

Dan Patterson Testimony

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Preacher: Reverend Dan Patterson

[0 : 00] You could start just by telling us a wee bit about yourself, your family, just who you are.! Yeah, I'm Dan, nice to meet you. So I am married to Penny, we've been married for just over 20 years and we have two boys, Fox is the oldest, he is just about to turn 17, he's in sixth year and already lining up my little car for ready to drive and take off on adventures and then Ace is our youngest boy and he is 14, he's in fourth year. And so as I've said before we live in out in Pullewn Olt Bay and just to be clear, I don't live in Gairloch. Now I, wait a minute, this could be online, couldn't it? Be careful.

Now in places like we live, sometimes there might be a small geographical distance but a large difference and we say, oh no, no, no, I'm not from there, I'm from there. Well Pullewn Olt Bayer are a wee bit more north and Gairloch's a wee bit south and so we are over the hill from Gairloch and so Gairloch's a separate entity from us but the boys go to school in Gairloch and it would be the main hub. We are just a bit further up around the shores of Loch Hugh.

And we've been there for about 11 years or so. Before that I was in Inverness, I was an assistant minister in the Free North with Colin McLeod and I was also down in Madras Street down in the Merkinch area. And so we have been enjoying life on the west.

If I'm honest with you, I'm an East Coaster originally and don't hold that against me because I've got a story but when I was in college I was in with Murdo Campbell and Hugh Ferrier and Thomas Davis and a few other shady characters.

And Murdo used to always say, West is best Dan. And then as an East Coast I'd be like, whatever Murdo, whatever. He was right. He was right. Having come to the west coast, I do love it. I love the people. I love the Highland hospitality.

[2 : 14] I love the makeup of the communities. And so we really enjoy living in Pulio and Alt Bay. Tell us where's your accent from? A few folks have said to me, where's he from? Because I can't place his accent.

So I grew up around Pershire, moved in fourth year to Lairg. I spent a couple of years in Lairg then went back to Pershire. But you might think, well, where's the accent then? The problem with my accent is I was a bus driver and so it got completely messed up with the way our country is of all different cultures and all sorts. I'm the kind of person if I spend half an hour in your company, I will sound just like you. And it's not deliberate. If I spend any time in England, I come back speaking like I'm from there.

And so I think probably my time on the buses, it just threw it completely and it's never recovered. So it's never recovered, never back to normal.

They can get your placement and scalp it with Alistair. Oh, sorry. So maybe tell us a wee bit about how you came to know the Lord. Now, I'll preface this by saying when we were walking down the road on the way to church tonight, which wasn't much time for you, I said, I'd ask you this question. You said, well, I haven't really got much of a story.

And actually that's the stories that I think need to be told most often because we tend to hear the drama stories. Yeah. If it's low key, which is a phrase that the young people use all the time nowadays, you low key.

[3 : 46] But if it's low key, then that's, that's good. So if you could tell us a wee bit about how you came to know the Lord. When? Was it fast? Was it slow? Was it drama? Was it not?

Yeah. Okay. Yeah, I think, as I say that, I was, I was remembering something that my grandfather, who was a minister, he used to say, never say you don't have much of a testimony because if you've been saved, the greatest thing ever possible has happened to you.

So it's not dramatic though. I was raised in a church going religious Christian household. Like many people, I grew up and really what I learned from parents who were lovely Christian folk was the Christian religion.

So back then, Sundays, there were certain expectations which were multiplied if your grandfather was the minister. And so I can still recall in Perth Free Church, frequently deciding that I needed to go to the bathroom because he was preaching so long.

And my mother looking at me with a look and I thought, no subtitles needed here. I know what you mean. But she gently whispered, if you get up again, I will tell your father.

[5 : 05] And as a young child, you thought, oh dear. And so for me, I grew up in a kind of strict kind of environment, but not overly strict.

We were taught the reverence of the Lord. We were taught the seriousness of faith. We were taught the need to go to church and the need to read and the need to pray.

And so through my younger years, that was fine. It was just normal life. But if I'm honest with you, probably I knew religion. I didn't know Jesus. In fact, I knew everything about church and I was one of these kids who could go to Sunday school and I knew the answer.

And I was quite content with knowing the answer. But when I was in about primary seven, I went to a youth club and the people who were there gave me a little book called The Greatest Story Ever Told.

And I read this little pamphlet and it said in it that I had a problem called sin and I needed a solution called Jesus. And that was the moment for me that I began to understand there's a difference between religion and the gospel.

[6 : 17] And so in a very basic way, I thought, right, well, if I need to be forgiven, I will pray and ask Jesus to forgive me. And then if I'm entirely honest with you, nothing much changed.

Just went back to school. I had a sense of what was right and wrong, which was depending on the situation, sometimes dialed down and placed to the side.

Out about with pals, we would get up to the usual mischief. Well, mischief you can get up to in Laird. Then if you have been to Laird, you will know there ain't much you can do in Laird.

But we were quite resourceful. And so there was the usual shenanigans on the go. There was a belief. There was a knowledge you should go to church. But that's about it. There's not much else going on now.

And for me, the big change came in my life was when I left home. I left home when I was 16 and I said to my parents, I'm going to the military. And my mum wasn't massively keen on it.

[7 : 17] But being the wise, astute mother she was, she said to me, why don't you go to a place called Teen Ranch? I don't know if anyone's heard of Teen Ranch.

It's an outdoor Christian activity centre. And she said, why don't you go down there and you can help out. And they have kids come in and they do camps. And it's a bit like free church camps, but all year round.

And I said, mum, I ain't interested. All I want to do is for you to sign this form and I'm out of here. And my mum in her wisdom said to me, I think you would like it.

There's a lot of girls there. And I said, mum, six weeks won't do any harm, will it? If I go for six weeks, will you sign the form?

She said, yeah, I'll sign your form and you can go if after six weeks you want to go. And so I went down and well, in God's providence, he had a different plan. Because when I was there, I was on a walk one night and I remember a realisation hit me.

[8 : 18] And the realisation was, there's a real difference between going to church and following Jesus. And what I realised is that Jesus was calling me to follow him in every area of my life.

And it was quite a spiritual moment for me. It was quite a profound moment for me. And at that moment, I was standing literally at a little crossroad in the path.

And I was looking at it and I felt like I was at a crossroad in my life. Where I was either going to choose to follow the Lord and whatever that meant. Or I was going to go my own way. And I was a wee bit fearful if I went my own way, I would never get another chance to follow the Lord.

And so in that moment I prayed, right Lord, I already believe that you've died for me. But I feel you're calling me to follow you in a whole life way. And that was the moment I said that prayer and began to take my faith more seriously.

And so I would say that to you, I don't know when I was converted. Because some people will say, well you're converted when you read that pamphlet. And then other people will say, well you were really converted when you decided to follow Jesus then.

[9 : 28] But the honest truth is for you friends, I don't think you can put a date or time on it. And I don't think you have to. Because I think God actually works sometimes really slowly in our life.

And there's biblical characters like that, that come along and you read about them and Nicodemus and people. And they actually just come really slowly. And so for me when I look back, my parents gave me a Christian identity from my birth.

And I began to understand it when I prayed that prayer from that pamphlet. But I only really affirmed that identity and began to really take it up when I was probably in my teens.

So, if you're wondering whatever happened to the military, I met a woman. And in that six weeks? In that six weeks. In that six weeks, I met my now wife.

And at the age of 16, I told her, I am going to marry you. And she said, you are crazy. And I said, well if you think that's crazy, hold on a minute.

[10 : 30] I was reading my Bible and it says, if you commit your plans to the Lord, they'll succeed. So I said, I want you to sit down on this log beside me because I'm going to pray that you're going to marry me.

And she sat down on that log and I prayed I was going to marry her, David. And I did not stop pursuing her until she gave in. And we're 20 odd years later.

Anyone who's 16, I wouldn't recommend it personally. I shouldn't say that actually. And he's watching. Yeah, it was a bit forward. It's normal actually. It was a bit forward but I think in some ways, I was maybe a little bit further on in my view of life than my friends.

And I was young, I was only just turning 17 but by then I had a clarity. I don't want to waste my life. And I want to follow the Lord. And I don't want to go out with a hundred different girls.

I want to find one girl, commit to her, love her and be loved. And so for me when I saw this girl, I was like, that is the one for me. So, yeah, not saying that's how it always works lads.

[11 : 38] But you know. You guys taking notes of the work. Yeah, yeah. If you fancy giving it a try, well you never know. You might be lucky like me. Not many trees in Harris but. Down by a pier.

So yeah, that's kind of my rough story. It's not a, it's not a Paul's Damascus road by any means. But I do generally think the longer I go on, the more I'm seeing for people who have been in church for any length of time.

I think that's absolutely normal. I think when you're raised in a Christian household, you're given the identity that is so new to someone who has a Damascus road.

You've already got it. All you're actually being asked to do by God is affirm what you've already been given. And so that's why for me it was just, wasn't a great massive moment.

When I stood at that crossroads, it was still a spiritual moment that I knew God was speaking. So for somebody who's here tonight, there are some who probably will have a lot of parallels with your life.

[12 : 44] Yeah. People who've grown up in the church, been taught about Jesus since they were very young, and who are probably wondering where they are exactly in the trajectory to becoming a Christian, or maybe whether they are Christians.

Some are, you know, haven't had that upbringing and are maybe, you know, fairly new to hearing everything about what it means to be a Christian. How, if somebody's sitting here thinking, well, I want to be a Christian, or I want to have assurance that I'm a Christian, how do I even pray?

What do I say? What would you, what would you say to them? What would I say to them? What would I say to them? Prayer isn't fancy. Prayer is just honesty. The best prayers come when you are completely open with God.

That includes saying, Lord, I'm doubting that you even exist. I'm struggling with the pain I'm going through. I'm finding this really hard.

I actually, Lord, I'm enjoying doing something that your word tells me is wrong. That kind of honesty with God is actually what we're called to. Being honest with them. And I believe that when we pray, when we're honest with God, that he honors that and he responds.

[14 : 12] But I think for anyone who is coming to Christianity or maybe struggling, you need to do more than just pray. You need to make use of all the things God's given you.

So maybe youth fellowship, maybe your minister, maybe parents you can talk to. I think for me, the biggest lesson I had to learn as a young teenager was that there's a difference between riding on your parents' coattails and actually understanding and knowing what do I believe and why do I believe it.

And I think probably the biggest challenge for me came when I was a little bit, maybe I believe about 19 or so, at a real crisis of faith, a real week of just wondering, what do I believe?

And I realized in hindsight, it was because I actually didn't know why I believed what I believed. I was believing it because I'd been told it.

But then actually my understanding of everything was so shallow that when I was put up against pressure of the world or other people's opinions, that shallowness was completely exposed.

[15:23] And so for me, I then had to begin a journey of really actually reading the Bible and then actually following up and asking questions like, you know, how do I know Jesus was from the dead?

What's the evidence? Or, you know, I want to get better at prayer. What can I do? And actually going and asking other Christians, spending time with other people my age and saying to them, how are you dealing with this?

It was for me, it was just a journey of just learning and absorbing and growing in it. And so that's a bit of a meandering answer. I know it. Good answer. Good answer. Good answer. Good answer. Good answer. Good answer. But yeah.

So you were a bus driver at some point in your life. You're now a minister. How did that happen? So yeah, I was working away at Teen Ranch and I decided I wanted to go to university, but I watched all my friends and family members go to university, getting loads of debt and then never do the thing they studied.

And I just thought, I don't want to do that. And so I decided in this pursuit of actually understanding what do I believe and why do I believe it? I thought I'm going to go to university and study the Bible. And I thought because that way, if I'm a Christian, I wasn't planning on being a minister, but I thought I'll always use this.

[16:44] This is just good for Christian growth. And so I went along to university. I was in HTC in Dingwall and I was there and somebody asked me, would you lead one of our services?

And the Lord took over my tongue and said yes. Oh, I said yes and had about six weeks and I just felt sick the whole time. The nerves.

And I remember I was in Cartarity Free Church and I stood up and I was preaching away and I was looking at my notes the whole time. And then I looked up and there was one person awake.

Everybody was asleep. And I thought, I'm really not doing a very good job of this.

But I came out of the pool pit and I felt more alive than I've ever felt in my life. I just felt, I need to do this again. There's something here that makes me feel alive.

And so over a process of time, I eventually went along to a church and the minister there said, I think you should maybe think about going into the ministry.

[17:58] But it was just a slight conversion. It was slow. A little service here, a little service there.

And I just kind of felt, I think I need to commit more of my life to the Lord. And that was in the form of ministry.

But it wasn't to be in the free church. Just to make it clear, I had said to the Lord, Lord, I'll do this, but not in the free church. Grandfather was a free church minister. Two uncles are free church ministers. No way am I going there.

And then where did he end up bringing us to the free church. So never say no to the Lord. Yeah. Last question, Dan. You're in Gerwach now.

Pull you in all bed. He did that deliberately, didn't he? Tell us just so we can be praying for you, however things, what can we be praying for in the ministry?

Yeah, I would say, give thanks. We've had an incredible season of blessing. It's just been wonderful. I feel so privileged to be in the congregation.

[19:08] I'm just like the tiniest cog there. They are self starters. They're just great people. I've just really enjoyed being there. But many years ago, Angus McRae from the free north, who used to be in Dingwall, who was the guy who led me into free church ministry.

He came to our congregation and he said, I want to challenge you to pray for 10 new homes to come out to church. And the people, when they heard that went, right, let's start praying. We long past 10 a long time ago. We're well past double that.

It's just been over the last five or six years, a period of God blessing. We're just seeing people come in. We've got the most diverse church that I can imagine. We've got every background. We've got those who are atheist or secular, Church England Baptist, FP, APC, the works.

And it's just a lovely, lovely group. And it's funny when I've been here this weekend, I can feel a similar vibe when I'm here. They've got a love for the Lord. They've got a love for the word. They're go get them. So they just get up and get on with it.

And it's a team. It's a family vibe. And so we've been really blessed. And we've renovated two church buildings. We've got no debt. And that's a tremendous blessing. So lots to give thanks for for us. But at the same time, we're fragile.

[20 : 33] We're fragile. We've got people who are close to promotion, as I would call it. And ready. But for me, I give thanks because they are ready. And that's our goal is not to build a big church.

Our goal is to prepare people for promotion. And so but with that comes fragility. So we're only a few deaths away till things get harder. Finances get stretched.

So pray for us that we would continue to grow in faith, grow in strength. I don't mean numerically. I know we always pray for numbers. But let's pray we're growing in our faith, that we're strong and that we're serving the Lord.

Because I think when we do that, we're a witness. And the Lord will take care of the numbers game.

So there's lots to give thanks for. So I didn't just encourage you. Just give God praise. Praise for it.

Thank you, Dan. Thank you. Thank you all. Lovely. Be with you. Thank you.