

25.9.22 Worship Service Testimony

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Preacher: Alasdair Macleod (Ali Garyvard)

[0 : 0 0] Okay, well thanks Cammie for asking me. I was just saying to Gordon there before we started that there's no accidents in the people that God puts in our lives and the relationships that we make over time. It's like a chance meeting with Cammie a few years ago on a fire service course I think. It's culminated now and he'd been asked to give my testimony.

So I'm sure Cammie's going to be down in gravel quite soon. I know it's great. I've enjoyed coming down to North Harris over the years for communion and things like that. So it's nice to be able to share a bit with you about what God has done in my life. I guess that my early years of my testimony would be quite familiar to a lot to you. I've grown up in the islands and my family were living in South Lost in Gary Hart and I was born in Stornoway and brought up my father.

My father was a Christian. My mother's not yet a Christian but the home life was very much set a wonderful example by my father in every way of family prayers, family worship every single day. I don't think there was ever a day that I was home and Dad was home that we didn't have family worship. He set me that example as a father as well and as a husband to my mother and as an elder in the church and his diligence and his attendance and even going to the weekly prayer meeting to the Sunday services and things like that. It's only as I've gone on in my own life that I really appreciate that upbringing and that example because I think it's so important of that consistency and that witness in your life and I'm so blessed and so privileged to have had that. So that was my kind of beginning of my life and as soon as I'd begun

I was being told about God from what I can remember. And I just wanted to read a few verses to you because this came to my mind as I was thinking about what to say tonight and it's from Proverbs chapter 8 and just the first four verses. It says, And then I was thinking about that because I remember reading this sermon by Robert Murray McChain, the old Scottish minister, and he was preaching in that text and he was applying it in the way that wisdom calls to us all, unto you I call, unto you O men I call, my voice is to the sons of men.

And he went on to say how we've all been called by God all throughout our lives and then it wasn't until maybe even just a few years ago that I really thought about that. God had been calling me consistently all the way through my life and I was very often not heeded that call. And I think it's, I think I sometimes felt that maybe because I'd heard so many testimonies, I'd heard so many ways of people coming to God and I thought that maybe I was being passed over. It wasn't for me.

[3 : 4 4] It might be fine for other people but God had no intention of saving me and all these kinds of thoughts and discouragements. But when I look back, I had a Christian father, I had a Sunday school teacher, I had Christian teachers at primary school. Even when I left home when I joined the army, even there God's word really spoke to me powerfully on a few occasions that I can really remember.

And when I left, when I came back home and all the time and McChain had been saying that, he said, if you know, as God's voice has been calling you all the time. He's called you in the family. He's called you when you've been listening to a sermon or reading the Bible alone or even if you go away to something that's nothing to do with God, to the cinema or to the pub or whatever it might be.

Very often, there'd be something there that God would speak to you and that God would pierce your heart. And when I look back over my life, I could see that that was true, that God had always been calling me. And I'm sure that most of you would have the same experience that maybe we're not always, we're just not always open to that, we're not always aware that that's what's going on. So I just wanted to share that maybe as an encouragement if any of you are feeling that way, you're seeking and you feel like God's not interested. Even the fact that you're here tonight, that's no accident, that's no coincidence. So anyway, yeah, that was, I said I was growing up and I was, I've

set that example, I was going to Sunday school and that was all good and well. And then as I went to teenage years, I think I started to kind of drift a little bit away from the things of the Bible, the things of Christianity and to go along with the world a bit more, just like along with all my friends, we were starting to get involved in smoking and drinking and drugs and things like that. And so gradually I've gone down that path and still going along to church on Sunday nights and things. I wasn't terribly rebellious or anything, I still respected my father and all that. But about that time when I was 18, I decided I wanted to join the army. So I put the application in and even in that I see God's hand because one of the things was that the army drugs tested people and sort of that kind of lifestyle that I was just starting to get into. I had to stop if I wanted to, if I wanted to join up. So that group of friends, things that kind of, the fact that I was joining the army meant that I couldn't get involved with that kind of stuff. So I left and I joined the army. I joined the Highlanders, which used to be the queen's zone in the seaforths and then became the Highlanders.

[6 : 36] And so that was an infantry battalion and we were on different tours of Judea around the Balkans and Iraq and things like that. And like I said earlier, God, I think in two ways it kind of helped me spiritually in some ways, but also it was a real detriment to my spiritual life as well.

I think in the way that, because I was away from home, I was away from what was familiar, so I maybe held on to the Christian upbringing a bit more. There were definitely times when I was low that I would read the Bible and I would pray. But also at the same time, you can imagine life in an infantry battalion, which is very much male-oriented, macho, all that kind of stuff, hard drinking and everything else that goes along with it. So in many ways, I think my conscience was seared. I was just learning how to be a lad and a man and what we thought was, I a man should be, being tough and being a ladies' man and all that kind of stuff. That was what was, you know, what we thought was great. And I remember one time on exercise, which was the final exercise in infantry training, which had been like months of quite hard work.

And we got to this point where it was our final exercise and we were marching. It was up in the hills in Garell Head and we'd been marching all day, about 18 kilometres, I think, and our packs were full of everything, ammunition and rations and your shooting bag and spare kit.

And it was about 70 kilos or 80 kilos worth of kit on your back and gone up and over hills and things and just really, really absolutely shattered and miserable. You know, it's raining and it was cold and I can't really imagine what it's like unless you've been there. But I remember being, we got to Harbours that night and just basically got into some trees and a little bit of shelter to settle down for the night. And I remember us feeling really, really miserable and really depressed about the kind of lowest point in all of my training. And I remember that I packed a little pocket Bible. The army would give you these little New Testaments and then I looked up and at the front, I don't see any of these Gideon Bibles that got little if you're feeling depressed or whatever, look up these passages. So that's, I looked, I looked up and I said to go to Matthew 11 and I said, come unto me, all you that labour are heavy laden and I will give you rest. You know, that was such a perfect word for how I felt at that moment. That just went straight through me. I still remember that to this day. You know, God just, like I was saying earlier, even though I'd completely ignored him in my life and completely denied him by my life, despite what I knew, he's still reaching out to me.

And you know, that love and that grace is so amazing. When you think of it, if a person had treated me in that way, if they had said, you know what, Ali, I'm not listening to you, I'm not going to do anything that you tell me, I'm going to do the opposite of what you tell me. And then for me to think about it, putting my arms around that person and saying, you know what, I love you, I don't care what you've done. And, you know, I just, I, just to think about that great love that God has for us, you know, mercy is not getting what we deserve and grace is getting what we don't deserve. And just mercy and grace to me in that situation. But it didn't, it didn't change my trajectory at that point. I carried on much in that, in the same vein, and until the next, the next kind of big point in my life, I'd say in spiritual terms, was a few years later when I was, got a phone call from my father to say that my brother John had been killed in a road accident that just came completely out of the blue. He was 25 at the time and I was 23. And so I was based in Germany, so I had to just come home and with the family and you can imagine, if any of you had been through something like that, a shock, just time to come to terms and it was just such a, you know, such a difficult time. And again, you know, my father's faith at that time really was like a light to me and the blessing of having a close family and a close community who all came just to, just to spend some time with us or, or just to bring, you know, random things like a box of tea bags and stuff like that. But, you know, that really

meant so much and such a blessing to, to live, to have a good close family and to have a good community like we do here in the islands.

[11:21] And, but as, as much as that was all good, I really experienced at that time the comfort of God through his word, through reading, especially the Psalms. And I just felt drawn to that and, and I can only explain that. I just, although I, you know, we could speak to one another as in the family and we could try and comfort one another, there was nothing that was the same as God's word and how that spoke to me and how that comforted me and reassured me and I knew that it was God speaking to me and I knew that it was his, his comfort. And again, that's something that I've never forgotten. And I think maybe, I'm sure, I'm sure many of you have had that, some kind of experience of God's comfort as well. And you can only, I think, understand if you've, if you've gone through something like that. But again, sadly, that didn't change my, my, like I said, my trajectory. Although in a sense, it did change in one way because and that's when I took a decision that I was going to leave the army. Because after that, that was, that was a very important time when the forces were in Iraq and Afghanistan. And when I was in Iraq, I was in Basra and there'd be reports in the news that a soldier had been killed. And because you couldn't, because of sensitivities, you know, to the next of kin and things, they wouldn't release a name until the family had been informed. And at the, all the bases, everything would be shut down. So you couldn't phone your family to tell them.

So they would maybe two days or three days. The fact is, I was reading a letter not long ago that my father sent me when I was out there and he was saying, oh, we were just watching the news and a soldier was killed in Basra and we had no way of finding out. It took two or three days for us to find out. And I couldn't go on putting them through that. I didn't feel comfortable. And anyway, I'd kind of lost my heart for military life. And so I came home with quite a lot of baggage, I'd say quite a lot of emotional baggage. And I was living back with my parents at that point when I first moved home. And I started, I got, I got an adult apprenticeship as an electrician. And so, you know, God was still providing for me. God was still being good to me and blessing me. And that was the same time that Reverend E. T.

Campbell came to Graver with his wife, Marietta. And they were making a really big effort to reach out to the community. And well, we were going along anyway, but one of the things that they put on was the Christianity Explored course. And I went along to that. And one of the first discussion groups we were kind of challenged to about Bible reading. And that if the Bible was, what said it was, that the Bible was God's word. And if the way to know God was to read his word, then it would make sense surely then to make a habit of reading the word. And not just randomly dipping in and out, but what was specifically advised us was, well, maybe get a plan and try and read through, read one of the gospels or maybe read all of the gospels or the whole new test. And it doesn't matter how long it takes you, but start reading through. And for some reason, I really, I got home that night and I was really kind of determined I'm going to do this. And I got a reading plan. I started following and started reading. And when I look back now, I think this kind of took place over a period of months and even years. It's like in Mark 4, the parable of the growing seed, you know, the farmer plants it and then the plant grows and it's ready for harvest. But he hasn't actually observed it always growing. It's just, it was a seed and now it's there. And that was like my experience of reading scripture for myself just daily, just actually on the fly. Nobody knew I was doing it. I remember one time even like, I think it was, I can't remember my mum and my dad were coming upstairs and I hid the Bible under. I don't know why, it was just, it was quite a funny thing, but if it had been any other book, I wouldn't have done it, but because it was the Bible, I didn't want anybody to know. But my dad noticed, my dad said that he'd be glad to see a difference in my life. So I'm responding to the way I was in the events. And that's what I'm going to do. I'm praying. No flashing lights, no, nothing amazing happening, but slowly but surely that seed of the word was growing and changing my thinking. It was showing that other things I was angry about and blaming it for some of us. And that was what I should be buried before I read.

You know, other things I would say is so nice, but I can't say, you know, you need to deal with the plank in your own eye. So that was again God showing me that he was there and that through his word, that that was one of the basic ways of getting to know him. That was one for me to get to know him and that his promise was that if I seek him, that his promise is to all of us, that if we seek him with all our hearts, then that he will be found by us.

So that kind of carried on. And then, as I should have mentioned earlier, I also kind of carried with me from the army a drinking habit. And I was still drinking quite heavily at the weekends.

[16 : 37] And this was something that was kind of bothering me. I wasn't happy doing it, but I kept on doing it anyway. And it was, it got to a point where I was on one hand enjoying reading the word and I was enjoying the sermons and things, but I was still living that kind of lifestyle.

I was still pleasing the flesh, if you like. And, you know, I really was struggling to get away from it. And I started going along to the road to recovery meetings. I don't know, some of you probably know Stan Gowdy. And the meetings there. And that was a real help to me again. And again, it was nothing fancy, but it was just getting together with Christian brothers and sisters. Some who would read something from the word and then would pray, would just share a bit. And, you know, I just learned so much from that, from guys that had similar struggles. And I remember one of the old elders saying that you've got, you know, you've got your flesh, you've got your spiritual side and you've got your worldly side. And whichever side you feed, that's the one that's going to grow. And if you're so into the spirit or if you're so into the flesh. And that was so true because it came to a point where I was stopping enjoying reading the word so much. And I was stopping kind of enjoying listening to sermons, things. It was like it was going great. There was no kind of interest in it for me. And I was bothered by that. I was wondering why that was. And I was praying about it. And the word kind of showed me that, well, all I'd been doing was going along on Sunday evenings, which is what the family had always done. And yet there was church on Sunday morning, which was a weekly prayer meeting. And I wasn't going to any of these things. And then slowly, but so I kind of committed to then going on Sunday mornings. But the prayer meeting was at a bigger step, as I'm sure some of you can imagine. It just seems to be a thing here.

If you go to the prayer meeting, then you're regarded as, that's like, you're really nailing your colours to the mast then. And one Wednesday evening, there was Champions League football on, and I was getting ready to, I said, I'm going to go to the prayer meeting. I hadn't told anybody. So I got my suit on and all that. And I got to the top of the stairs, and I put one foot down the first step, and then it just almost rebounded. And I went back, I took the suit off, and I just started watching the football. And then I heard my dad's car going. I was still living at home then. And as soon as I heard his car going, I just felt, you know, I really, really like the down Lord. And so that kind of gave me a determination that the next week I would take that step. So I got to the top step, and I started, I made myself kind of go downstairs. And it's funny, just like I say that, there's no coincidence as to, as I was coming down the stairs, at that same time, my dad came out and sat in him.

So he saw me, and my mum was just behind him. And he said, oh good, you're coming. He didn't make any big fuss about it or a big deal about it, which I was really glad about. And I think that's a point that we should all bear in mind if somebody comes to the prayer meeting or whatever. Just don't make a fuss out of it.

But yeah, he, so I just went, and as soon as I got into the car and went out and got to the church, I just felt peace and just felt like this is where I should have been all along. And I'd say that again to any of you that are seeking and any of you that are interested. If there's other meetings, prayer meetings, Bible studies and things like that, then that's the place to be. You don't have to wait until you feel an assurance of faith or anything like that. If you're interested and if you want, you feel that God's calling you, you want to become a Christian, you're having these kinds of thoughts, then that's absolutely the place to be. And the people there will only just be glad to see you.

[20 : 31] And so I was learning slowly that, and I think that I wasn't going to get some, like, road to Damascus experience. God was saying to me, you know, you know, you know everything that you've been taught. Not that I know everything, but you've been taught about me from a young age. You've heard so many sermons and testimonies and you know all about the way of salvation and all of these things. And are you going to be obedient to me or not? And I remember, like, being at work and I'd be working in people's houses and there'd be verses up on the wall that would be verses I'd been thinking of or verses from my reading would keep popping up in my mind and then the minister would be preaching about them on Sunday evening and I was thinking, right, I said, you know, God's really speaking to me. And I remember this verse from Revelation 3 kept coming up, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone opens to me, I'll come in and sup with them. And I was thinking, I was thinking about the verse and it kept coming up. And then Mr. Campbell preached on that on a Sunday evening. And

I was thinking, I can't get away from it, but I was thinking, well, how do I open the door? How do I open it? I want to be there with God's people. And then it came to me later on that Jesus said in another place that if anyone loves me, he will keep my commandments. And that it's kind of the

same thing, I think it's in John 14, that then my father and I will come to them and will make a dwelling with him. And that was, there were some simple commands in God's word I just wasn't being obedient to. I wasn't committing myself to him. I wasn't confessing him with my mouth. I believed in my heart, but I wasn't confessing with my mouth.

And there's actually a few young people in Gala that were converted around that time. And when they were giving their testimonies, I was listening, I was like, maybe I'll find the missing ingredient here. And that's what then kept coming to me from Romans 10. If you confess, if you believe in your heart, you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. And I had been carrying this almost secret faith and secret believing in my heart, but I was not confessing it with my mouth or with my life. And the Lord was telling me to commit to him wholeheartedly that I couldn't just commit 75% or 90%. I had to commit all in. And that came, the communion season came and passed. I sat behind the table and one of the women on the way out, she said, she just said to me, do not miss being with us today. And then I did. And I thought that the next time that there was going to be the communion to gather and I'll really, I want to go forward.

But at the same time, I was feeling unworthy, which I didn't realize was kind of the point. But I, I am this done to the service and I was thinking, well, Lord, I'm going to go today.

And I felt really encouraged by the sermon. And when the minister finished preaching the sermon, I, we stood up to pray at the end of the sermon and I just said, Lord, well, I'm going to go, I want to go and stop me. It's not the right thing. And just as we sat down in the first ministry, we said, we're going to have the final singing. And the very first verse that he read out was a verse that had really spoken to me at the time of my brother's death from Psalm 51 and of gladness and of joy from me to hear the voice. It's all these very bones, which I has broken, may rejoice. And that was such an encouragement to me.

[24 : 28] And I went outside and I saw Callum, I don't know if any of you know Callum Lickerson, young Callum, he was, he was in, he kind of knew that I was probably going to go. And he was like, are you going? And I was like, yeah, let's go. And went round the, went round the side of the church and saw Norman from the Erebrook, I mean, the words, he said, and he just had this big smile. He said, that's the place, boys, that's the place.

And it was just such, you know, that all of these, just these things, like I said, no coincidence, just all these just little things that were such an encouragement and so uplifting for me. And, you know, so that was when I made my profession of faith. And I think I thought that then that was going to be it, that, you know, I would be sorted in, that I'd never have any more troubles. I was just going to kind of live in this blissful peace with God and things of the world wouldn't touch me. But I find out that that's not true either.

There was a lot of things that God took away. He took away the drinking and that, which was such a big thing, which is something I thought I'd never get over and something that I prayed such a long time about. I thought that God wasn't answering, but he did. He took it away.

And, you know, sometimes from some of the testimonies I've heard of people with alcohol problems, sometimes God takes it away like that. Other times, people like me, it seems to take forever and you seem to need to learn the same lesson over and over again. But God answered that prayer and he answers it all differently for each one of us for his own reasons, for his own glory, according to his own wisdom. And I can't really look into that. But just to say, say that, as the Apostle said, that he is convinced that God would carry on to completion that work that he had begun in us. And that's what I found to be true, that God is 100% faithful to his word. And he always has been. Throughout my life, God has been faithful to his word and he has always proved through to his word. Though we are faithful, he is faithful. And it's been a difficult road, I think, because of my own disobedience. The things that have caused me the most pain and the most difficulty and the most lack of assurance in my Christian life have always been because of my own disobedience and my own failures. But I've also found that the Lord doesn't ever leave you where you are, but that he uses even these things, even your failures and your mistakes, to teach you. If you bring them to him in confession, as he commands us to do. That if we say we have not sinned, that we make God a liar. But if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us. And so that kind of brings me up to, I guess, to the present day, in a sense, the next kind of major event, I guess, in my life is my father becoming ill and stomach cancer last year and it becoming evident that there was nothing that could be done for him and that he passed away. It would be almost, it would be a year in October.

[27 : 49] And again, that was quite hard to come to terms with. Once we came to terms with it, that itself was a blessing because we were still at that time with him and we knew that he was going to pass away and he knew and he was so faithful and he didn't complain or anything once and he just kept on testifying to.

He would keep repeating the verse. He said, he was saying, he said, he said, he said, he said, he said, he said, I've come to that.

You know, I'm in pain and I know that I'm going to pass away, but because I know that I'm right with God, then I can bear all that. But he said, I can't imagine facing this without God, you know.

And then one of the, as the illness progressed, he was getting more and more morphine and so he was, there was less moments and he was lucid.

And one of the last times that we had, we had worship together, I was reading and praying and the rest of the family were there and then we're kind of all filing out the room.

[29 : 02] And I just happened to be the last one there and he said, see you in the morning. After a while he said, but we don't know what morning that would be. And of course, he was speaking about the fact of the resurrection and that we'll all see one another again on that day and on that morning.

And after he passed away, I think that that has, that's something that became much more real to me, that the fact of eternity, the fact that there's a world beyond this one.

Although we believe it and we believe it in theory, I guess, because we read about it in scripture and we believe that there's heaven and that there's such a thing as eternal life.

But now that somebody that I have known since, known all my life that I loved very much, that has passed on, I know has gone to heaven and it makes heaven somehow much more real.

And so those, those, even those parts of God's word have become more alive to me, more real to me. And it's, it's almost through the sorrow and through the hardship of losing my brother and losing my father.

[30 : 10] And some of the God's sweetest promises have been really made known to me. As Jesus said to Martha, that the one that believes in me shall never die.

He, he, he, he, he lives and believes in me, and, what is that again, I'm the resurrection life. He that, um, believes in me, shall he die, yet shall he live. And the one that lives and believes in me shall never die.

And, um, then, I don't know if you know, Angus McKay from Kinloch, the elder from Kinloch. And he said that to me, his father passed away a number of years ago. And he said that you'll, you'll find that your love and your respect for your father will only grow as time goes on.

And I think that's, that's so true. It's just another reminder that even though somebody has gone, that they've, they haven't, they haven't died. Um, like, like Abel, like scripture says about Abel, that he being dead, yet speaketh.

And, um, so yeah, I'll leave it there, Cammy. I don't know. Yes. A couple of questions. I had a list, but we don't know about it. So, um, yeah, you talked about the prayer meeting.

[31 : 15] It's just, anyway, I was in two opinions. You said, now we always talk about the prayer meeting, how important it is. And you said how important it was for you. So it's just an encouragement for people, um, that may be in two opinions even here tonight.

Yeah. What is it? How's the importance of the prayer meeting for you? And, you know, for him thinking of coming to the prayer meeting for the first time, which is, you explain it's quite hard. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I find that, um, like I said, when I, when I actually got over that kind of mental hurdle and that kind of, I guess, worry about what everybody was going to say.

When I, when I actually got there, I just felt like it was the right place to be. And then, um, I think the different style of the meeting, perhaps you're hearing quite a lot of the elders praying and things like that.

And just all of that is just so, it's, it's such a benefit when you're, when you're seeking it. I think it's always a benefit, but, um, I just, yeah, it was, it was really a blessing to me to, to go.

And because I was, I was thirsty, I was hungry for, for more of God's word. And that was, that was just, that was the place to be. And to get around, because he focused on, as he said, that pure gathering, that he, that he, that he, that he, that he, that he, that he, that he is.

[32 : 28] Which people, that's very main Bible study fellowships or whatever, make the most of every opportunity. Thank you very much. Anyone got any questions?

Spoken long enough, I mean. I've got one more, just in the workplace as well. I think I mentioned this beforehand. I know you say fire service, you weren't converted in the army, but since you've been converted, a lot of workplaces are sparky, but also in the fire building, which can be a bit kind of challenging in times.

Yeah. How have you found it, especially when you've been storing the larger group, the most sites lost your smaller group, but have you overcome the challenges of being challenged in the Christian or, you know, challenges of being in front of you?

That's a good sense. Yeah, I think, I think that's been a big learning experience as well, of trying to find the right approach.

I think at first, like with the fire service, when I was in the Stornami station, because it was really, really extra, sort of, laddish banter, and I took the approach of just being like, not reacting to it.

[33 : 39] So, but then that kind of meant that I was kind of sitting there, like, looking very stern most of the time, which I don't think was very helpful. And then, kind of, but then I had to watch, because of having been in the army, I could quite easily get into that banter and things and try and be sort of, be cool and be one of the lads, which wasn't helpful either.

So, I think it was, I think I really took me a long time to, kind of, find the, you know, a wise balance of, you know, being friendly with the guys and being, showing them that I cared about them.

But also, I wasn't going to, you know, take part or approve of their jokes and things like that. I think it came with praying and asking for wisdom and for the best way to love people and things like that.

And I think I shared with you earlier, something that you're surprised by, guys that you thought would have no, kind of, interest or no reaction and occasionally they would say things to you when there was a quiet moment or whatever.

So, I think it's, I think being, I think being consistent is very important and, yeah, just showing them that you care about them and that you're interested in them and that you don't think that you're holier than, holier than they or whatever.

[34 : 55] Yeah. But for sure, yeah, it can be a challenge. It can be a challenge. And this morning in Grava and Gordon was preaching about, one of the things he was talking about, it was personal witnessing and I think that's definitely an area where I personally could be speaking right a bit more and not being, not being afraid of the blowback or whatever, but just, you know, speaking out more vocally for Christ in these situations.

Absolutely. Yeah. All right. Thank you. Any other questions, AN magic? On looks like I could get hot seat■■■■ to be the other. Thank you. Thank you.

You?