

Coming Alive Spiritually

by Bob Vernon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding what it means to be a Christian and the need for spiritual rebirth through accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Duration: 50:37

Topics: "Spirituality"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of receiving Jesus as one's personal savior. He shares a personal experience of a police officer named Pearson who was shot while on duty, and relates it to the need for spiritual transformation. The speaker references John 1:12, which states that those who receive Jesus into their lives become part of the family of God. He also highlights Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, where Jesus explains the concept of being born again and the purpose of his coming into the world. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the coherence and agreement of the Bible's teachings on the necessity of being born again.

Transcript

Tonight, I'm going to be talking, as it says in the bulletin, on practical Christianity, and you may be thinking, well, what does he mean by that? What's it all about? I want to talk tonight about the nuts and bolts of being a Christian. You know, many times you and I have been to places where we've heard a sermon and we're very much motivated about being a Christian. Perhaps you don't know really what it means, though, to be a Christian.

You say, well, yes, I agree, that's nice. You might have heard a pastor speak on achieving peace in your life, or achieving happiness, fulfillment. Or you may have heard a pastor speak on a release from guilt and despair.

And all of these things, they have pointed to Christ and said, now you can find these in Christ. And you're wondering, well, I want to find those things, but how do I find them in Christ? Where does it come together? What does it really mean to be a Christian? Some people would have you think that it really doesn't make too much difference as long as you're sincere. As long as you sincerely believe something, that that's good enough.

That faith in itself is a virtue and will save you. You know, that's really not true. You know that if you just stop and think about it for a moment.

Early in my career when I was working Southwest Division, I went into an emergency hospital and a young boy, about five or six years old, was on the emergency table heaving great gulps of air into his lungs because he was about ready to die. He had taken a 45 automatic bullet right in the forehead. And he was unconscious, of course, but his body was trying desperately to live.

And he died right as I came into the room. The family was already there and they were huddled around him. And there was a great deal of emotion and crying and weeping and anguishing.

And there was a young boy, just about a year older than this boy, who had a striking resemblance to him. And he was in the next room and he had his head in his hands and he kept saying, oh, I didn't know it was loaded. Oh, I didn't know it was loaded.

He had shot and killed his own brother. Now, that boy really didn't believe the gun was loaded. He had faith that it was an empty gun.

He had a sincere belief, an honest faith. And when he pointed that gun at his brother's head and pulled the trigger, he honestly had faith that it would not go off, that it was empty. He had taken the clip from the handle.

He didn't realize there was a round still in the chamber when the slide had closed shut. It was an honest mistake. He had an honest belief that caused him to do a certain action, but that belief was not correctly placed in the right manner.

He had faith, but it was not appropriate faith. It wasn't placed in the right person or thing or concept. So you see, it does matter what you believe.

And tonight I'd like to begin by talking about what the Bible says we must believe in talking about this. I would like to relate to you from the Bible, a story about a police captain. Did you know there was a story about a police captain in the Bible? You say, now, wait a minute, Bernie, you're stretching a little bit.

Would you turn in your Bibles to Acts, the 10th chapter? In Acts 10, we have a story about a certain man by the name of Cornelius. And he was indeed a police captain. You see, back then, they didn't have a civilian police department.

The land of Palestine had been taken under the authority of Rome. Rome had swept across most of the then known world with its armies, with its legions, and Palestine was under the command and control of Rome. They had detachment of soldiers there, a garrison at Fort Antonio.

And at Caesarea, they also had a garrison. And Cornelius was the police captain in charge of Caesarea, this city in Palestine. At that time, the army, the occupying army were, in fact, the police.

When something happened, when you called the police, the soldiers came and they were the police officers. And so here we're talking about the police captain of Caesarea. And it says here there was a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort.

And then it says some very interesting things about Cornelius. It says really four things that I think are very remarkable. Number one, it says he was a devout man in verse two and one who feared God with all his household.

In other words, he believed in God. He was a devout man. He was a religious person.

He believed, it says he feared God with all his household, and he gave many alms to the Jewish people and he prayed to God continually. Now, you notice those are four great things about this man, virtuous things. He was religious.

He believed in God. If there had been a church to attend, he would have been attending. He would have been a churchgoer.

He gave alms. He practiced the good works of what you might say is a Christian way of living, although they didn't really have the name Christian at this time. And thirdly, he even, rather fourthly, he even prayed.

So as we look at this man, he was devout and religious. He was probably, he would have been a churchgoer. He believed and feared God and all his household.

He made them get together and give respect to God. He had the good works of giving to the poor and all those kinds of things. And he prayed constantly.

You'd think that would be enough, wouldn't you? You'd think surely this man would find favor with God. Well, he did find favor, but he really wasn't in God's family yet because we'll find out what happened here in verse three about the ninth hour of the day. He clearly saw in a vision, an angel of God who had just come into him and said to him, Cornelius, can you imagine that? You got to get the picture now.

Cornelius is, is there at probably taking the traditional afternoon siesta or about to, uh, there in Palestine. They did that. That was part of that culture.

And all of a sudden an angel standing there. And it says that he clearly saw him in a vision, which indicates to us he wasn't asleep yet really. And, uh, I'll tell you that that shook him up because it says in verse four and fixing his gaze upon him and being much alarmed, he said, what is it, Lord? He used the right phrase there, man.

He said, don't want to mess with this dude. I mean, after all, you know, here he is angel, uh, some kind of flashy clothing on it says later on in the chapter, it doesn't really say flashy, but it says he had shining Raymond. We noticed that about angels that whenever they appeared there, Raymond shined, it said like, uh, like lightning kind of had a glow about it.

And so I don't blame Cornelius for being a little bit alarmed. He was righteously alarmed, you know? And he said, what is it, Lord? And he said to him, your prayers and your alms have ascended as a Memorial before God. In other words, you've got the attention of God Cornelius.

And now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter. He is staying with a certain Tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea that is in the city Joppa. And when the angel who was speaking to him had departed, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier of those who were in constant attendance upon him.

Currently, one of his soldiers was also a believer. It gives us a little indication when it says, and one of the soldiers was a devout soldier. So he brings in a couple of them and a devout soldier, probably a believer.

And after he had explained everything to him, he sent them to Joppa. Now you have to get the picture here. Here, Cornelius is religious.

He believes, he prays, he gives alms. And all of a sudden there's an angel saying, in effect, that's not enough. There's something else you've got to find out about.

There's something else than just this of being a Christian. And I can imagine Cornelius probably had some questions in his mind. Now, wait a minute.

He's shaking his head and scratching his head. There's something more? Now he didn't say that because he was alarmed. I mean, you would too be if an angel appeared to you, whether it was a vision or otherwise.

And Cornelius was like that. So he didn't really say that. But I imagine he was thinking that.

There's something else yet? But he assumed there was, and he sent some of his servants immediately. And on the next day, as they were on their way and approached the city, Peter went up into the house, stopped about the six hour to pray. And the Lord prepares Peter's heart.

Because you see, Peter was a Jew and things had to be kosher. I mean, literally. And Peter was not used to associating with non-Jewish people, that is Gentiles and especially soldiers.

That would be kind of a disgrace to go to an occupying soldier's house. And so the Lord prepared Peter. We're not going to go into that right now.

But he prepared him with a vision, letting him know it was OK to talk to this guy, Cornelius. And so later on, down through the chapter, you have to read it some other time if you haven't read it before. Peter does go with the soldiers back to Cornelius at Caesarea.

Verse 24. Rather, verse 23. And on the next day, he arose and went with them.

And some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day, he entered Caesarea. Now, Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

He probably had a pretty spacious house being the the centurion of the detachment there at Caesarea. And he probably had one of those typical Mediterranean houses that had a patio in the center and was built around this patio. And it says he had he had invited many of his relatives and friends.

And he was waiting for this message of what else he was supposed to do, except what he was doing in order to find favor with God. And when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up.

Peter was embarrassed. He raised him up saying, stand up. I, too, am just a man.

And as he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled. Doesn't say how many. It just says many.

So Cornelius was anxiously awaiting the arrival of Simon Peter. And in verse 28, it says, and he said to them, you yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him. And yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. And so I ask for what reason you have sent for me. And then Cornelius, beginning in verse 30, relates to him what happened as far as

his vision and how he was supposed to send for him to find out what else he was supposed to do.

And it says in verse 33, and so I sent to you immediately and you have been kind enough to come. Now, then we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord. And in opening his mouth, Peter said, I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation, the man who fears him or respects him and does what is right is welcome to him.

The word which is sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all. And then he goes on and begins talking about Jesus and he talks about how he was crucified in verse 39 and how he rose from the grave in verse 40 and in verse 41.

We'll take it up. Actually, let's skip down to verse 43 of him. All the prophets bear witness that through his name, everyone who believes or trusts in him has received the forgiveness of sins.

And that kind of sums up what Peter said to Cornelius. He told him about the fact that Jesus died on the cross, was rose from the grave the third day and how he lives today and how that was a substitutionary death. And then he said, and it's everyone who believes or trusts in him.

That's how you become a Christian. That's what it means to be a Christian, being devout, being religious, giving alms, praying. All of those are good things, Cornelius.

But you see, you have to accept Jesus Christ as your savior. You've got to believe in what he did on the cross. That's the key issue.

That's how you become a Christian. Now, let's leave that story right now for a moment and find out why all of this was necessary after Cornelius, being such a good guy, still had to do something else in believing in Christ. Turn in your Bibles way back to Genesis, the first chapter, verse 26, Genesis 1, 26.

And we're going to find out why Cornelius had to do something more than just be religious, a believer in God, that is a prayer and a guy with a lot of good works, giving alms and all those good things. Why did he have to do something else? We begin to see the reason right here. Then God said, let us make man in our image.

Notice he says, let us, you know, there were the Trinity was there way back then, always has been father, son and the Holy Spirit. And they're talking with one another. Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

And God created man in his own image, in the image of God. He created him male and female. He created them.

Now, that's a very important concept to understand, and that is that we were created originally in the image of almighty God. Now, what does that mean to you? Does that mean that originally we looked physically like God? Well, you know, if you if you look around this room, you can see there are many different kinds of looks as there are people in this room. Nobody really looks the same.

In fact, I've heard it said that if you don't think God has a sense of humor, just look at one another, you know, look at how different we are and and how we all have different looks on our faces and different hairstyles and everything else. And, you know, that's beautiful that we're all different. God has made us

different.

And so it's not physical that he's talking about. It wasn't that we were created to look physically like God, but it says we were created in his image. And many Bible scholars believe that what that means is we're recreated really a trinity, a body, a soul, the person behind the eyeballs and a spirit.

You say, well, I kind of understand the first body. I can I can see that. I can understand what you mean when you say man is a trinity and that he has a body.

But what's the difference between soul and spirit? Well, I've had it explained this way and it makes a lot of sense to me. You know, a body gives you contact with with a material world. And Jesus Christ was the body form of the Godhead gave God the ability to walk this earth and to talk with us and to let us touch him and see him.

He had a body, Jesus Christ. There's a soul, the intrinsic you, the person behind the eyeballs, the the personality that you get to know. You know, there's more than than this body to Bob Vernon.

Some of you know me and I know some of you. And and it's more than just knowing my body. It's knowing me, that person that lives in this body.

I want to be great. Someday we'll all have rejuvenated, perfect bodies when we see Christ. We won't have the imperfections we have now.

We won't have the problems we have with this body. And, you know, it says that in first Corinthians, it says that we go, we kind of get grown and get tired of having these bodies because they fall apart. They they have problems and want to be great.

It says in first Corinthians to slip into our new bodies when we see the Lord, the perfect ones that he has reserved there in heaven for us. That'll be great. But we have a body and then there's a person that lives in this body, the soul, and that gives us the ability to not just contact the physical world, but to contact one another, to have communication with other human beings and to get to know and and to be self-aware and to be aware of others.

The soul, the spirit gives us contact with God. The spirit is that form that that part of us where we literally have communion with God almighty and man originally was created a triune, a triune person, a three parted person with a spirit that gave him constant contact with God. But something happened in chapter two, verse 17, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat your God speaking to Adam and Eve, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

Now, God said in the very day that they eat from this tree of good and evil, the knowledge of good and evil, they would die that very day. Now, let me ask you the question. Did Adam and Eve, did either one of them physically die that very day when they ate of that, whatever it was? No, they didn't.

In fact, they lived several hundred years later. Was God wrong? Did God make a mistake? Did God make a booboo when he said in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die? No, no, no. God doesn't make mistakes.

You see, they did die. They were born rather created by God to be a body, a soul and a spirit. But when they sinned, their contact with God was severed.

Their spirit died. They were no longer spiritually alive. You say, how do you know that? Well, there are many parts of the Bible that talk about that.

But I think one of the classic chapters about becoming spiritually alive again is a very familiar one. It's John, the third chapter. Turn over to John, the third chapter.

And, you know, once you understand that spiritual death concept that the Bible talks about and that God talks about, you'll understand what Jesus was talking about when he talked with Nicodemus in John chapter three. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to him by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are come from God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.

Jesus answered and said unto him, truly, truly, I say unto you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the world as he sees it. And he said to him, truly, truly, I say unto you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the world as he sees it. And he said to him, truly, truly, I say unto you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the world as he sees it.

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And I almost am getting to the point where it kind of has a negative connotation. It shouldn't because it's a very descriptive connotation. I mean, meaning to it.

It's a phrase that Jesus himself used. And he told Nicodemus, you've got to be born again. And of course, Nicodemus was very confused.

He didn't know what he was talking about. And he says in verse four, how can a man be born when he is old? I mean, he is confused. Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again?

I mean he's just this really just kind of as a kid say blew his mind and Jesus in verse 5 says truly truly I say unto you Unless one is born of the water of the Spirit. He cannot enter into the kingdom of God You see what Jesus was saying going back to that original concept of man being born with a spirit But when Adam and Eve sin, God said in that day, you'll surely die They died spiritually and now God is telling in the person of Jesus Christ and Nicodemus Nicodemus. You've got to come alive again Spiritually, you've got to be born again spiritually.

You see Nicodemus. You're dead spiritually and There's no way you can have contact with God unless your spirit comes alive again That really all matches in with many other verses that you read in in the Bible for instance in Romans the sixth chapter There's a classic series of verses rather Yeah, it is. It's verse.

It's chapter 5. I'm sorry Romans 5 beginning with Verse 6 for why we were still helpless that is, you know Here we are spiritually dead at the right time Christ died for the ungodly For one will hardly die for a righteous man though Perhaps for the good man someone would even dare to die but God demonstrates his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners And we'll find out just what that means a little later on here Christ died for us much more than having now been justified by his blood We shall be saved from the wrath of God through him for if while we were enemies We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son much more having been reconciled We shall be saved by his life and not only this but we also

exalt in God through our Lord Jesus Christ Through whom we now have received this reconciliation that is being brought back into Relationship with God member dying spiritually no contact with God. He's talking about being reconciled and in verse 12 Here's the classic verse therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world he's talking about Adam there and death through sin and he's talking about spiritual and physical death too but spiritual death primarily and death through sin so that death spread to all men and All have sinned And so what he's saying here is is Every man that's ever been born into the human race since Adam has been born spiritually dead a sinner And I want to make a statement that that is easy to to get confused over but listen carefully What the Bible is saying here is we sin Because we're born sinners We're not sinners because we sin did you get that But we sin because we're born sinner We're spiritually dead. Every one of us was born spiritually dead Every one of us was like Nicodemus.

We need to be born again now Jesus goes on and Back in John 3 if you'll flip back there just a few pages You know, this is one of the rare churches I speak in in many churches in my travels This is one of the rare churches where when you say back in John 3 and all of a sudden you hear all the shuffling Of pages like crazy in most churches. They just sit there and look at you You know, it's kind of neat to see you following along and you being interested enough to to read yourself Jesus goes on and he talks about being born of the Spirit in chapter rather verse 5 of chapter 3 And then he says that which is born of the flesh is flesh. In other words your body Yeah, that's one thing but that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit do not marvel that I said to you you must be born again, and Then I guess he could see I mean being God He knew what was going on this guy's mind and he has to explain a little more and he said I You know Nicodemus.

I assume he's thinking now. Wait a minute. I can't see a spirit Now, how can a spirit be born? Jesus answers that and he says the wind blows word wishes and you hear the sound of it But you do not know where it comes from and where it is going So is everyone who is born of the Spirit? In other words Jesus was saying you may not see it happen with your eyes But as sure as you see a tree bending over from the influence of the wind, although you don't see the wind You know that the wind is there because of the effect of the wind the results of the wind Everyone doesn't dispute the wind, you know, it's there because you see the results and he said it's that way with your spirit Nicodemus if you get born again spiritually, there'll be some results Something will happen to you you'll be a changed person and Nicodemus answered and said how can these things be and he said are you a teacher of Israel do not understand these things and he Goes on and he gives him the classic verse that many of you have memorized as children in verse 16 for God so loved the world That he gave his only begotten Son So that whosoever believes or trusts in him Should not perish But have eternal life God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved Through him.

So here we have this classic Explanation to Nicodemus by Jesus Christ himself about the necessity of being born again Now the Bible is a beautiful book it it fits all together So neatly it just kind of all falls into place and you know, the rest of the Bible all agrees with this Isn't that amazing? It's not really is it because it's inspired And you know there there are basically three steps that I followed just getting down to the nuts and bolts now Of what does it mean to be a Christian? There are basically three steps that I Took when I became a Christian and expressed my belief in Jesus Christ First of all the step of recognizing that you are a sinner and confessing that to God The Bible says if we confess our sins He's faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness You've got to take that first step of confessing that you need God Now that's a tough step for many of us to take Especially for some reason men they they don't like to admit many men. It's a kind of a macho thing They don't like to admit they need anyone. I don't need anybody I'll make it.

I'll clean up my life. I'll make it through the pearly gates someday. I'll be good enough I will will it to be I'm a strong individual.

I can make it but the Bible says no no In order to really come into God's family in order to get for sick forgiveness for being a sinner You've got to confess to God God. I'm a sinner. I need you.

I Reminded and I'm not sure I tell so many police stories here in my messages I forget which ones I've told and I asked Esther I said did I tell this one and she said I don't know I hear You speak so much. I can't remember but I'm gonna tell it anyhow because it illustrates this point I'm trying to make and frankly, I can't remember whether I told it here or not but one night we were chasing some kids in a stolen car and The car that we were chasing it was over in the East LA area We got into the sheriff's area and we actually chased them over a cliff and it was kind of a hairy thing you know, we'd gone in pursuit on the radio and All the other cars in the district were coming in and you know us cops We cheat we we use a radio when we get other guys to help out And so we were hopefully waiting for these other units to come in and help us But they hadn't switched over our frequency to the sheriff's and so we didn't get any help We're all by ourselves over in the county and it went on for quite a while We were screaming around the hills up there by this glue Center and my partner that I was working with that night was Bill Lynch He's now ahead of our anti-gang squad called crash and Bill Lynch said look at Bob I think they're gonna crash and just he said that they hit a telephone pole and the last we saw him We're going over the cliff upside down. Now.

That was a very Sobering sight for us to see we knew they were young kids We knew they would probably be killed and I guess I was a little shook up and I don't know whether I said it wrong Over the radio or or whether the girl was upset and mistook what I said But I'll never forget I I said for j9 the vehicle We were chasing just went over 200 foot cliff and before I got out of the car. I started asking for merge equipment requesting an ambulance Fire department heavy equipment heavy equipment. Oh, you know, I'm asking for all these things and she burst in she said For j9 all units on all frequencies for j9 just went over a 200-foot cliff I guess he thought I was broadcasting on the way down saying for the ambulance, you know Heavy equipment, you know Tell my wife I'll be late, you know going down and She really came out that way, you know, and I picked up the radio and I said no no No the unit we were chasing just went over the 200-foot cliff, you know and I cleared that up and I got out of the car and I rushed over to the side fully expecting to see this car at the bottom of this 200-foot ravine and Instead an amazing miracle that occurred as I hit the telephone pole and the car began rolling over It had somehow ripped out the cable guy wire that was into the ground and the cable guy wire had somehow got tangled around The left rear wheel and the car was dangling over the cliff holding on to this telephone pole with this guy wired amazing thing and Well, we didn't know how long it was gonna hang there, you know And so we're out of the car and the car was just down not too far from us and by that time some neighbors had heard the crash even though it was late at night and they'd come out and we got some guys garden hose and we were using it as a rope and we kind of made a human rope also and I was kind of Hanging over the edge and and as the kids come out of the car The car was on its side and the door opened like a tank turret, you know These kids are coming up out of the car and I've got my big police flashlight and I'm saying hey over here You know, I'm gonna give you a hand and I'll never forget look on this one kids face He looked at me and all he could see was cop, you know, and he said no man I'm gonna make it and he started toward the other side of the car and you know, he didn't realize where he was He just didn't understand and I I flashed the light down into the ravine I said you better look and see where you're at buddy, and I shined the light down into the ravine, you know And I'll never get his eyes He's holding on the side of this car and he started down the beam of light and the further down the light he went the bigger his eyes became and He

said yeah.

All right. Would you like to still help us, you know? And I mean he was ready to come off and you know amazing as it may seem We got all three of those kids out of that car and the only kid that was hurt was a kid in the backseat for Some reason he'd gotten under the seat during the pursuit He thought that we were going to start shooting you and he thought the seat could protect him from our gunfire and When the car went over the bottom part of that seat with the springs had cut a gash in his head But that was the only problem with these three guys amazing but you know for a moment they didn't want to admit they needed help and Really? I couldn't help him. I mean that the situation was such that They had to come to me, you know, I couldn't get on it.

I wouldn't get on the car, you know and They had to come to me. They had to admit All right cop. I need you and You know as I've tried to explain it was tough for him to do These were young kids that were trying to get away from some cops and to admit to a cop cop.

I need you It was tough and you know It's kind of that way with many of us in God I don't know about you, but but most human beings kind of have a problem that way with God It's kind of hard to come to God and say God. I just got to admit something to you. There's no way I'm gonna make it myself And you know, that's what you've got to do If we confess our sins He's faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteous And you know, it's not that way just to join the family of God.

It's that way in living with God You know that the prayer that I pray every morning I pray while I jog and I pray as I drive to work and I pray out loud in my car because I find if I pray in my mind I Start thinking in my mind wonders and pretty soon. I'm not praying you ever had that problem And all of a sudden I'm way up on a tangent I all of a sudden I come to and say wait a minute. I'm supposed to be praying man I haven't prayed for the last 10 minutes.

You know, I've been just thinking about something I start praying about some guy, you know, and then I start thinking about him and it's his house and I think about my house I'm thinking about the doing something on the roof or something a man. I'm not even praying and So I found that I've got to pray out loud And so as I go to work I pray out loud and the one of the first things I say Soon as I get in my car and I'm going down Linda Vista turning through the freeway I say something like this. It's not always the same.

It's a little different, but I always say this. Well God here. I am again old sinner Vernon Lord God admit to you.

I'm a sinner. I need you today If I'm gonna be an effective assistant chief of police for the city You've got to give me that kind of wisdom that kind of strength because God I want to admit to you I don't have it myself You know God loves that kind of prayer, you know where I got that from the Apostle Paul He was like that He was a kind of guy that would say when I'm weak then I'm strong When I admit to God just how weak I am Then I'm strong. Well, that's neat.

That's the way I like to start today. You know, that's the way you start the Christian life To begin to join in God's family. You have to come to the point where you say God I have to admit something.

I need you. I am a sinner the second step you take when you join God's family is you have to make an Expression of faith to him you have to step out in faith and take what many Bible theologians have called the great leap of faith the leap of faith Not only do you say God you're up there But you have to believe

some specific things. The Bible says this I want to turn you to John 10 9 and 10 many of you have memorized this It's a key verse if you haven't you should I've memorized.

I want to try to quote it to you right now If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord and Believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead Thou shalt be saved There are some specific things that says you must do you must confess with your mouth To someone that you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord what that phrase is Lord means He is the Son of God and that takes a leap of faith You have to believe that Jesus was who he said he was the Son of God not just another teacher As a matter of fact, if you really think it out, you know, I've heard people say well Vernon I can't quite go along with you. I I do believe that he was a great teacher And you know that that's inconsistent. You can't really believe that let me show you why Could a great teacher be a liar in one of the principal doctrines that he teaches You see Jesus said I'm the Son of God Jesus said that Now he couldn't be a great teacher if that was a lie It's either he is who he said he was or he's a fraud and a charlatan and we shouldn't follow him but I believe he was and is who he says he is and of course Most of you in this room tonight are with me there But Jesus is Lord and it says if thou shalt confess with my mouth Jesus is Lord and Believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead thou shalt be saved But with the heart men believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth Confession is made unto salvation.

That's very important That's very important. You must take that leap of faith in Believing that Jesus Christ is who he says he is and that God raised him from the dead That's another key element. You have to believe I was over one night Had a dear friend of mine who has now passed away He kind of nurtured me on the department brought me up in the ranks of management Tom James Helen James his wife attends here Tom Is a great man He was like Cornelius He was a good man He was religious He believed in God he had good works he even prayed once in a while and Really that was his problem.

He was such a good man. He didn't think he needed to do anything else. He was like Cornelius God didn't send an angel to him But he sent crummy old Bob Vernon to him and I told him what he yet had to do and one night I was over at his house and we were having dinner I dropped by on my way from Venice station where I was captain at the time and He had just had open-heart surgery and he didn't want to Make that statement of faith before I wonder went to surgery because he said I thought it would be Hypocritical that I only would call upon God when I needed him He says now that I don't need him and I have this bypass and it's working real well now I I want to talk about it and so I I sat down and we talked about it over dinner and Helen was there and in cooking.

I never forget. We had spaghetti that night and I Suddenly for some reason just looked across to Tom and we really hadn't been talking about the Lord and we're just talking about other things I was talking about Venice and about police work and he was a commander at the time and I said boss Isn't it about time? That you take the step of faith And become a Christian He said yeah You know, I'm so shocked. I don't know what else to say.

I sat there Helen was going around and things were burning on the stove and she was saying oh great. Oh, he's gonna do it, you know and We were kind of excited there and I didn't know quite what to say and I said well, uh, I What let's see, uh, I was kind of stumbling around and he said well, what do I do? What do I believe he said I do believe I believe that Jesus was who he said he was I believe that much and I believe that he that he died and he rose again. I believe that much He said I'm not sure I know all of I'm ready to buy all that stuff in the Old Testament about a guy being swallowed by a fish and all That but but I do believe that Jesus was who he said he was and I said hey Tom that is enough.

I Said the other may come Later on but that initial belief that you have that initial faith that Jesus was who he said He was that he died for you that he rose again and you're ready to admit to him that you're a sinner. That's enough That's the initial step of faith. You don't have to accept the whole thing the whole thing You don't even know the whole thing yet.

You know, how can you accept it all? He said you're right. I only know a couple things something about a fish on a guy something about Ocean open or not for something he says I'm not sure I I know all of that I said well if you just take that initial step and he said well if that's all I have to do I'm ready to do it. Let's do it and Right there around the table as the food burned on the stove You know as Helen was jumping up and down alongside the table Tom James bowed his head and he took the third step.

Remember the first one was to confess God. I'm a sinner I need you secondly express that faith that Jesus was who indeed he said he was and is and thirdly Receive him as your personal Savior That's found in John the first chapter and this is the verse that literally brought me into the family of God John 1 12 the gospel of John first chapter the twelfth verse where it says Talking about how God entered history in those first few verses of the chapter the word became flesh and dwell amongst us God the Communication of God to man became flesh and dwell amongst us then in verse 12 It said but as many as receive him to them Gave he the power to become the sons of God Even to those that believe and trust in his name You know, it does take more than just a simple belief you say, how do you know that? Well, you know the Bible in the book of James has this to say Now believe us in one God Big deal. No, it doesn't really say big deal.

That's Bob Vernon's translation But it says thou doest well, which is kind of King James for big deal. Okay now believe us in one God now do us well the devil's believe and tremble In other words, it's not enough to just believe in God You've got to take that belief to the point of commitment As the Bible puts it in John 1 12, you got to receive him into your life to ask him to come in last summer August The 18th, I believe I was just talking to the officer who was involved yesterday. No Friday A young officer by the name of Pearson worked Central Division Pearson and his partner were going down.

I believe it was Hope Street and They saw some men out behind this hotel and they Something drew their attention to them and these men did something to attract the officers the officers got out of their car and Pearson went on the right side of the hotel and his partner whose name I can't remember right now went on the left side of the hotel Going toward these men who were in back of the hotel doing something that looked like it was illegal And as the officers approach, it was quite dark suddenly They opened fire on Pearson The first round hit Pearson right square over the heart and what we call the ten ring right on his chest and It blew him to the ground and as he went down the second round caught him in the left elbow It just grazed his left elbow Spun him to the earth as he laid there He picked up his Rover radio that we have and he told his partner in short gasp that he'd been hit his partner heard the gun fire Rushed over to his partner's aid after he had taken a shot or two at the men fleeing over the fence into the night Being more concerned about his partner's welfare. He rushed to his side He saw a bullet hole right in it in Pearson's tie right over his heart And he said how bad are you hurt partner? And Pearson said I'm I'm hit badly. I I think I'm dying Get me to a hospital if you can He reached under his shirt to see just how bad it was.

Perhaps he could stuff something into the wound And his hand came upon something. It was kind of abrupt and Pull out his flashlight and ripped open his shirt and he saw his ballistic vest His bulletproof vest on him and the bullet protruding from the vest He said Pearson Pearson you've got your vest on man, you're okay and Pearson said you mean I'm okay. I've got my vest on he set up and found her there He said he said yeah, and he said let's go get those.

You know, he's ready to go after those guys Now now you're laughing of course, but let me tell you something those vests are kind of light They're about three point eight pounds they're only a quarter of an inch thick it's kind of a Plastic like nylon webbing type material and it does give and his chest took a big impact and he was bruised In fact, I just found this out a few weeks ago as I was talking with him I didn't know this until now but he had to stay in the hospital several weeks because of the trauma that his rather several days because of the trauma that his body took and It was a you know hurt that he experienced and he thought he was dying But you know as I was visiting with him that night and he was laying there in the California Hospital Just about two blocks away from where he was shot He was on this bed there and I was talking to him and he had a great big red spot and it was already turning into a bruise and I was kind of Joking with him about how he acted and how he was giving messages to his wife and all that thinking he was gonna die You know, we were making fun of him and he said well look if you guys are gonna make fun of me He's I'm gonna tell one on my partner And his partner kind of stood at attention there as I my gaze fixed over to him and I said, what's that? He said well, sir. He didn't have his vest on tonight. I Looked at him and I said you didn't have on your vest No, sir It was in the trunk of the police car, sir And I said and Could have been you he said as a matter of fact we argued over who was going to drive that night It could have been me You see the vest was extremely important that night to Pearson.

It saved his life. I Know he would have been killed what it went right through his heart But the vest wouldn't have helped the other officer even though he had one Because it was in his car you see the point I'm trying to make it's not enough to believe in the vest You've got to put it on To make it part of you in order for the vest to help you and it's that way with your relationship with God The Bible says thou believest in one God thou doest well the devil's believed But as many as received him to them Gave he the power to become the sons of God That's how practical Christianity starts. That's what it means in nuts and bolts in cop language to be a Christian To confess to God God.

I need you just like Cornelius did and by the way, he did After he found out what he had to do, even though he was religious a believer did well prayed Once he found out what I told you tonight, he took the step of faith. He put on the vest of Jesus Christ And you know what? Tonight is going to be the most important night in the lives of many you because I'm convinced that some of you tonight for the first time understand what it means and you're going to step out and you're going to receive Jesus Christ and put on the vest and take your Belief to the point of commitment and in so doing you'll begin This Christian life of coming alive Spiritually not being just a body with a soul that lives in it But with a spirit that can give you eternal contact with a God that created you and this universe Let's bow our heads in prayer While our heads are bowed You're in an attitude of prayer I'm going to suggest that All over this auditorium if you would like to take your belief to the point of commitment if you would like to begin Being a Christian if you would like to receive Christ You just take those three steps that I outlined and I'm going to repeat them to you So you can pray right now right where you sit Number one Romans 3 23 says for all have sinned Confess to God God. I'm a sinner.

I need you do that right now Secondly Bible says that if thou shalt confess of thy mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead thou shalt Be saved just make that statement of faith to God that great leap of faith Maybe you don't completely understand it yet, but you're ready to just take that leap of faith and say yes I know it's real. I don't understand it all but I'm I'm willing to take the leap of faith God I do believe I Do believe that Jesus is who he said he is And I express my faith in him right now thirdly but as many as received him Put on the vest of Jesus Christ Invite him into your life Take it past the point of just intellectual belief or assent Tell God that you want him to be personally

involved with you that In the person of Jesus Christ you want him to come in and make you the man or the woman That he wants you to be Put on the vest our father Thank you for those who have prayed those words In their own words to you sincere as they are father Bless them Give them the assurance that they are indeed in your family Father may this be just the beginning of a wonderful spiritual life Contact with you the very creator of the universe Father, thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross to to be my substitute to be our substitute Thank you for making it so clear what we must yet do Come into personal contact with you and be truly as your word says born again in Jesus name Amen

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