

From Footlights to Fame

by Billy Strachan

Billy Strachan shares his journey from a troubled childhood in Scotland to a profound search for faith and purpose amidst the challenges of the entertainment world.

Duration: 56:33

Scripture: Psalm 119:103, Proverbs 3:15, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 4:4, Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, 1 Peter 2:2

Topics: "Fame"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal experience of being a part of the Hollywood Christian group and having access to Paramount Warner Brothers studio for three years. He talks about how he had the opportunity to talk to stars about Jesus Christ and lead them to salvation. The speaker emphasizes the transformative power of God in his own life, as he was once a broken and miserable person but was changed by God. He also addresses the idea of the permissive society and challenges the notion that people cannot change their lifestyles with God's help.

Transcript

Well, you don't just dive into talk from footlights to faith without first telling you how you got into the footlights to begin with. Although I have a bit of a Scottish Glasgow accent, I'm really not from Glasgow. I was born a way up in the Highlands of Scotland, and whatever it was I did wrong, I'm not sure, but I was a rebel right from birth.

Because the first thing I remember was them holding me upside down and spanking my backside. I wasn't sure what for, but they've been spanking it a lot after that, you know, and ever since. And life was a struggle for me right from the start, because you see, it so happened that my mother never did want me.

And apparently that can be communicated to a baby in the womb. And I didn't know that at that time, but it could be to the extent that when I was born, I rejected the mother's feeding and rejected the mother. So I spent the first year in the Aberdeen Sick Children's Hospital.

And so life was tough, right to begin with. Then they moved down into the Glasgow area. And of course, life for me there was six of us in one room.

And it was the survival of the fittest. And so there was lots of poverty and lots of unhappiness. And of course, I was a Second World War kid.

And so night after night, it was under the bed while the bombs dropped, going out to see whose houses get flattened, and rummaging around to see if you could salvage anything before you were stopped salvaging anything. You would be made to, in one occasion, help to black out the lights in a room that a drunk man had left the light on, planes going over, could see the light. And the most horrible moment of the day was when the postman turned the corner.

The whole street vacated. Everyone sat in their houses quiet. And then as a boy, you could hear the whale go up.

As one after another of households opened letters to discover that their father had been killed in the war, or their son had been shot in the war. And so there was nothing but death, destruction, unhappiness. And then I remember on the occasion that the Germans made an attempt to bomb the shipyards at Clydebank.

And the people in Clydebank made the supreme sacrifice by switching on the lights in the city and not in the yards. And the Germans bombed Clydebank instead of the yards and saved the shipping. Well, my father the next day took me to see the devastation to show me what man could do to man.

It left a very, very profound impression upon me. And even though I was a small lad, I was already asking the questions. Why? Why am I alive? Why bring me into a world that threatens my life? Why have people so unhappy all the time? And I began to look for a reason for living.

What am I here for? What's all this about? Now, of course, you're told that at that age you can't think, you know. Ah, what would he know? You know, that age, they don't think at that age, you know. What a load of rubbish.

Of course you think. And I remember when I was five that I went to school. No, that's not true.

When I was five, I was taken to school. And thereafter, the police escorted me there daily if they could catch me. I must have been very religious, though, because I helped all the teachers in their prayer life.

They used to pray every morning that I wouldn't come to school. But I usually ended up going. And at the end of that first year, the teacher taught me a nursery rhyme for the annual school concert.

And I went along that big night of the program and my mother gave me a bath that night, whether I needed one that year or whether I didn't, and greased my hair down with lard and had velvet pants and a wee bowtie. And so off I went to the school concert and the teacher said, OK, Willie, it's your turn. So I marched on to the platform.

I'd never been on a platform before people in my life before, you know. And here's all these parents and people crammed into the hall and they're all looking up at me. You see, that was very nice, especially when I looked around and saw there was nobody else up there but myself and realized they were looking at me.

So I looked back. Well, they kept looking at me, so I kept looking at them. And we were having a nice time, really, until the teacher said, get on with it.

And I couldn't remember what it was I was to get on with, you know. But the thing is, I liked it there because there was much more light out there than there was off stage, you know. So I decided to stay there and I started pulling faces, you see.

Now, the more ridiculous the face I pulled, the more the audience laughed, the more they laughed, the worse I got. And there was only one person didn't seem to take it too kindly. That was the headmaster.

And the audience saw his hand coming in to get me. And just as it about reached my neck, I moved this way. And so an infuriated audience saw him rattling behind the curtains in the other direction and the hand came in from that side.

So I moved back this way until he had no alternative but to march on, pick me up, carry me off and apply some punishment to the seat of my knowledge. Well, that night when I was back in what we call home and my brother and two sisters and I, we were all in the bed in the corner, as it were, sort of trying to sleep. But you can never sleep when people were in drinking me a fox and visiting.

But one of the neighbors said to my mother, was that your wee fella that nearly killed the concert? And my mother said, was it? I could kill him. And the neighbor said, oh, I wouldn't do that. They hang you for that.

Besides that, I must tell you this, for as long as your wee fella was out there, I forgot my trouble. Now I heard that five years of age and I heard that and I lay there in bed and I thought, what better and more noble thing could you do in life than to make people forget their troubles? So I decided to dedicate myself to the task of making sure people got a good laugh in the midst of pressure. Now that meant that I became obsessed with every conceivable avenue of entry into the entertainment world.

And of course, we had already seen a way in the distance coming up modern things. And the idea of having one act that would last 60 years was dying and you had to be prepared to produce new material, do new things. And so I was foresighted enough to know that I had to be able to try and do everything.

And so you tried everything. You did everything from pantomime, ventriloquism. You did tap dance, singing.

You learned all that you could. Of course, I neglected my schooling because of this. One of the earliest functions I actually portrayed until my parents found out was I actually sat on a man's knee as his ventriloquist dummy.

And maybe that accounts for my dumbness ever since. But one night my parents saw the actual performance and stopped it because they had no idea that that's the kind of thing I was doing. But the people actually thought the man was a ventriloquist.

He had somebody under the seat reading his line, my lines. And I just sat on his knee and opened my mouth, you see. But I was a real fella and they thought it was a living doll.

People have said I've been a living doll ever since. But anyway, I tried and fought and fought. And then, of course, it meant that I spent most of my free time in and around the show business hunts.

And I found that the show business people were very keen to see you on the road to stardom. It really amazed me that they were all very interested in helping a wee fella like me to reach the top. The only thing was it did have a price.

And that was that the road to stardom always seemed to go through a bedroom. And so by the time I was 14, I was a moral wreck. Things that you think are new and are labelled permissive, ah, come off it.

They were doing it even in my day. But in my day, they were more hypocritical. They used to pull the curtains.

Today's generation are not hypocrites. They just do it in the open. Sometimes I think that today's generation are to be admired.

Because everybody thought that didn't happen in my day, but it was happening. They stuffed the keyhole, pulled the curtain, put the light out, but were still permissive. You can't change the nature of the beast.

And so, of course, my life was ruined. But then you see, there was no God. So it doesn't matter.

And I grew up in a family that didn't seem to care too much about the existence of God. No leadership from my father and the things of God. In fact, his philosophy still today is your old man doesn't need God, so neither do you.

And I believe them. But the funny thing is that in the midst of all that fight to get up in the entertainment world, there was all of this immorality and drunkenness and debauchery. To the extent that I had always a sneaky suspicion that somewhere down the line, it was like the credit system.

You enjoy now, but you're going to pay later. Somewhere there was going to be a reckoning. Well, at 15, mother died.

And I was asked to come home because by that time I was living away from home. And they were quite glad I was living away from home. And so I went out to the funeral.

And that was the first time I came in contact with anything religious, because, well, you don't want to be mistaken for pagan. So you have to pay somebody to do the funeral and get the thing done properly. You know, so father had managed to get a minister to come and he stood there in the house and he talked about this wonderful woman, this wonderful mother, this wonderful woman.

The time he was finished, I thought, you got the wrong one in there. I wonder if my father knows, you know. And so I took one look at this guy and I said to myself, well, if that's religion, you can keep it.

You're a liar for a start. And, uh, but anyway, we buried her and we went to the cemetery. And as I looked down into the grave and I saw there a casket with a birth date and a death date on it, something very deep happened inside me that nobody else noticed.

Just a real flash went right across my mind that life cannot add up to a wooden box with your name on it, with your birth date and death date. There must be more to life than that. And she was only 43.

And so from that day, a great search began in me that other people never knew was going on because I still kept up the other life too. But I decided in my misery that maybe what I needed was a religion. Now I was so ignorant of the religion game that I thought that ran the churches like the run the theaters, you know, the bigger the theater, the better it is.

So I actually went around the streets of Glasgow, measuring up the churches till I found a big one. And what really impressed me was the billing that this minister had outside the church. It said, Scotland's most worldwide traveled minister, the Reverend Leslie J.P. Hope M.A. B.D. Ph.D. D.D.T. And so I thought, I thought, well, if anybody can help me, this guy can.

So I marched along there one Sunday. I managed to stay sober and I borrowed a suit because the fancy stuff you used on stage, the theater belonged to that. You walked home in your rags and lived alone.

And boy, from midnight to the morning, I couldn't sleep. I hadn't slept in years. Some of you will know what that's like.

Some of you haven't slept for years. And you get your pill to knock you out at night and the other one to wake you up in the morning. So you know what I'm talking about? Where just the sheer loneliness is just chewing you up to bits.

Well, I was there. I had all that lonely business and I thought maybe what I need is a religion. So I'll try it.

So I stayed sober, borrowed a suit and I went up this massive flight of stairs to the door. And there was the usual welcoming committee at the door, a fella with a pile of hymn books and a face like a squashed violin. So I talked to him about the weather and I talked to him about rangers and Celtic.

I talked to him about all the, you know, the great political issues of the day. And at 11 o'clock, he took this chain out of his pocket and looked at his watch and said, well, you have to forgive me. I said, excuse me, but I've got to go in now.

So he went in and I stayed out and went home. He never asked me in. And all the time I was talking to him, I was screaming inside myself, ask me and ask me.

And I've never been in one of those places. If I could just get myself through the door, just ask me in. But he never asked me in, so I didn't go in.

And I actually was so determined. I went back five or six weeks on the trot to the same door. The seventh week I went in, he wasn't on the door.

Nobody was. So I quickly marched in and sat behind a massive pillar, just like that thing there. And I sat behind it and I thought, I'll pretend I've been coming for years.

But I think everybody knew it was my first time because when they stood, I sat and when they sat, I stood. And when they asked us to turn to the book of Genesis, I asked the person next to me who he was. And so I think I gave myself away.

But at any rate, I was fascinated by the service. I'd never been in the Church of Scotland in my life before. And in came the Beagle.

And he was, you know, wearing a bow hat and tails and a white shirt. And he had the trousers as well, of course. And he was carrying the Bible, you see.

And he carried the Bible in ceremoniously. And the whole congregation stood as it came in for a respect for the Word. And they carried it up into the pulpit and they opened the massive book there.

And then he came down and stepped to the side as the minister came in. And he'd come in in massive big robes, you know, and two little white bits sticking out here. And I thought, what funny team colours, you know, but people are different.

So he marched up the stairs into his pulpit. And then what really got me was that this Beagle went up and shut the door behind him and locked him in. And I thought, I'm just scared he runs away without doing the job or something, you know.

But at any rate, by that time, I sank way down in my seat because I was sure that if he opened his eyes after his great prayer and suddenly looked at me, he'd say, you out for a start. We don't have your trash here. But I didn't have to worry, you see, because he never looked at me.

As a matter of fact, he never looked at anybody. He said, dearly beloved, we are gathered here this morning. And me, I kept looking up, you know, sort of wondering, is there a second audience I don't know anything about, you know.

And, you know, he never even looked at the people. And I thought, I'm down here, man, why don't you get in touch with me? And when it came to the sermon, I thought, this is it. He'll just look at me and say, sinner, hell, damnation.

But he didn't. He talked about Florence Nightingale's hand for 30 minutes. And I thought it was very nice, you know.

I got it at school, but I don't know what we're getting it in church for. And when do you start talking about God? Well, he never did. He pronounced his benediction.

And out came the beadle, came up and opened the door, came down. The minister came down and stood there. The beadle went up.

And the minute he lifted the Bible and started carrying it down, everybody stood up. And then there was this processional of the minister, the Bible and the beadle went out behind the organ. And so being a dissatisfied customer, I got up out of my seat and followed the pair of them out behind the organ.

Now, I think that was the first time in the history of the Church of Scotland anybody had ever followed the beadle, the Bible and the minister out. In fact, when I got behind the organ, the beadle nearly dropped his glass eye. And he put his hand across my chest and he says, where are you going? I said, I want to see that man.

He said, you mean the doctor? Oh, I said, no, he was a doctor, not medical, theological. I said, what's that? He says, it doesn't matter. Do you have an appointment? I said, do I need one? He says, just a moment.

Now, see if you can see you. So this Jeeves like character came back out and said, the minister will spare you a moment. Now, listen, I had never been that near to a minister in my life, except to throw a brick at his heart.

And so I went into his study and there he is sitting behind this big old desk with his hands on it, looking like Dr. Doom. And I went up there and I was glad I didn't have my kilt on. It would have sounded like Maracas, you know, and here was my knees knocking like mad, you know, and I was, I meant everything from the depth of my heart.

And he said to me, what can I do for you? And I said, I want to be religious. He said, did Billy Graham send you here? And I said to him, is that that wee man that was carrying that book up into that box? And he

says, don't you know who Billy Graham is? And I said, no. And you know, I get this.

I lived in a flat in Suckey Hall Street, 300 yards along from the entrance to Kelvin Hall, where Billy Graham held a Tell Scotland crusade for six or eight weeks. And I never even knew he was in the city. Shows you how blind you can be.

The advertising must have been all over and I never saw a thing. Never knew it was going on. Shows you how blind a person can be in life and think you know everything.

And so he said, well, don't worry about it. He said, you've come to the right place. And next week I have a special service for making Christians.

And you come along next week and join all the other young people in the front row. And at some time during the service, I'll come down and I shall ask you three questions. You nod your head three times and you're in.

And I thought that was marvelous, you know. So I stayed sober another week and went along and stood with all the other young men, really priding myself that I was feeling cleaner than I had all my life. And he came down and he asked me questions.

I had no clue what he was talking about. But if you think in front of, if you think in front of all those people, they were going to nod and I was going to do that. You'd had it.

So I nodded too, see. So they came down and presented me a lovely little card, all crimped and silver, just like a wedding invitation that told me that now made me a Christian, I'd promised to upkeep the tradition of church going in Scotland. So when the service ended, I went out to the steps of the church and I just stood there and I deliberately tore the card up into little strips and then I tore it up into little bits like confetti and I just threw it up in the air and let it all go down on the doorstep and said goodbye.

And I went home and I got goofed and drunk, really blottle. And, uh, you see, they might have said that made me a Christian, but I knew I was as rotten when I came out as I was when I went in. They did nothing for me.

And I wasn't, you know, that's one thing about the entertainment world. You know what it is to con people. We're professional conners and we know how to pull the wool over your eyes in a performance.

So the one thing we're not gullible and we don't suffer fools lightly. And there's one thing I wasn't going to bite was a religious kick that was unreal. So I never bothered going back.

But the thing that I did get in that church was why make all that fuss about the book and not read it. So I decided to buy a Bible and I went to Mingus's bookshop in Glasgow and I marched in and I walked around to make sure that I could see a section of the Bible. And then I made sure nobody was looking in case it might get out that I was reading the Bible.

So I went up to the shopkeeper and I said, excuse me, miss, but do you, um, sell, um, and she was a typical Glasgow shopkeeper. And you're like, oh, you want a Bible? Man alive. I dived under the table and pretended I was a bookend.

And when I was sure nobody was looking to come out and I said, yes. And she would go and get a ladder. And she can bring this big tooled leather thing with buckles on the end of it.

You know, I said, Luke, you're getting about five Bob in those days. You're getting five Bob, just put something in the paper bag quick. So I had this thing in a paper bag and all the way up the street, I was sure everybody was watching my paper bag and knew it was in it.

You know, I felt so guilty at carrying this. And I got to my flat and I put it under the mattress and I decided to come in early that night and read it. Well, when it came in at three o'clock in the morning, well, that was early for me.

I got it out and I thought, let's see what this thing says. So I opened it and it said, and so-and-so begat so-and-so and he died. And when he begat somebody else, they died.

And when they died, the others died. And you know, about 40 people kicked a bucket and 12 died. And here was me looking for life.

And I began to say, it's no wonder people never read the thing, you know? And then the next night you feel, felt depressed. You'd come in and open it and you'd read it. The number of them that were numbered were numbered fourscore thousand eight hundred and eighty-eight to the east side, eastward, and fourscore thousand eight hundred and eighty-eight to the west.

I thought, what's this, the capacity of Hampden Park? So I thought, no wonder people never read this thing, you see. But it's funny that every time I got depressed and there was three times between 15 and 20 years of age that I attempted suicide, that I would get this thing out and read it. And I remember in one very, very low period, I got it out and I stood there in my flat and I actually thought I was going mad.

And I said, God, you're really cracking up, saying a thing like that. And I said, God, if you're there and this is really your book, this is your last chance, because I'm not afraid to die. That's the only certainty there is in life, that we're all going to die.

I mean, there might be a war, there might not be, there might be bad weather tomorrow, there might be good weather tomorrow. We can never predict these things, but there's one thing you can certainly say and that is you're going to die. And so I knew that.

So I was never afraid of dying. I was scared to death of living. Living was my problem, not dying.

And so I said, God, if this is your book, you either make me aware of that tonight and it has a life-changing effect on me or I'm quitting. And I picked it up and I opened it, what I thought was random, and I read, whoever calls in the name of the Lord shall be saved. I thought, whoever, that means anybody, and I'm anybody, calls and I've just shouted, God, shall be saved.

Saved? Saved? I said, I wonder what that means? Saved from who? So I looked at the top of the page and said, Romans. I wonder what the Romans have to do with me? So I settled down that night to read this thing called Romans. And by the time I read the third chapter, I went back to find out when they printed the thing.

I was sure somebody had put a chapter in about me because I suddenly knew that I'd lived all my life as though God didn't exist and I didn't need him. And I could be a big man without him and that I was a sinner and God's judgment was upon me. Well, I said that night, God, this is it.

Come and save me. And I waited. Nothing happened.

So I just went to bed. But something did happen. I slept.

And that was a new experience for me. When I woke up in the morning and found out I'd been asleep. You know, it was just a surprise.

And then all sorts of things began to happen to me. But two or three days later, I was knocking on the door and there was an inquiry after me asking if my name was Billy Strachan. And I said, yes, I had two names in those days, you see.

They'd been looking under another name for me. And it was to let me know that Her Majesty was very interested in me being responsible for the defense of the whole country and that they wondered if I wouldn't mind serving in the military forces. You know, they've been looking for me for quite some time to do that, apparently.

I never knew the Queen had such an interest in me, really. But anyway, I was sort of thrilled to bits. I had to be.

They picked me up and within hours they had me medically examined and stuck on a train and sent, would you believe it, across the border. Oh, it was like, oh, well, I shan't tell you. And so I came down and here I was in England.

And then I went to an RAF hut and they picked, fitted me up in a uniform. And that night I was in a room with men that hated the whole world, absolutely hated the world. And boy, I was really in a mess.

And so I got ready and jumped into bed to bury my sorrows. And as I got in bed, I suddenly saw the fellow on this side of me kneel down. And I looked and I saw the fellow on that side of me kneel down.

Now, I had never seen grown men kneel down in public in my life before. And everybody else saw them at the same time as I did. And there was just a fraction of silence.

And then all pandemonium let loose. They threw everything at these two fellas. Anything that moved got chopped.

And I suddenly found myself lying in bed between two mountains of rubbish. But, you know, I was deeply moved because I knew that they knew the God I was looking for. So I started to watch them.

And I wanted to get near them. And being an actor, I thought, I'll pretend I am one. So I watched them.

And one day they were going down a cafeteria just like this, getting their food. And I don't know if you've ever seen military food being served by fellas that never wanted to be in the military and never wanted to be cooks. And so, you know, the fellow would stand there with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth and a ladle.

And he'd take the porridge, you know, and he'd go. Sometimes it hit the plate. Sometimes it hit you, you know.

And so this fellow, this Christian fellow went down there and he went and some of it landed on his uniform and he smiled and said, thank you. And I thought, smile, say thanks. If he does that to me, I'll put the boot in, you know.

I thought, let's pretend. So I went down the line and he went and I got some of it in my tie and I said, thanks as much as if I meet you in the dark afterwards, you're for it, you know. And then I watched these two fellas go over to a wooden table and sit down and then they bowed their heads and prayed over it.

And I thought, pray over that? What are they asking for? Courage to eat it? So I went to the end of the same table so that they would see me. I went to the end of the same table. So I sat down and I bowed my head and counted to 10.

I mean, I didn't know what to say. And so when I finished, they came along beside me and one of them said, good morning, brother. Oh, I felt terrific.

I said, good morning, brother back. And then I began to talk to them. I said, have you ever called the name of the Lord to be saved? And he said, well, of course you wouldn't be a Christian unless you were saved.

You need to have the Lord Jesus as the one that died on the cross to forgive you in your life. He rose again and you used to ask him in and he comes into your life and gives you the power of a new life. So I thought, what I've been reading is true.

And so I thought, hmm, I must remember that. But just at that moment as I was getting interested, the RAF discovered who I was. So they immediately whipped me out of there and whipped me into the Royal Air Force Variety Group and gave me a rank to keep me out of trouble, which of course gave me access to alcohol again.

And I started traveling the country in a show called Bells and Bells for the restoration of St. Clement Dane's Church on the Strand, which was the Air Force patron church. It was to make money for that. And so I was in that show.

And so out the window went all the thoughts about Christianity and religion again. And then from there I started going on to further programs and had a radio go with Sam Costa, Cherry Lynn, Ken Platt, Richard Murdoch. And that was good.

And so I was beginning to get crazy. But also there was the alcohol. And so that was ruining me again.

And so one night I thought, that's it. This has just got to stop. And so I knelt down by my bedside in the hut.

I suppose I knelt because I'd seen those two fellows kneeling. And I decided to pray. That's as far as I got because the fellows all looked at me the new kind of pig I was.

And so one of them jumped over his bed, jumped over mine, picked me up by the throat and smashed me straight in the face and knocked me clean across the room. And then he came and stood with his foot in my chest and said, Strachan, I don't believe there is a God, but if there should accidentally be one, you're the last rat he'd ever help. So he picked me up and threw me on the bed and they all walked out to go and get fish and chips or something.

So I lay there with gaps that I've still got in my mouth where my teeth came out and blood coming out of my mouth and a sore jaw and tears coming out my eyes. I asked the Lord Jesus to be my savior. And of course, you know, now 25 years later, people are asking me, brother Billy, when you became a Christian, was it an emotional? And of course my response is, oh yes, it was.

I was in absolute agony. But the amazing thing is Christ came in. He came in and I found that within 24 hours I had led my first friend in the hut to Christ.

And so there was two of us. And life began to be different. And I knew that there was great changes taking place within that I couldn't even account for, and neither could they.

They tried every day to stop me from having faith, but they couldn't. And so when they saw that I was determined to stick to this new faith, they were determined I would too. And as many a night I came in tired, had been on stage, and then I would be on an all night duty and on all the next day duty.

And I'd come in that night and I'd just want to flop my bed and I'd get under the mattress and the fellows would come over and pull the blankets off and say, hey, prayers, out. And they made me pray. They'd never let me forget my prayers.

And they'd say, pray for us when you're down there. And it was great, great. And of course, just at that time, having received Christ and tasted newness and things, and I moved into the Doer Play, the White Sheep of the Family by Eldegard Pesch for the Air Force Drama Group.

And they gave me the part of the 98-year-old absent-minded Church of England vicar in the play. And, but that night, one of the opening nights that I was on, God held a conversation with me. He said, what are you doing? I'm using these people.

Why? So that they get relief from their pressures and problems. For how long? Until the show's finished. Then what happens to their problems? I suppose they come back again.

Where's your problem? You've got them. So what's the answer? And I suddenly thought, hey God, the answer's tell them about you. Not just joke.

Good Lord. So I came off and went to my dressing room and I said, Father, are you telling me to preach? And he said, yes. So I said, get lost.

I don't mind getting respectability. I don't mind being forgiven. I don't mind getting guarantees of getting to heaven, but just keep your finger off my career.

I've worked at this since I was a kid and I'm aiming at Hollywood, Times Square, Broadway, the lot. And don't start telling me to be a preacher. It's crazy, God.

Because if I stay on the stage, I can make much more money for you and me. And, uh, you know, we'll have a great time. But the Lord just persisted.

And so I decided I wasn't going to be a Christian anymore. But it was no use because every morning I woke up, the Lord said in my heart, good morning. And I couldn't get rid of him.

And then to boot BBC one gave me my first edition for television in Aston Green studios in Birmingham in 1956. And I had a promissory note, a contract to begin television, uh, as soon as I would leave the air force. But of course, in that intervening period, the Lord got me to give it up and to go into the ministry.

And so I said farewell to show business and what I thought I was giving up. I discovered was freedom. I was actually being released from something.

And, uh, it's amazing how quick it took me, I think about three weeks to start saying in meetings that I gave up television for Christ, you know, and an old man came up to me and he said, son, I have a disappointment for you. Nobody gives anything up for God because he doesn't need anything. So I'm afraid since you publicly declared you're giving up television, the Lord will have to give it back to you one day, somehow, somewhere, just so that you'll chew those words and that you'll never say again, you gave them up for the Lord.

So I just put that in my heart and left it. But you know, the funniest thing was that everything I thought I'd never get as a Christian I got within three years I was in Hollywood. Oh, I wasn't making a film.

I actually was the guest of the Hollywood Christian group and had the freedom of the paramount Warner brothers studios in Hollywood for three years running. I went over there to walk around the set, talking to the stars about Jesus Christ and in leading stars to Christ. And it was a very rich experience to meet those broken, miserable, sick people that you sit and watch on the box and think are happy and to lead them to a saving knowledge of Christ and everything God ever said he would do for me, he did.

And picked me up, changed my life. And, you know, we're sitting listening to today's philosophers over the permissive society saying that it's impossible for people to have their lifestyle changed and that you must settle down to just reckoning you are what you are and put up with it even with God's help. What a load of rubbish.

As an immoral drunkard, three times nearly take my own life between 15 and 20. I came to Christ and he completely revolutionized my life. And if you had told me that I would ever marry, I would have said that's impossible.

But 27, he trusted me with a woman, gave me a wife and a family. And my wife had a first child about 30 and a last one at 41. I have a daughter that's just about 18, one 16 and a boy eight.

And I wouldn't swap them for anything. And it's been amazing, the revolution. And if you'd come to me in the gutter, lying drunk in the gutters of Glasgow and said, Strachan, do you know that God can save your soul, change your life? And by 1980, you will be the principal of an international Bible college with 200 students from 20 nations around the world studying under your care and keeping.

I would have only had one word to say, impossible. God couldn't do that. He did.

He did. And even the words of that old man, I've had to chew. Because about seven years ago, time tease television contacted me and they said, we've been sort of waiting all this time for news that you might be changing, but it looks like you're stuck in this religious rut.

Why not come and do something religious? And I've now been doing a series every year for the last seven years on time tease. And the last series went out just over a week ago on the butterflies of Brazil that I brought back from Brazil last year when I was visiting the jungles and talking to missionaries and natives in the jungles of Brazil. And it's amazing to think that everything I was ever taught in the industry, God is using today in order to get the word out about himself to people.

Of course, my only critics on television are Christians, because I'm not saying what they would like me to say, but my only answer to them is if they can get me 40,000 people next Sunday morning in their church to say what they would like me to say, I'll be pleased to come and say it for them. But unfortunately, they can't get 10 in their church. And so I'm not throwing away such a tremendous opportunity.

And it's a delight to know, and I'll tell you this privately here tonight, that there are no restrictions on what I'm saying on television about the Lord Jesus Christ. And I'm finding it straight from the shoulder. And I'll tell you this, those programs go out after midnight.

So there's not a Christian watching it because they're all in bed at 10 o'clock. You know, and it's a pure, pure pagan audience. And there is a good response to these programs.

And it's great to see God could do it. It has always been a delight to go anywhere in this country where anyone invites me. And I have never yet refused an invitation in Britain, but I've never written to ask to go anywhere.

And so irrespective of whether it's summer or winter, fair weather or foul, if I'm invited and can fit it in, I will eventually go to that church. Because to me, there was a nice person called Jesus who picked me up out of the gutters of Glasgow. And it was as though he wiped my nose and gave me a shilling.

And I was so thrilled to bits that somebody would be nice to me for the first time in my life, that my response to him was, thanks, mister. Is there any messages I can run for you? And ever since then, he's just simply said, yes, go to that church and tell them this. Go to that church and tell them that.

Because each time I've delivered the message, I've just run back and said, did it, anything else? So I'm merely a message boy, and I've never been anything other than that. And it's the same with the Word of God that's ministered. I'm merely the delivery boy.

One of the earliest jobs that I was given in six floors up in a tenement building in Glasgow in our family home--I call it a home, six of us in a room with a kitchen--was to lean out the window. I used to put a cushion on the window, lean out, and mother shut the window behind me to keep me from falling out. And my job was to watch for the bread man.

And I would keep my eye in the street, and you would hear the clip-clop as the cooperative horse-drawn bread van came round the corner and came down the street and stopped. And I used to shout, mother, the bread man! But it took me a long time to grow up and discover that the bread man never made it. He just delivered it.

Somebody else baked it. He was just the bread man. And whether he was tall or thin, whether he was small or fat, bad-tempered or soft, ugly or beautiful, was of no consequence as long as he had the bread.

And very often he had a little cloth cap on as well. And we thought he was everything because he brought us the bread. But I discovered later he never made it.

And it's an interesting book is this Word of God, because it's likened to many things. It's like opening a kitchen door and looking at the ingredients on the table. One minute you read it, you're told it's water.

But then the next page you read, you're being told it's wheat. Then you're being told it's more precious than rubies. Another place tells you it's like honey.

Another place tells you it's something else. In fact, when you discover the many ingredients connected to the Word of God, you say to yourself, I don't think I could bake anything with that. But the master chef is the Holy Spirit.

And it's the Spirit of God who is the teacher of the Word of God who is a very good baker, and he custom builds and bakes whatever loaf you need tonight, just for your health and diet's sake. That's why a preacher must never take from God the bread he gets and likes, and the cake he gets and likes, and suddenly think the whole congregation should have this cake every Sunday. We cannot pass over to you the things that were precious to us.

God has a capacity of taking a message in an evening like this and making it mean one thing to one person, but a completely different thing to another person. The bread man just delivers it. God's the baker, and God forgive us if we preachers ever become bakers instead of bread men.

And it's interesting to study the bread of the Old Testament. In Exodus 12, where most people know that to be the chapter of redemption and the beginning of the Passover lamb, very often people fail to realize that not only did they inaugurate the Passover lamb that night, they also inaugurated a feast of unleavened bread. There was to be no leaven in any house.

Leaven was a type of yeast which was a type of sin. It has a capacity to just creep quickly through the whole dough and ferment the dough. That's what sin does.

It creeps through and it spoils and it mars. And God said, when you eat in my presence, let the bread be unleavened. No sin in it.

Of course, today we have people, someone wrote to me this week saying they felt they could not take the communion because they weren't too sure whether the bread on the altar was leavened or unleavened. But of course, in the New Testament time, it has a completely different meaning because Jesus is the bread of life. And Jesus was the one who said in the New Testament, there's just one responsibility that you have and that's to see to it that when you eat this bread, partake of Christ himself, that you don't mix in any yeast, any leaven, because that corrupts the bread of fellowship.

And it's interesting that Jesus said in Luke's gospel 12 and 1, in the meantime, when they were gathered together, an innumerable multitude of the people, insomuch that they stepped one in another, he began to say to his disciples, first of all, before he talked to the other people, this was a message for his family. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. Whatever you do in your fellowship with me, when you take bread and wine, you're remembering my body broken for you, just like a piece of bread being broken, and I am the bread of life.

My life's blood being shed for you. You drink the wine, and it's assimilating, taking in part of me. But he says, make sure that when you do that, you're not doing it with any leaven of hypocrisy mixed in to that fellowship.

And what's that? Well, Jesus tells us, which is play acting, hypocrisy. The hypocrites were Greek actors. You only needed four people to walk into a village, and you had a whole production, because one man could play nine parts.

All he did was put a piece of wood between each finger, a long spill of wood, and at the top of each, because they naturally fanned out on the hands, was a paper face of a character. Four faces, four in this hand, his own face in between, and he could play nine people, and all he did was move behind a face and change his voice, move behind a face and change his voice, and they were called hypocrites. And isn't it interesting, Jesus says, the one thing that spoils real fellowship with me, spoils the bread.

That which is good for building up your very life, is if you try to bring into that fellowship pretense and play acting. We don't have to expand that. We're left between ourselves and the Almighty God to discern whether or not we are pretenders.

And in Matthew's Gospel, in the 16th chapter, Jesus said this, take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And the leaven of Sadduceeism was rationalism. And too often we come and have fellowship with Christ while we rationalize our faith, make it appear to be nothing more or less than a form of religion here below.

With no deep meaning, no personal relationship, just build a faith to suit yourself and your own mental capacities. Many have done that in the church. Many have ended up simply stating, I don't believe in God, but it's good to be religious.

I'm honest to God. And they are. They are declaring they don't know him personally, but they are mixing into the bread that was to be taken, that which spoils it.

Rationalism, mere human intelligence, and nothing of faith and love and reality and spirit. He says, make sure that that's not in your fellowship. And then in Mark's Gospel, in the 8th chapter, he sounded another great warning and he charged them saying, pay attention, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod.

And Herodianism was worldliness, absolute worldliness. He said, don't bring that into fellowship with me. When you eat of the bread of heaven, and what better way to make sure that we are clean than when we come to take the emblems that remind us of the living bread.

He says, make sure there's nothing in it that smacks of worldliness, because that was Herod's problem. He was more concerned with what people thought than obeying the truth of God's word, more concerned with his own reputation than obeying the word of God. And the challenge is there to eat pure bread and to have nothing that spoils.

And isn't it interesting that it was on that feast of unleavened bread that Jesus sat with his disciples around the table, and he broke it and gave it to them, passed that cup, told them they would never eat or drink of it again until he drank it afresh with them in his kingdom, and yet at the same moment could turn around and say at the table, there is one who's got his hand in the dish who will betray me. Who will betray me on the very night? And he knew who it was that should betray him, but he never exposed him because he allows every man the dignity of his own conscience to get his heart right with God. And it is interesting that in Paul's description of the communion feast, he does finish that reading by reminding us to examine ourselves, that there be no unworthiness as we approach the table.

It has to be pure fellowship, remembering what he did for us in dying and rising again to live within us. And should there be anything within your heart that's not right, this is the best place to be at this time, because this feast is for sinners, not for good people. And in one occasion I was at a communion service.

We are sitting on the platform. I noticed that as the plate was passed from person to person and the cup was passed from person to person, one lady just passed it over and sat there sobbing. And I detected that she was of a sorrowful spirit because there was evidently something in her life that was not right.

And when everyone was served, I remember taking the cup and the bread, leaving the platform, going down into the body of the hall, and making my way along the row to where she was. And I said to her,

Sister, take it. It's for sinners.

It's for sinners. And with a simple prayer of heart before taking that bread and that wine, a child of God can get their heart right with God. For the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.

And it only takes a second to put your heart right with God and know that you can feast with nothing in it that spoils it and go out into a newness of life with a new spring in the step. I'm so glad he gave us a feast like this. It makes us have a solemn moment in all our attempts to make worship happy, exciting.

It gives us that solemn moment just to examine the heart, and if there's a slight smidgen of the yeast of pretense, rationalism, or worldliness, just as you take it, get rid of it. Confess it in your heart, turn to Christ, thank him for his mercy, enjoy the feast, and enjoy the fellowship. For Jesus Christ's sake.

Amen.

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