

Neil Lachie MacDonald Testimony 8.3.26 evening

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Preacher: Reverend Neil Lachie Macdonald

[0:00] We can start with that question. What is your name? Neil Lachlan MacDonald. So everybody calls you Lachie. I've never felt able to call you Lachie, but that's probably more out of fear of your mother than any other reason.

Yeah, my mother gave me a short Scottish name that couldn't be shortened, Neil, and everybody calls me Lachie. But she's Catherine Joan and everyone calls her Joan. And my wife's Catherine Joan and they were both nurses and dad's called Lachie.

So it all becomes very confusing. And then I'm ministering Lachbrum and Koigia, or Alupul and Achltibui, depending on what you want to call it. So names become very challenging, really, don't they? Yeah.

But you're David. I'm David. Straightforward. No other names, no. So I'll maybe begin by asking you just to say a little bit about your childhood.

I mean, everybody here, knowing Mary so well. About to know her a whole lot better. Feels that your childhood must have been a huge blessing of great peace and tranquility.

[1:05] Well, hers was. So anyway, I won't lead you down a path at all, but you can just share as little or as much about your childhood. Before you go, David first and Mary first came together when I was about 14.

And apparently I said to my mother, do you think I'll ever be as big as David? So I've definitely overtaken you there. Yeah. Well, I was born and brought up in Inverness.

Dad's from North Uist. Mom's from Gerlach. So we spent a lot of time either in Gerlach or in Uist. And I love tractors. That's probably the one defining characteristic of my life, other than being a believer in Jesus.

And so I always loved going to Uist because there was tractors there. And I liked going to Gerlach because there was the boat there. So that was the kind of thing football never featured in my life, really, at all.

So I'm more into heavy machinery and red diesel than anything else. So grew up in Inverness. And we grew up going to the East Church in Inverness, Church of Scotland, under the Ministry of Innesia and MacDonald.

[2:07] And I never heard a word. We were there, week in, week out, faithfully. I did try hiding on the garage roof, climbing trees, being unwell.

But we always ended up having to go to church. And I sometimes would sneak in a wee car or something. I remember being on the floor in the East Church with a Sierra XR4.

That was swiftly removed. And we had to listen. We went to youth fellowship. I usually embarrassed Mari. Still embarrassing her. The best yet to come. And Mari was always very sensible.

And very good. And I was the exact opposite. So that was it. Mari was always excelling. And I was usually distressing my parents.

But we had a very happy childhood. Very happy times. Our grandparents, more so on our mother's side. Our grandparents in Gerlach were lovely Christians.

[3:06] And we spent a lot of time in Gerlach, mum and dad working. And, yeah, it was good. So we went to the free church there. Our grandparents. Our great-grandfather was from Tolstachulish.

And he was a free church missionary, as it was back in those days. And he was ministering in Gerlach and in Juranish, in Skye, at Dunvegan. So we had a connection to the free church, although we grew up in the C of S.

And grew up, went to free church camps and enjoyed them. But, again, never really. I mean, faith was something that didn't really factor.

It was just part of life. Some of you maybe have grown up with the same experience. That it just becomes routine and normal to go to church and to be part of a congregation and to have a familiarity with the Bible and with worship and with singing.

But really for it not to mean anything to you. Kind of like, you know, the Tulloch road, you know, the Tulloch sign. Being able to see it, but not really being able to see it.

[4:07] Not really understanding any of it. So I was under its sound, but I wasn't really hearing. I could see, but I couldn't really understand. So that went on for a long time until I was converted just after my 18th birthday.

Between the ages of 16 and 18, I kind of hit my more rebellious phase, where I got involved in things that I shouldn't have got involved in and shouldn't have known better. And indeed in some things that we got involved in, we were quite, I had a sense of discomfort and being unsettled even in pursuing or had been involved in these things.

And they didn't bring any kind of meaningful satisfaction or fulfillment to me. Whether that was, you know, the party scene or the drinking scene or whatever it might have been.

These things were always kind of just empty. And I never really felt that satisfaction until the Lord started to convict me of my need of Him and my need of forgiveness and my need of His saving power.

Mary had professed faith. How old were you? 15. Oh, yeah, really? Oh, well, that's not quite as impressive as I thought. Maybe you weren't as a head.

[5:23] Well, I professed when I was 18, so there you go. God is good. So, yeah, I'd been away and we got in tow with a guy, a friend of mine, and we got in tow with a guy called Raymond McNaughton.

And he was from Glasgow. And what we didn't know at the time was that he was in Inverness on witness protection because his brother had been murdered in Glasgow. So, I don't know. You remember nine, no, what was it called?

Police Stop. Do you remember the Police Stop program? And you used to see, it was like, what you see now, police interceptors. You ever seen police interceptors? And there was a video of an XR2, a Fiesta.

You don't even know what that is. A Ford Fiesta XR2 going up the A9, passing Avi Moore. And the guy in the back's opening the boot and horsing the spare wheel out at the cop car and the jack and a hammer and all that.

Well, that was Raymond, we found out later on. We had no idea. So, we kind of got in tow with some dodgy characters. And looking back, the Lord spared me from a lot of difficulty that could have come to pass.

[6:31] So, I, around about the age of 18, began to understand or become restless and unsettled. And a couple of friends of mine, the year before, a friend of mine, Andy, who had been living a pretty hedonistic lifestyle and had gone down to Edinburgh and come home, and he was only six stone.

He wasn't very well at all. He'd come to faith. And I remember driving past the Beaufort Hotel on Christmas, Boxing Day? Was it either Christmas Eve or Boxing Day? I can't remember. And we were in a Ford Orion 1600 Kia.

Nice machine. Again, maybe you don't know what that is, but cars. Again, football, not at all. Cars, heavy machinery, yeah, that's my thing. We were driving in the Ghia and he said to me, I've got something to tell you.

I've become a Christian. And I said, that's great, Andy. Let's celebrate. Let's get a burger. So, that was fine. And then a couple of months later, his brother Chris, who's the same age as me, they'd gone to Kilrock Teens and Twenties Weekend.

Has anyone ever heard of the Kilrock Teens and Twenties Weekend? No. It was a Teens and Twenties Weekend at Kilrock, which is just outside Inverness. Like a weekend, like the youth conference kind of thing.

[7:45] And they'd gone there and Chris came back and I went down to see him at one point in the week. He said, I've got something to tell you. I've become a Christian. I thought, wow, this is weird. I'm out of here

kind of thing.

And Chris said, you're next. And I said, aye, on your bike. So, I went away. But sure enough, in the Lord's providence, the Lord was calling me. We had a pretty crazy couple of days around about my birthday.

And I came home on the Saturday evening. And for reasons unknown to me, but all of the Lord, I had implanted within me a desire to go to church the next day. I hadn't really been going to church. And the boys were going to Smithton, Free Church. So, just because they were going, I phoned and said, you going to church tomorrow? Yeah, I'll get a lift with you. Yeah. So, I went with them. And David Meredith was preaching.

And it was really the first time, I think, that I'd ever heard the gospel. It had been preached to me faithfully. And I'm quite sure wonderfully over the years by Anisean.

[8:40] And it is a regret that I didn't hear it because he was a wonderful preacher. He is a wonderful preacher. But this day, I heard it for the first time. And Chris and I were both working in Regmore Hospital Kitchen at the time, which was a really excellent job.

We were getting £3.60 an hour. So, you know, that's probably a lot less than you'd be getting now. But on a Saturday and a Sunday, we got time and a half and double time. So, it's £7 an hour. And we were there working.

And we went out to the car for our break. And Chris had his Bible. And he said, oh, well, we just read. I said, oh, you horse on. So, he read. And then he prayed. And that was fine. And then afterwards, we went to another friend's house.

Another Andy. Two Andys. And there was a bunch of guys there about our age. And they were having just fellowship. And then they had worship. And they all prayed for me and this other friend, Mark.

And I found that a wee bit weird. A wee bit unsettling. But again, the Lord was in it. And just over the course of maybe three or four days, the Lord convicted me in my heart of my need of sin.

[9:44] I remember having a conversation with the other Andy one night. And he said, well, you know what you've got to do. You just have to ask the Lord to forgive you. To come into your heart and to make you new. And so, I did that.

But when I went up to my room and to pray, I got down on my knees in front of my bed. It's the only experience of this I've ever had. I've never had anything like that before or since.

I was very aware. People talk about spiritual warfare. And I was very aware of a battle that was going on. Perhaps that was inside me. Perhaps it was external from me.

I couldn't turn around. I felt a presence in the room. I couldn't turn around. I was too scared, actually, to turn around. But I prayed. And in that moment, there was absolute peace.

A peace that I had never encountered or experienced before in my life. In that moment, I believed that I was saved. In an instant. And there was this contented peace that fell in the room.

[10:44] And I went to sleep. And I woke up the next morning and didn't feel any different. And then thought, oh, am I? Did I? Maybe I didn't. And I struggled with maybe assurance for a while after that.

But I've since then had that blessed assurance that Jesus is mine. Just through committing to the church and investing myself into his word and becoming part of a fellowship and just gaining that knowledge and that understanding.

So that's the kind of shortened version of how I ended up coming to faith. And then tell us just about your walk.

After that, did you walk steady? How long was it before you felt a call to ministry? Well, I was driving a Peugeot 205 D-Turbo, which I had to buy because I lost my license with the Cavalier GSI 2000, which was the dream machine.

And the worst part of that, let's go into it. The worst part of that was that when I lost my license, my sister didn't have wheels. So she got to use mine. And to see the old Cavalier disappearing out the gate every day with the Mari at the wheel was, well, that was a trough.

[12:00] But I can remember at that time, so that was at the age of 20. And I can remember I was working in Elgin at the time. I was working for Your Move. I was valuing properties. I was going back and forth to Elgin every

day. And I remember driving past Brody Country Fair.

Remember the adverts, the cheesy adverts on telly. I was driving past Brody Country Fair thinking, I wonder if I'm called to ministry. So I was at the age of 20. Well, I never applied until the age of 30. So I wrestled with a call to ministry during that period.

But during that period, I think it was formative in my faith. I think I probably coasted for a while after coming to faith and after the kind of real fire of coming to know the Lord and being excited by that. And then things become normal and a wee bit routine. And I think what saved me from falling away or from backsliding was just that willingness to commit to serving in the church.

So I became part of Smith and professed faith there. At my first communion where I professed, it was Ian McCaskill that was ministering, only in America.

[13:06] And McCaskill says, how do you fancy coming and doing a camp in Uist? And I said, ah, I'll come to Uist and do a camp. And so I went to this camp in Uist 1999. And I was rolling around on the floor wrestling Ian Grant, a sort of white-haired boy.

And there was a Margaret McKenzie that was there as a leader. And she says to McCaskill, I think we're going to have trouble with that big fellow there. And McCaskill said, that's one of the leaders. So Margaret and I had a great time at that camp. Actually, that was the first time I did the camp there in North Uist. And I did it right up until 2016. So 17 years of Uist camps.

It was a real blessing. But actually, just committing to the church. So Alistair Macaulay, now minister in Tain and Fern, he had a Cavalier SRI at the time.

And he couldn't fathom how I could have a Cavalier GSI. Well, it didn't last long, did it? But Alistair asked me if I would get involved with reality.com. Cool names. That was Sunday school.

[14:07] And I thought, well, I don't know how wise this is getting me to teach younger guys at the early stage in my life as a Christian. But anyway, I did it. And I was involved and then got involved in the youth fellowship.

And we had a great time there, a blessed time during these years in Smithton. We had about 50 kids coming to a youth fellowship at one point. It was a real blessing. We had various different youth workers during that time.

And throughout that, I questioned, am I, am I, should I, shouldn't I, will I, won't I, are we all called to ministry? Am I just really overthinking it? And I was unsettled in work.

I never really settled in the jobs that I was doing. But they all prepared me looking back. There was all elements of preparation and the providence of God for pastoral ministry.

So it wasn't until after I was married to CJ that I applied to ministry. It wasn't part of the prenuptial agreement, she says. So I kind of led her astray.

[15:06] It was a year after we got married that I applied for ministry. I got to the point where I thought, well, I think I am. But how do you discern a call to ministry? It's not an easy thing.

How do I really definitively know whether or not I'm called to ministry? So I thought, well, what I'll do is I'll apply and I'll let the leadership of the church decide. And if they see something and they think, yeah, we think you should go for it, I'll do it.

And if they say no, fantastic. I won't do it. So I applied and they got me to preach and I was interviewed by the Kirk Session and they said yes. And I went to the presbytery and I was interviewed by them and they said yes.

And I went to the board of ministry and I was interviewed by them and they said yes. And I did the scripture exam and I passed that. And I did three years in free church college as it was then. And I miraculously passed all of that.

And then I received a call to a congregation. I thought, okay, right. I think probably that's sign enough. That's confirmation enough from the Lord that, yeah, I think I am called to ministry.

[16:09] And the first call was to South Uist and Bumblecula. Now, some people would say that's exile. Others would say put them to the furthest reaches of the kingdom. Others would say damage limitation.

But we had a blessed time there in the Uists and enjoyed our time and very unexpectedly received a call to Loch Broome back in 2017. And we've been there since.

Do you want to say a little bit just about how you discerned a call to Uist and to Loch Broome? Conscious even on the fact, you know, we're praying for Scott.

We're praying for Stuart. We're praying for Gordon. All who are in different stages. And it can be really hard, I can remember, in coming here and Loch Cairn and just discerning.

How do we know where God is leading us? I used to go to a businessman's Bible study on a Friday afternoon in the Cali Hotel in Inverness.

[17:10] And I always remember somebody who often, you know, people say they've got their kind of pet phrases almost, but helpful. And there was a chap there who used to say, our God is not a God of confusion.

It's always stuck with me. As we were thinking about this weekend, he gives us answers. He's not a God who leads us astray. He's not mystical in that sense. There are areas that we struggle to comprehend, of course, because he is eternal and infinite, and we are finite in our current state. I think we have to look at things practically and spiritually, prayerfully, and we have to seek the Lord's wisdom in it. So, in college, I was given the opportunity for my first year placement, you're given a placement.

So, I was in Buclue Free Church, which was a city centre congregation under the mentorship of Alec MacDonald and Bob Ackroyd.

And saw a good cross-section of ministry, including going to Sochten Prison. Bob was the chaplain there, which was a really profoundly depressing experience, I must say, a difficult thing.

[18:20] But for second year, you get put to a vacant congregation. And usually, if your first placement was urban, your second would be rural. And so, John McIntosh called me in and he said, I've got a couple of options for you.

You can go to London or you can go to South Uist. And I was like, well, South Uist. So, the people in Uist I knew because I'd been doing camp all these years.

So, this is 2012 by this point. So, I'd been doing camp in Uist since 99. And, of course, dad's from Uist, so cousins in Uist and a familiar place. So, we went to Uist the summer of 2012.

And it's usually a six-week placement. I think we were there for 12 weeks because the manse was vacant. They were vacant. They were needing help. And as is often the case, right, when you live in the islands and the weather is good here, the weather is awful on the mainland and vice versa, right?

So often it seems to run that way. So, we were in Uist and there was blue skies for like eight weeks. There wasn't a drip of rain. Went to St. Kilda and all the good stuff.

[19:29] Well, I was going to say I went fishing with my cousins. I did go fishing with my cousins, but I didn't get on very well there. I was sick as a dog. But it was a great time. And there was cars floating down the street in Edinburgh.

It was so wet. The Saab garage, the cars were actually floating out of the garage and down Balcaris Street. But we were in Uist and the sunshine thinking, well, this is a good sign that the Lord thinks we should come here. But after that 12 weeks, we already knew the people before we went.

And then having been there with them, the Lord gave us a desire for that place and gave them a desire that they might call us. It was slightly different in the sense that it was an appointment by the mission board.

It wasn't a traditional call. But they were keen to call us. We were keen to go. And the mission board were happy to endorse that. And so we ended up in Uist.

And I always wonder, I remember having a conversation going over on the Hebb one day with someone just about, I was fearful of the day that a call would come elsewhere because how do you discern it?

[20:30] And how do you make that decision to leave a place and people that you love and that you care about and that you have been called to and whom you have served and who you've pastored into?

And that call came very unexpectedly to Loch Broome. So I was on a five-year appointment in South Uist in Bembecula. And John McLean, the late John McLean, tremendous.

John McLean was interim moderator for Loch Broome when Alistair was called to Smithton. And I remember we were in Inverness. It was, I can't remember, I think it was January time.

And John McLean phoned and he said, oh, would you give me a date for Loch Broome? And I said, John, I can't give you a date to preach in Loch Broome because I can't go. I'm on a five-year appointment.

It would be unfair to the people in Loch Broome, unfair to the people in Uist, so I can't. He said, aye, aye, okay, I get that. But you'll do the communion that you agreed with Alistair. And I had no recollection of agreeing to do a communion.

[21:31] I hadn't written it in a diary or a calendar or anything. And I said, oh, when was that? Remind me. He said, June. We just booked a holiday to Spain in June. I was thinking, oh, no.

What date in June? Oh, Sunday the 3rd. We were flying to Spain on Tuesday the 5th. So I said, yeah, yeah, that's fine. So I went to Alipool.

And of course, our maternal grandfather is from Reef, sort of right at the headland up in Achillebuie. So we've had a house, a family home there for a year. So we used to go there at Easter and other holidays.

So again, a familiar place and some familiar people. So went up there, did the June communion in Coygach and came away and went to Spain. And that was great. And then we came back from Spain and we're getting a call to Loch Brum.

I was saying, how is that possible? So we drove home and we got to the house in U.S. And literally, I put my hand on the door and opened the door and the house phone was ringing and went in and picked up the phone.

[22:31] Hi, Lachie. Sandy Sutherland, interim moderator for Ferrantos and Rosales. Hi, Sandy. They'd like you to come back and preach again with a view to a call. And I thought, right, okay.

The Lord is speaking here. It may not be that we're going to Loch Brum. It may be that we're going somewhere else. But it would appear that we're on the move. In the April of that year, this is June. In the April of that year, Neil Johnson of the outdoor centre had phoned me.

Can you come up and see me? And I went to see him. And the centre was in receivership and they couldn't honour the camp. The camp was cancelled. And it was a big blow having gone for so many years and done it for so many years.

But providentially, when I ended up accepting the call to Loch Brum, the two weeks that we had to move was the two weeks we were supposed to be at camp. And so there were practical things like that.

Our Isabella was just about to start school. There was elements of the ministry that we felt we'd gone as far as we could have with in South Houston and Bimbecula.

[23:29] And so we accepted the call. We were given a peace. We had no peace about any of it to begin with. But we prayed about it and the Lord gave us a peace about it. And the way that I would describe it is that it was really hard to go.

It was really difficult to leave. It was really difficult to leave Uist, but it was very easy to go to Loch Brum. It's a really odd thing to think about that it was hard to leave these people who we loved and who loved us and showed us such care and kindness.

But it was also easy to go to a place that were hungry for the Word and who had invited and who were very welcoming as well. And now we've been in Loch Brum for eight years, nine years this year, and there's still so much to do.

So I think it's got to be by prayer and supplication, but we've also got to take notice of the practicalities and the real things and a desire. You know, I don't believe that the Lord sends us kicking and screaming to places that we don't really want to go.

Yes, we have to be faithful. Yes, we're to be obedient. But I believe that He calls us to places that we're set apart for. I remember way back in 2005 with Smithton, we went on a mission trip to Athens in Greece with Argyris Petru and the congregation in Piraeus there.

[24:49] And we were supposed to be doing a holiday club, a summer holiday club with kids. And it was a bit of a daunting experience thinking the language barrier and missionary work and going out and even doing leaflet drops.

And, you know, it was a thought, well, as we turned up on the first day, no kids came. None. And so we had to do a variety of different things, but it turned into just an excellent trip.

And I remember giving a sort of feedback after that trip back in Smithton and just saying, it wasn't what we expected. It wasn't what we were anticipating, but it was actually better. It was actually better than what we had hoped.

And often that's the case for us. If we commit to the Lord faithfully, often what comes to pass is better than we would ever dare hope. What can we be praying for you in terms of ministry, family life, just general?

I think eight years in, really only now are people locally that are outside the church starting to, we're starting to get to know them and they're getting to know us and we're not, well, I don't think we're weird, but, you know, maybe they do.

[26:01] But you know that, quite weird, I, well, yeah, okay. So I guess just, I see rural ministry and small community ministry, like, same as yourselves, island, highland and island ministry is so relational.

So it's not event driven, it's not big bang, it's not glitzy. It's like coming alongside people, getting to know people, being genuine with people, loving people.

And that just takes time. It takes time. But the Lord blesses that. So just investing yourself into the life and work of the church and the community and the people around about.

So just pray for wisdom and opportunity in that regard and it would be taken. And that we would be effective witnesses for Christ in the community.

Okay. Any questions from anybody else? Before I ask Scott to pray for them. Naki, you talked about growing up, not bowing to the word being preached to you day after day, but then looking back, seeing the signposts, seeing key people who'd prayed, said, come praying with me, prayed for you.

[27:20] And then were signposts on the way. We've got a lot of youth there who've kind of, you know, having those key conversations can make the world of difference.

So just reflecting back on that yourself, the key point to yourself and how important that was, those people who would step out.

Yeah. Well, this guy here was always an encouragement to me and he also held me accountable.

He's good at that. I'm sure you're aware of that, of course.

David is steady, you know, and he's a guy that, you know, I can rely upon and who's always been just that picture of faithfulness.

So having people that you can look up to and people that you can rely upon and people that you can speak to at any time about anything is so important. I think it's good to talk. Find folk that you can be honest and open with.

[28:19] When I was young, it wasn't that I was opposed to the gospel. I wasn't antagonistic in the sense that I would go to things, I would be involved in things.

It was just part of life, but it wasn't personal. I didn't have that living, active relationship with Jesus. And that didn't come until the Lord really convicted me and drew me by His grace.

So I think if you've got friends and you have a faith, then encourage each other in that. Speak to each other about that, but also find yourself an older Christian.

So for me, one of the most formative things in my early Christian walk was being part of that businessman's Bible study. Older men experienced wise counsel.

And just listening to them and learning from them, I think, was formative, very helpful for me. So find older people. Speak to older people.

[29:21] Gain the input and the wisdom of older folk who have been on the Christian walk for a longer time and who have experienced, believe it or not, all the things that you will experience just in different ways and can bring you a great deal of wisdom and save you a great deal of heartache if you listen to their counsel.

So we will be praying for you. Thank you, Neil, for the weekend and for your ministry over the years.