

6.10.24 Reverend David Strain Testimony

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Preacher: Reverend David Strain

[0 : 00] How are you feeling? Good. Tired? I'm good. I'm good. Thank you for being willing over the course of the weekend to share so much of God's Word and you're going to just share a little bit of your own life story, testimony with us now.

So we'll maybe just start with the question of where you're from and just how you came to faith, when that was roughly as well. Yeah, so I was born in really a wee village in the east end of Glasgow called Carmile that the city eventually consumed.

It sort of retained its village identity at its own little main street and grew up in a nominal, very loosely affiliated Church of Scotland home.

My father never went to church, professed to be an atheist. He went to church growing up in the village where we lived. And I remember when my mother was dragging us to church as a kid asking my dad, Daddy, why don't you go to church?

And he said, well, I've done my time. Like it was a prison sentence that he had served. That's how he felt about the church. And my mother brought us dutifully along to church. And then maybe, I think maybe about 10 years old, something like that, she had a falling out with the minister.

[1 : 25] There was a new young minister with all sorts of harebrained ideas. They were probably really good ideas, but she was furious and opposed. And that was the end of that. And so we stopped going to church.

And then I went off to Bannerman High School in Bayliston in Glasgow, which was a rough place. And there I met a classmate who had been converted in a Pentecostal church.

And he led me to the Lord. Every day he talked to me about Jesus. We would, this is terrible, but every day for lunch, the bell would ring for lunch and we would walk out the front of the school and walk up Bayliston High Street to the chippy.

Then we'd buy a deep fried pizza and chips, which is the, it's ambrosia, but anyway. And then we'd walk back through the scheme and into the back of the school.

And that whole trip took an hour. That took our whole lunch hour. And he would share the gospel with me every day for two years. And I think he felt like he had really bruised his forehead, battering it against the brick wall of my hard heart.

[2 : 46] But actually, secretly, so I was Joseph for a wee while, Joseph of Arimathea. I was secretly persuaded, but not really willing to go public.

And so I would try Jesus on for size and not let anybody know. I would stop swearing. You know, I'd try to pray and see if it would take, see if it would stick.

And of course, Jesus doesn't play games with us. He doesn't jump through our little hoops. You're either for him or you're against him.

Those are your choices. There is no fence you can sit on. I was trying to sit on the fence. It's an uncomfortable thing to do to sit on the fence. And then one day, kind of half asleep, got off the bus in the morning.

Wasn't thinking about it. But I saw him, my friend Neil, on the other side of the playground. And I walked up to him and said, hey Neil, I want to become a Christian.

[3 : 50] And his jaw about hit the floor. Because he never knew any of this that was going on inside of me. How old were you then, David? About 12. Maybe 12 to 14.

Somewhere in there. I can't remember exactly. And I turned 50 in August. And now I can't remember anything. But somewhere in there, early teens.

And his jaw hit the ground. And the bell rang. You know, there's footballs flying. And kids are running everywhere. And there's the two of us praying in the playground. And I came to know the Lord Jesus there.

And my parents immediately freaked out. Because they were raised very nominal Church of Scotland. That's all they knew. He was a Pentecostal. He told me the Church of Scotland is dead. Don't go there. He was completely wrong.

There was a new evangelical minister in the parish in Carmiel. Who loved the Lord Jesus and preached the gospel faithfully. But I wouldn't go there because I'd inherited his bigotry.

[4 : 48] And my parents wouldn't let me go to the Pentecostal church. Because they were scared. They thought it was like the Mormons or something. Something kind of weird. A cult. And so I was stuck. And for about two years I didn't go anywhere.

Now, if you're a Christian and you've got no teaching and no fellowship. Bad things happen. In your heart. And I was incredibly confused.

Really mixed up. Full of doubts. Full of fears. And really coming to a crisis point. And then one day the local Church of Scotland minister turned up on the doorstep.

And I've since discovered that my unbelieving parents had arranged for him to come. And they were out. They did not love Jesus.

But they knew that I did. And that I was in trouble. I was struggling. And my dear parents arranged for him to come. You know, I opened the door. And I said, oh, mom, dad aren't here.

[5 : 44] Thinking. Because my mother was still technically a member. Thinking the minister's come for her offering. Money. Or something. Oh, they're not here. And he's like, no, actually, I've come to see you.

And so he came in and sat down. And we began to talk. And I was, you know, a 14-year-old judging the minister to see if he was orthodox. And sounds, you know.

And he was so patient with me. And he took me under his wing. And I started going to the church.

And at that time, Billy Graham had come to Celtic Park.

If you remember when that was. And so I went to the church. And there was five or six people in my year in school. Who had been converted.

And I walk in. And I'm like, what are you doing here? And they said the same in that same high-pitched Mickey Mouse voice. What are you doing here? And we formed a wee youth group.

[6 : 41] And I look back on it now. And actually, the Lord was doing something really remarkable. I thought it was totally normal. But I don't think it. At least judged by my experience of.

Since then, I think it was unusual. We would get the keys to the church. We didn't have a youth minister. There was nobody. There was nobody even a volunteer leading a youth group.

It was just youth that loved Jesus. And we would. Whenever we got together, we'd spend hours praying together. On our knees. We'd get the keys of the church.

This dusty old Church of Scotland. You know, with the dark wood. And it smelled like damp. And we'd get the keys. The minister would give us the keys. And we'd go in there.

And sing our hearts out. Five or six of us. Fill the place with song. And pray and pray. And it was like a wee revival. It was amazing. And the minister just was so wise and so patient.

[7 : 42] Was a model pastor. And nurtured and disciplined me. I went off to art school in Dundee. I trained as an artist. And he traveled up to Dundee a couple of times every term.

Took me out to dinner. Continued to pray for me. I owe him a huge debt actually. He had a formative influence on my life. What's his name?

Bruce McDowell. He's still a minister. He's a minister of Park Church in Uddingston. Which is now in the United Free Church. He left the Church of Scotland. And he's a dear man.

So you've taken us to about age 21, 22. Somewhere in there. And you trained as an artist. Yep. But you are now a minister.

So how did that happen? So when I was thinking about becoming a Christian. And Billy Graham.

[8 : 40] His crusade was coming to Glasgow. And everybody was talking. I remember thinking. If the Christian gospel is true. It is the most amazing thing. And how could you keep this to yourself?

If I'm going to follow Jesus. I'm going to tell everybody about this. I mean he's alive. He rose from the dead. It's amazing. How can you keep it to yourself? And I just filed that away. And thought. Well that must be what everybody thinks.

When they become a Christian. And so that was there in the background. And after I went to uni. And was involved in the CU.

I was the president of the art. That sounds very grand. But there was like eight of us in the art school. And I was the mug that was willing to organise it. But I was the president of the CU.

And every now and again somebody would randomly come up to me and say. You're going to be a minister aren't you? And I would sort of go. Maybe. Maybe. So that was just there in the back of my mind.

[9 : 37] And. It kind of came to a head. I worked with UCCF after I graduated. I was a really worker.

So volunteer for a year. Working with the Christian unions in Dundee. Where I went to art school.

And. I was planning to go to the Royal College of Art in London.

My external examiner in Dundee. Was a professor there. And had said look if you apply I'll get you in. And I had all these grand plans. And I was trying to decide.

Is it ministry or is it the art world? Will I do a career in the art world in some way? Or will I go into ministry? I'm doing relay. The relay program with UCCF for a year. That'll get my portfolio together to submit to the RCA.

If I go the RCA route. That'll be. And that's my plan. If they accept me. Then that's how I'll know I'm supposed to go there. And then. Just before I submit my.

[10 : 37] My application form to the RCA. In London. UCCF said we want to know first. Are you going to do another year? And pursue ministry. And so I was thrown into a crisis.

And prayed and prayed. And called Bruce McDowell the minister. And he just said. He actually said to me. David at some point. You've got to stop running away from God.

And do what he's called you to do. So. I submitted an application for ministry. To the Presby of Glasgow. In the Church of Scotland.

And they accepted me. And. My wife and I met. In that. In Dundee. She was a nurse. At Nine Wells Hospital. In Dundee. We met at St. Peter's.

At a communion. Season. Or. She met me. At the communion season. And I didn't meet her for some time. Until after that. She had. She had grand plans. And designs. That I was unaware of.

[11 : 39] For some time. I didn't know I was caught. Until it was too late. And. And. She's not in the congregation tonight. But I'm very grateful. I was caught.

And so we got married. In that second year. We moved to Glasgow. And. Started training. For the ministry. Okay.

And. You're. Well what happened next. You're now in Mississippi Jackson. You served. Tell us a wee bit about ministry. Just over the.

Over the years. So I. I. Came out of the Church of Scotland. That was a. Very painful. Process. And.

And into the free church. The free church. That's my wife's. Denomination. So. She's from. Achlete Bowie. And. Her family.

[12 : 35] And both her mother's side. And her father's side. Are all free church people. Our father. Gillis is an elder. At. Smithton. In Inburness. And. So I had.

I had free church. Sort of. I was familiar with the free church. I'd. I'd been around the free church. And. Donald MacLeod. Went out of his way. To welcome me.

And. And. And. Make some arrangements for me. To come into the free church. And so I did. After I graduated from Glasgow. I went to Edinburgh. And did two more years. At the college. The. The. What's now. Edinburgh Theological College. Seminary. But it was the free church college. Back then. With Malcolm McLean. And. Calumian. McLeod. And. Alistair Curley.

Who's in. Inverness. Was in the year. Below me. And. Kiki. Where is Kiki? He's over there. He was there. And there's several others. That you probably would know. And.

[13 : 29] That was like. Coming up for oxygen. You know. I'm surrounded by people. That want to love. Jesus. And serve him. And take the bible seriously. It was amazing. And. From there. I went to London. I was the free church minister.

In London. For five years. And. Like. Like most men. Coming out of seminary. Straight into the pulpit. I thought I knew everything. And I didn't know anything. And I could preach a sermon.

But I didn't have. A clue. How to lead a church. Or. Any of the challenges. Really. That were facing me. I was thrown in. At the deep end. And it was very humbling. And the congregation. Very patient with me.

After five years. I was pretty burnt out. Honestly. That we were burnt out. And. At that time. In the free church. There were. There were. Not many.

Vacant. Congregations. That weren't. In real trouble. And I'm. I'm burning out. Our family is. In real trouble. Where. It was. It was just.

[14 : 25] So stressful. And difficult. And dark. The thought of going from one. Nightmare scenario. Into a very different. But equally nightmarish scenario.

Did not appeal. So we were kind of stuck. I couldn't be an Anglican couldn't be a Baptist there were no options in England for that reason at that time but unbeknown to me mutual friends of mine knew of a little church in Columbus, Mississippi and they got in touch and said we've been listening to you online we would like to talk to you about maybe coming over and so Sheena and I got the big Times of London atlas that somebody gave us for a wedding present this big book this huge thing we pulled up America and tried to find Columbus, Mississippi and we couldn't find it on the map it's tiny it's a minuscule little place and we're thinking we're in London's what is it 12 million, 13 million people we're going to go from here to there this doesn't make any sense at all but I went over for a conference that I was just attending a minister's conference same conference that I brought you over for and they came down and met me and it struck me that they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd and the Lord knit my heart to theirs and all the pieces fell into place and so I took my family and we moved to London moved, sorry from London to Columbus and it was a

Columbus was about 80 people London was about 80 people Columbus was 250 people it's a bigger church smaller town bigger church and so they loved us really, really well we were exhausted when we got there burnt out but it was a tight-knit community that cared about us and you know in London if you wanted to see somebody in the church it was an hour ordeal to kind of get there and back but in Columbus it was five minutes and you're in somebody's house and we healed there and I was content to stay there till the Lord took me home and one day out of the blue one of the elders in Jackson called me up and said Derek Thomas who was the evening preacher at First Pres in Jackson has taken a call to another church in Columbia South Carolina to be their senior pastor and we would like you to consider coming and being our missions pastor and our evening preacher

First Pres is a very big church it's a flagship congregation in the PCA the denomination I'm a minister of now and I remember thinking this is this is not realistic but the elder said will you at least pray about it and I said okay I'll pray about it and I hung up and said Lord this is never going to happen is it amen but you know one thing led to another and my own elders actually when I came to them I thought okay one way I'm going to know if the Lord wants me to move is that my own elders will it will be partly their response how do they handle this and they were really upset they didn't want me to go but they they went to prayer and they came to me and said we think this is what God this is God's will for you and for us and for the church we don't we're grateful for your ministry we want you to stay but we think this is the right thing that was a big deal

I was really wrestling with it when they called me but I came to Jackson I was the evening preacher for one year and then Ligon Duncan the senior minister left to to become the chancellor of Reformed Theological Seminary and then there was a there was a sort of an agony of a pulpit search where I was a candidate but I'm already a minister in the congregation so they're bringing other candidates in to preach and they come and preach their best sermon and then leave you know but I'm there all the time so every sermon has to be my best sermon because I'm still there you know and so I'm being judged it was like a year long interview it was agony and at the end of it I was in my study preparing the search committee we're meeting downstairs and there's a knock on my door and they we want to see you downstairs so I come down and they they look me in the eye and say we would like you to be the next senior minister and I burst into tears

[19 : 15] I was just the stress and the pressure of it all was so intense so I became I became the senior pastor that was 11 years ago and it is an absolute joy I love I love being there and the Lord's people are really patient with me they put up with all my quirks and idiosyncrasies and the Lord is blessing his word the congregation's happy and united or at least it was when I left them they were happy and united and growing under God's word so yeah and it certainly seemed that way when I was briefly there for the day could you maybe just finally just paint a wee picture for us of of church over there and tell us how we can be praying for you as you go back and how we can be praying for the congregation over there and the family yeah so our church it's a big it's a big church it's a great big building it's white it's all painted white inside and red carpet so it's white that's what it looks like you can go online and see it our services are on on our website big we have a robed choir

I wear a Geneva gown it's very traditional in the morning not so traditional in the evening very formal but you would feel at home I think among us very warm congregation very generous and

hospitable eager to love and serve people who come in our doors we have two services in the morning and a six o'clock service at night and we have adult Sunday school in between the two services in the morning there's about a thousand people in the building on a Sunday morning we have a school that shares the premises so on any day of the week except Saturday there's at least a thousand people in the building at any given moment there's and there's just there's so much ministry happening I'm still discovering things going on I'll be walking down a corridor and there's a Bible study happening in there and the Lord is at work in all sorts of ways it's just an amazing it's an amazing place but our needs are probably very similar to your own despite the difference in size we have because of where we're situated culturally in Mississippi we have a lot of cultural Christianity people who have just enough church just enough Jesus to kind of put you off to divert you when you start talking to them about their soul to keep you at arm's length to kid themselves that they're secure when they're really not and so I tell people there's only four folks at First Press in Jackson really only four people in Jackson at First Press in Jackson there's the obvious bright growing Christian and there's the obvious unconverted person who comes to the church for all sorts of various reasons and they're easy enough to spot and then there's a big group in the middle there's the worldly converted person and there's the churchy unconverted person and they're almost impossible to tell apart and so a lot of my ministry is targeting that big middle group and trying to if you're converted and you're living a worldly life is to alarm you and wake you up and call you to Christ and faithfulness and if you're churchy but you're not a Christian is to show you that religion is no no basis for a for a quiet conscience and that you know the only safe refuge for your soul is the Lord Jesus so I tell people

I jokingly tell people I have to get folks unconverted first and show them their need of Christ that religion just won't cut it so that's a big thing our society is we're sort of the buckle of the Bible belt in Jackson Mississippi but even there cultural Christianity is rapidly disappearing it's becoming a post-Christian context in some fairly dramatic ways and we're working hard to figure out how can we mobilize as a church to reach our city with the gospel the days of sitting on our laurels and folks just show up those days are gone Jesus says go into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that's the mandate and we don't have any right to sit back and just hope that things will one day be different we're under orders and it's it's not the minister's job merely it is but it's not only it's all our it's our calling as Christian people to go and compel them to come in and say I've got good news for you and that's really challenging it's really really challenging so if you're praying for us you can pray that the Lord will help us figure out how to be faithful witnesses in our changing culture you can pray for my own holiness and my own walk with the Lord and for blessing on his word

I think one of the maybe one of the most discouraging aspects of the American evangelical landscape across the board is the disappearance of the prayer meeting American churches really really struggle to have a prayer meeting at all and that really hurts my heart coming from this context and that's something I want to see I really want to see change so we've got to call on the name of the Lord if we expect any of his blessing on anything else that we do for him and so the prayer meeting is the Spurgeon called at the engine room of the church it's where the heavy lifting gets done at the prayer meeting and so we need to recover an emphasis on that for sure thank you David I'm going to ask Duncan to pray for you and then we've got just a few minutes to ask a question or two

[25 : 59] I've got one question great but before we have a question Duncan pray please Lord our father we thank you for the testimony that we have heard and we thank you Lord that it shows us the great grace that you show in somebody's life we thank you for the way that you called David through his friend at school and we thank you Lord that we preserved him and led him to a gospel church we thank you Lord for that minister who faithfully looked after him through the years and we thank you Lord that you called him into ministry to share the great and glorious news of Jesus Christ of the world Lord we thank you for the path that you have led him on that has taken him to Jackson and for the ministry that he has there and the congregation that he is part of we pray Lord for your blessing upon that congregation we pray Lord that you would continue to work and that Lord especially that you would be working in the lives of those worldly

Christians and of those who think they are saved but are in fact just going through the motions and having a bit of religion on the outside we pray Lord that your spirit would be at work to divide soul and spirit joints and marrow to demonstrate to people where they stand and the danger that there is in not being truly in Christ Lord we pray that you would be at work to reinvigorate the life of the

prayer meeting in that congregation in the American church we thank you Lord for the great history of revivals that there were in the 18th and 19th centuries which were driven in large part by your people praying we pray Lord that the church would recapture the desire to be in the place of prayer and to seek Lord you to act rather than for individuals to act to try and create something Lord we pray that you give people patience and that Lord you would enable them to look to the Lord Jesus Christ at all times and Lord as they seek to witness in a place that is religious but it's very quickly becoming secular we pray Lord that the church would rise to the challenge and go out and as David said to compel the people to come in and what we pray for his church we pray for our own we pray Lord God that here we would have a desire to compel people to come and hear of the Lord Jesus Christ and to come and worship you and live in true God we pray Lord for your blessing upon David and his family we pray that you protect them from all the attacks of the evil and we pray Lord God that each of them would hold fast to the Lord Jesus Christ Lord we pray that you would be at work in that place and wider field we pray Lord for whatever links that

Jackson has to the wider world and to the mission fields throughout the different continents we pray for your blessing upon David and Lord we ask that you would uphold all that go out in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray Lord for your continued blessing upon David's ministry but we pray above all that you would bless him as he studies your word that Lord you would continue to reveal the wonders of it to his own soul and the Lord as he applies it to himself he would then be able to preach it to his congregation we pray Father for your great blessing upon all of his labours and pray Father that you would give him a precious and an ever increasing flock who belong truly to the Lord Jesus Christ and want nothing else but to be at worship worshipping him in spirit and in truth and all this we pray in his name

Amen Amen We just have one question David any other questions they can ask you on the way out the door you spoke about and Duncan just mentioned the prayer as well that that text compel them to come in we've got the vision of this little 12 year old who's day after day for two years basically doing that and persuading you and witnessing now I'm seeing 12 year olds I'm seeing 10 year olds I'm seeing 8 year olds I'm seeing some who are older as well and do you have anything to say to the young folks even in terms of you know we saw the table this morning I've heard young people say I don't think I'm allowed to go there there's an age limit on that isn't there so do you have anything to say to young folks maybe in terms of encouragement instruction challenge about faith in [31 : 28] Christ the large table and how God can use them in the playground I would say young people young people mostly over here old people over here and young people over here that's interesting I would say there's no age limit on coming to Jesus and trusting in Christ and following him and if you can trust in Christ and receive his mercy and forgiveness and grace you can come to his table if you can profess your faith credibly understand the Christian gospel and articulate it in a simple way then he's your saviour you're his child and he welcomes you at the family table you want to unpack that trust in Christ what do you need to know in coming to the table and being

Christian forget the table for a minute don't forget it but put the table aside is what I mean for a minute the critical issue is do you know Jesus I don't mean do you know about him but do you know him for yourself do you have a relationship with him he's a living person right he's alive and he wants you to know him and he wants to know you you get to know about him from the scriptures but he asks you to call out to him and to seek him for yourself to confess that you're a sinner and that you need a savior and that Jesus can save you and wash you clean give you a new heart you need to say I'm sorry and not just generally sort of vaguely I'm sorry get specific what are my sins before God that I so far as I know them and confess them be real for yourself get down on your knees quietly in your room and ask

Jesus to come and rescue you and save you and give you a new heart and make you his child and he will he will and then coming to the Lord's table is a little there's a bit it's a wee bit different coming to Christ is between you and Jesus but the Lord is given as a church and he's given us elders to shepherd us and care for us part of their job is to listen to people when they say we've come to trust in Jesus and to give them guidance and encouragement and to listen and say well yes you have understood the good news about Jesus and you're ready we think you're ready or maybe you're not quite ready and you don't really understand yet and we want to encourage you with more here's something to read why don't we get together and talk about it some more and that's the process so you come to the elders you talk to one of them and you say this is what's going on in my heart

I really want to follow Jesus I love him and I trust him and I want to come to the Lord's table I don't know if I'm ready or not will you help me help me figure that out and that's what they're for that's what a good elder does now as for serving in the playground my story should be a reminder to us all of a couple of different things one if you're a follower of Jesus Jesus wants you to open your mouth and tell other people about him you don't have to do that in a preachy way you don't have to be ugly about it and mean and demanding and abrupt and cold and harass people but your friends talk about all sorts of things with you that they're excited about and you talk about things all sorts of things with them that you're excited about if one of them is Jesus then let one of the things you talk about be him and amongst all the many things that you're excited about and just be natural and tell them about your love for him and your trust in him and his love for you and then start praying for them pray that

God would save them and then pray for opportunities more opportunities to talk about them talk to Jesus talk about Jesus with them and he'll start giving you those opportunities you can do it evangelism is a big scary word that scares even mature Christians and we think that it's some special set of skills that you need and you have to learn techniques and be a theologian and actually all it really means is I love the Lord Jesus he has saved me and I really I love you too and because I love you too I want you to know about him and the other thing I think my story tells you is that it's you're never too young to start talking about Jesus but you also don't ever give up on anyone don't ever give up on anyone just because you don't think they're listening my friend talked to me every day for two years about Jesus and he was sure I wasn't listening and I was listening all the time he thought there's no way this guy's going to believe in

[37 : 24] Christ and he was convinced of that until the moment I walked up to him and asked him to pray with me and trusted in Christ so don't ever give up don't ever that's not just for the little ones it's for the old big ones too not just for the young ones but the old ones there's no lost causes there are no lost causes remember the dying thief it's never too late while I while I breathe I hope there's no lost causes don't stop praying and don't stop witnessing if you're praying for somebody you better be willing to be the answer to your own prayer of course if you're praying for somebody to come to know Jesus you better be willing to open your mouth and talk about him with them you can't pray oh lord please save my dear friend and send somebody else to bring them to Christ but don't use me no no no no he he's put you in that situation in that relationship with those people in your life in your family in your home you're the one live for

Christ try and live a consistent Christian life show show people that you know that you're a sinner and you're trusting in Jesus talk about him naturally and honestly and humbly pray and pray and pray and pray and plead with Christ to save them be willing to be part of the answer to your own prayer and don't ever give up on anybody it might take you years but the Lord can save them so yeah thank you David absolutely end of questions great where's my bible thank you very much for sharing testimony and and