

# Personal Testimony and Repentance

by J. Edwin Orr

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*J. Edwin Orr shares his personal testimony of faith, trust, and God's provision, highlighting the power of prayer and witness in his life and ministry.*

**Duration:** 1:04:24

**Scripture:** John 20:29, Romans 12:1-2, Revelation 1:12

**Topics:** "Testimony"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by sharing a personal testimony of his conversion to Christianity at the age of nine. He then recounts how he and a friend started preaching in the open air, using a ukulele and singing off-key to attract a crowd. They eventually formed a group of 24 young men who shared the gospel. The speaker also mentions how they started keeping a notebook to record their prayers and the answers they received, which taught them about the power of prayer.

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## Transcript

I want to give a word of personal testimony, and then I want to continue my message of this morning. When I say I want to give a word of personal testimony, I'm sorry I can't give any dramatic story of my conversion. Before I was converted, I had not shot any policemen, or robbed any banks, or run away with anybody's wife.

In fact, I was converted in bed on my ninth birthday. Now, after that, I can't say that my Christian life was outstanding. I went to Sunday school, I was sent there, but I enjoyed it all right.

It wasn't until I was about 19 years of age that I began to work for the Lord. I went to a friend of mine called Jim Wilkinson, and I said, Jim, would you like to go out preaching with me? He said, can you preach? I said, no, can you? Well, he said, I've read a paper in the Young People's Society. I replied, I've read two papers.

Well, who's going to ask us to preach? I said, why not start in the open air? I'll invite you, then you can invite me. Well, he said, I'm game if you're game. But how do you get a crowd? I said, we'll get a crowd all right.

Now, I had a little ukulele about this size. My friend Wilkinson had a great pair of lungs, but he couldn't sing in tune. If I played in G, he always sang an octave lower, an H flat.

We never struck the same note together, but we always drew a crowd. A crowd of curious music lovers would gather to find out what it was all about. Now, some of you may say, well, if you'd never preached before, what did you say? I'm going to give a word of advice to some aspiring young preacher.

Never try to preach beyond your experience. So what I did was, I simply took the first verse that Mother had used to win me to Christ. He was wounded for our transgressions.

And I explained it in the open air. That was my first message. Then Jim took his turn.

We got such a thrill out of this, we decided to do it once a week. And then we began to share with others, until we had a band of about 24 young men. We didn't want to get confused and complicated, so we wouldn't let any girls join us.

But I remember one evening in our home, one of these young fellows said, does God really answer prayer, or do things just happen and we say that it's answer to prayer? I said, why don't we put it to the test? He said, how would you do that? I said, let's keep a notebook. We write down the things for which we pray. And we'll leave a space for the answer.

So I got a notebook, and on one side of the folio, we ruled it off for the date and the request. On the other side of the folio, directly opposite, a space for the answer and the date. It was amazing what God taught us that way.

I still remember the very first thing for which we prayed. They said, well, what are we going to put down? I said, I'll tell you one thing. I said, this little ukulele is too quiet for 12 of us singing.

I strike the first note, you get the right note alright, but you can't hear the ukulele after that. So let's pray for a banjo mandolin or a piano accordion or something like that. About five days later, I had a phone call at the office where I was at work.

And this young fellow said, is this Edwin Orr? I said, yes. He said, I'm Robert Ardell. I said, I'm sorry, I don't know your name.

He said, I'm a friend of Sidney Murray. I said, that's alright with me. He said, I hear you're having open air meetings.

I said, that's right. Could I come along? I said, can you do anything? Well, he said, I'm sorry, I'm not one of these public speakers. I try to speak, I get all mixed up.

I'm very self-conscious. But I play a banjo mandolin. I'll bring it along if that's any use to you.

There was our answer to prayer. Sometimes our answer to prayer was no. I remember, for instance, one time we prayed it wouldn't rain.

Now in Ireland, it rains 300 days a year. In California, from Easter to Christmas, you can plan a picnic. Very rarely you're spoiled by the weather.

But in Ireland, you can't tell. It's just one series of winter storms after the other. It's a cyclonic type of weather.

We prayed it wouldn't rain. It came down in sheets. But we were forced to take shelter in a little Presbyterian church where the pastor had a difficult job, was struggling.

And the arrival of 20 young men, all full of vim and vigor, was just a shot in the arm to them that we were glad it rained. So we're quite ready for the Lord to say no sometimes, or this way instead of that way. In 1932, that's a long time ago, Lionel Fletcher, the famous evangelist, had a united crusade in the city of Belfast.

I was sitting in the Donegal Square Methodist Church in that big final rally when Dr. Thomas Coughran, the missionary expert, said, God has been answering my prayers for 30 years. I felt in my hip pocket for our little prayer notebook to see how we were doing. And I discovered that every prayer had been answered except one.

And that was for the conversion of a fellow that I didn't know, but was a friend of one of the fellows in the group. He was a tough nut, hard as nails. I said to Edward Forsyth, who was with me, look at that, all our prayers answered except one.

Look, give a signal to the boys and get them together. We got together in the vestibule of the church. I said, do you see this? All our prayers answered except one.

Up walked another of the group. He said, do you hear what happened tonight? So-and-so was converted, this young fellow for whom we'd been praying. Well, that moved me so much that I called Jim Wilson, my original buddy.

I said, Jim, God's been speaking to me, and I think we ought to increase our band from 24 to 240. Will you join me in this? Hey, he says, 240? Let me think about it and pray about it. I don't want to hold you back, but I don't want to just go along, he said.

On Wednesday, he phoned me up again. Well, he said, I've had a big struggle, but I've got the victory. He said, I'll join you in prayer for 240.

I said, that's too bad, because the Lord has changed my vision. I'm praying for 2,400. But believe it or not, we got 2,400.

The city of Belfast has major roads radiating out from the center, going due west and due north and so forth, all except in the direction of the Belfast Lock, but three-quarters of a circle. The road's going out this way. We put an open-air meeting on Sunday night after church time across every main road.

We simply invited a Presbyterian Bible class or an Episcopalian rover scout crew or a Methodist Christian endeavor and so forth, just to come and help us. The head of a big organization in London heard of what I was doing in my spare time. Said for me, I went to London.

He offered me a salary to extend this kind of work with prayer for revival all over the world. I was delighted. Here was a man wanting to pay me to do what I wanted to do.

I went straight back to Belfast and gave in my notice and business. But the day after I gave up my job, I had a setback. My friend in London had to go away for missionary conferences for a year or so.

He had to go to India and China and Japan and right around the world. His committee said, we will not be responsible for some strange young Irishman while you're away. So he wrote me a nice letter and told me

to go back to work again.

Now I'd already given in notice. I could have gotten my job back, but the more I prayed about it, the more I felt that God was calling me. But this was at the bottom of the depression.

Most kids today never heard of the depression. But those of you who are my age know something about it. Thirteen million unemployed in this country, but one-tenth the population.

In Britain, about three million. There was no social security, no welfare. Just soup kitchens, that sort of thing.

Seemed to be the wrong time to do anything. But I made up my mind, I'm going out by faith. When I shared this with my friends, they all turned against me.

They said, you're making a mistake. I said, what do you mean? Well, the Lord has closed the door. I said, last week you all said the Lord had opened the door.

Now one man changes his mind, lets me down. Does that mean the Lord has changed his mind? Or does it mean we're just playing games and saying it was the Lord opening the door? However, my mother was a widow. My father died when I was ten.

My brother was out of work and my sister was ill. I was the only one supporting the home. I was in my late teens, as I told you.

Well, this was by now, just about twenty-one. So I went to Mother and I said, Mother, I've decided to start out by faith. She said, well, what's going to happen to us in the meantime? I said, I don't know, but I'll send you the usual amount of money each week.

I said, the Bible says, if a man provide not for his own, he's worse than an infidel, he's denied the faith. So I'm not going to dodge my responsibility. She said, but where will you get it? I said, I don't know, but I'll send it to you anyway.

Now all my friends were critical. In fact, they all said I was crazy, except one. I remember him with gratitude.

I had a letter from him just last week. Sidney Murray. He said he didn't know whether I was crazy or not.

All the others were sure. An Irishman called T.W. Wynne paid my fare to Liverpool in England. In return for a little favour he wanted me to do for him.

I arrived in Liverpool with two shillings and eightpence, about sixty-five cents. I had a bicycle, a change of clothes and a Bible. The only friend I had within a hundred and fifty miles of Liverpool was a Roman Catholic scoutmaster whom I'd met at a jamboree.

I'd been a rover scout and gone camping and so forth. So naturally I went to see him. He said, where are you going to sleep at night? I said, in bed.

He said, very funny. Where are you going to get your next meal? I said, I don't know where I'll get it, but I know where I'll put it. I wasn't feeling as cheerful as it sounded.

It was more like whistling in the dark. Look, Edwin, he said, in the Catholic Church, when a man has a vocation for the priesthood, we send him to a theological college. I thought the Protestants did the same.

I said, yes. He said, then why don't you do it the usual way? I said, you see, I'm called to be an evangelist. He said, what does that mean? Well, I said, an evangelist is one that travels with the gospel.

Look, he said, I've been out of work for three years. I've just got this job at Camelard Shipyard. I can't give you anything, but I'll lend you enough money to go home on the next ship.

Otherwise, you're making a great mistake. I said, Frank, I don't want to borrow your money. Well, he said, what are you going to do? Well, I said, the scripture says, my God shall supply all your needs.

If that's true, I can depend upon it. If it's not true, the sooner I find out, the better. So I started out with my 65 cents.

And I'm still traveling. As I told the folks this morning, I expect next week to be in Indonesia, and the week after that to be in India. Not just for the sake of traveling.

I'll be preaching at a World Vision conference and so forth. Now, did it work? Well, I was trying to find out. I felt sure it would work, but I had to prove it for myself.

First of all, I was in England. And I noticed that everyone spoke a different kind of English to me. Now, in Ireland, when I was in school, sometimes a boy spoke with a pronounced English accent.

And we didn't like it. We thought it was put on. So we had a sure test.

We'd take a pen and stick it in him. If he still spoke the same way when he was angry, then we knew it was natural. If he lapsed into an Irish dialect, then we knew he was putting it on.

Now, there I was in England, and now I was the odd man out. I cycled down the World Peninsula from Birkenhead to Chester. Chester, by the way, is still surrounded by a Roman wall.

One of those ancient cities. When I got to Chester, it began to rain very heavily. So I prayed that I might reach Shrewsbury about 40 miles south without getting wet.

Now, you know, you couldn't cycle in the rain for 40 miles without getting wet. In those days, I was very thin, but not that thin. But I got to Shrewsbury without getting wet, and yet it rained all the way.

Now, some of the kids may say, did you hitchhike? Hitchhiking was unknown in England in those days. It wasn't until the GIs went over and showed the limeys how to do it that hitchhiking became known. In 1933, if you'd stood in a road in England with your thumb out like that, the people would have thought you had a sore thumb.

They wouldn't know what that meant. So I didn't hitchhike. But a truck driver had stopped to tie a waterproof cover over some bags of sugar.

The rain was beginning to come down. He shouted across the road at me, Hello there! In such a friendly way, I knew he must have made a mistake. English people are notoriously reserved.

They just don't speak to strangers. It's not because they're snooty. It's because they're shy.

They're a shy people. And if you've travelled in England, you can be sitting in one of those railway coaches. Last time I was travelling from Oxford to London with a friend of mine, I said, look around and see who's talking.

And there was a Canadian talking to two Americans. They were the only ones talking. They don't speak to strangers.

So I wheeled my bicycle over. I said, did you mistake me for someone? Oh, he said, I'm sorry. I thought you're a friend of mine called Bert Cook.

I said, that's funny. I have a friend called Bert Cook too. He said, but you're not English.

I said, I'm from Ireland. He said, I knew you were a foreigner as soon as you opened your mouth. Then he said, you wouldn't know the Bert Cook that I know because of course he was English.

I said, I was in England once before. I had a vacation at a place called Northampton. The fellow I met was Herbert J. Cook.

He was studying to be a Methodist minister. The truck driver looked at me in amazement. He said, blimey mate, it's the same bloke.

Now the population of England was 35 million. This truck driver mistook me for one of the few Englishmen I knew. He said, where are you headed for? I said, London.

Not tonight as it will take me three days on a bicycle. How would you like to ride with me? Are you going to London? No, he said, I'm going down the other way towards Cardiff. But I'll take as far as Wellington.

I said, excuse me, I don't even know where Wellington is. He said, that's about 10 miles east of Shrewsbury. I said, I'll go with you.

We tied the bicycle on the sugar bags, put the waterproof over it. I got into the cabin of the truck with him. I remember as if it were yesterday.

Narrow winding roads. Now they have motorways and freeways. But not then.

Narrow winding roads. The rain just slashing against the windshield. The windshield wipers going back and forward, back and forward, back and forward.

I started to witness to him. I found him responsive. Well, Mr. Rory said, if you're right, and I want to become a Christian, do I have to close my eyes when I pray? I said, brother, you keep your eyes open and the Lord will understand.

And he got converted with his eyes open. When I reached Shrewsbury, the rain had stopped. It was now 11 o'clock.

I'd spent some of my 65 cents. I couldn't go to the best hotel, obviously. So I stopped a policeman.

The police in England are always very friendly. Very helpful. I said, could you tell me where I'd get cheap accommodation for tonight? He looked me up and down.

He said, what do you do for a living? Why did he reply that way? Well, this was during the Depression. There were so many million men wandering about the roads looking for work, tempted to steal, just to stay alive, that they were arresting people on the charge of vagrancy. By the way, that's still the law in California.

The police can arrest you for hanging around if you don't have a job. They don't do it now because we're not in that state. But he said, what do you do for a living? So I said, what could I say? I couldn't say I'm a traveling bookkeeper.

I'd given that up. I couldn't say I'm an ordained minister. I wasn't ordained.

So I said, I'm an evangelist. He said, you don't look like an evangelist to me. Well, what's an evangelist supposed to look like? Well, he said, you're very young.

I said, no, I'm not. I'm 21. Well, he said, that's very young for an evangelist.

How long have you been an evangelist? I said, not very long. He said, how long? Well, I said, just a little while. He said, I have reasons for asking.

How long have you been an evangelist? Well, I said, sir, if you insist on being technical, I started at 8 o'clock this morning. He said, do you have anything to show me that you're genuine? I said, well, I have some letters of introduction. He said, show me one, just one.

I thought, which one shall I show him? I had a letter written by an Episcopal rector to show to people in the Church of England. I had a letter written by a Presbyterian minister to show to people in the Church of Scotland. I had a letter written by a Methodist, and by a Baptist, and by a Plymouth brother, and by a Pentecostal.

And I had a letter written by an obscure friend of mine who wasn't at all well known. He worked in a little storefront mission, a little mission hall. But his was the nicest letter of all.

I thought, this policeman in the middle of England won't know anyone in Ireland anyway. It doesn't matter which letter I show him. So I showed him the most enthusiastic one, the one written by the nobody.

He read it through. I still see him with his flashlight, reading it. Sat down his flashlight, shook hands with me very warmly.

He was a converted policeman. He was a deacon in the Shrewsbury Baptist Church. And he was a close friend of the William Phillips that wrote the letter.

You may say, what do you mean close friend? Well, I asked him that. He said, what do you remember about William Phillips? I saw him last week. I said, he's 280 pounds, 20 stone, big man.

Well, he said, I met him in Wales at a convention. They were very short of accommodation. He's 6 foot 2, big tall policeman.

And he said, they asked us to share a single bed. He said, since then we've been considered very close friends. He took me home.

That night I slept in a feather bed. Next morning, two eggs for breakfast. Frank Nelson, my Catholic friend, said, where are you going to sleep at night? Where are you going to get your next meal? That's how it was provided.

And something clicked in my mind. If God can take care of me today, like this, he can take care of me tomorrow. This week.

Next week. This month. Next month.

This year. Next year. So I've lived a life of faith like that ever since.

I must be perfectly fair with you. When I enlisted in the Air Force and served as a chaplain, Uncle Sam insisted on paying me a salary. But I don't object to that.

Trouble was, who would pay my salary? For instance, would the American Baptists pay my salary if I went to Iceland? No, I just worked on my own. Now I'm a professor at Fuller. I teach there part of the year.

They pay me a professor's stipend part of the year. But I've found answers to prayer like this everywhere. I'll tell you one other before I give you my message of the evening.

I was cycling in Kent, near London, when the old bicycle broke down. I discovered I needed new handlebars, new front fork, new back wheel, new front wheel, new three-speed gear, new crank, new pedals, new tires, new tubes, and several other new parts. This bicycle, by the way, had belonged to my older brother and had been handed down to me.

It was falling apart. I had to wheel that bicycle the last ten miles to the home of an Englishman who was so kind as to ask me to spend the Christmas vacation with his family. I hadn't the money to go home to Ireland.

I had to wheel that bicycle. You get twisted up wheeling a bicycle one side and then the other side ten miles. When I got there, my friends got tired waiting for me.

I was supposed to be there for supper. They went out to a meeting Saturday night. Christmas Eve, I should say, not Saturday night.

Christmas Eve. They went out to some meeting, but the back door was left unlocked and I let myself in. There was some cold food and a welcome note.

I was praying for a new bicycle or the money to buy one. The phone rang. There was my answer to prayer.

A Baptist minister across the River Thames in Essex had taken ill suddenly. His deacons were in desperation trying to get another preacher two days before Christmas. Most people have made their arrangements for Christmas more than two days in advance, including preachers.

So no one could come. They couldn't break their arrangements. I don't know how they got my name and I certainly don't know how anyone could have known the name of my new friend, but they asked me if I'd come and preach the Christmas sermons in that church.

I said to the deacon on the telephone, well, you don't know anything about me. He said, Mr. Roar, don't be offended, but we're so hired up, we'd take anybody. I'd never preached a Christmas sermon before, so I

thought of something to say and went across there and preached in this place in Hornchurch.

Another deacon came up to me after the meeting. To make a long story short, he wanted to know if I'd be offended if he offered me a Christmas present. A bicycle that he had custom built at Coventry.

The best bicycle built in the world. I said, what makes you offer it to me? Of course, I had no intention of refusing it. I just wanted to know why.

I mean, it's unusual. I mean, I could ask Dr. Wood, have you ever gone to preach a supply or a visitor and somebody come up and offer you a bicycle? It's rather unusual, isn't it? So I said, what makes you offer it to me? He misunderstood right away. English people are very self-conscious.

There is a difference, you know, in national temperament. An Englishman's always afraid of making a fool of himself. So he's very careful what he says.

An Irishman doesn't care whether he makes a fool of himself or not. So he doesn't care what he says. An American doesn't realize when he's making a fool of himself.

So he tried to explain. He said his father had died and left him some money. He bought a car.

And now that he was driving the car, he couldn't be bothered with a bicycle anymore. He hung it up in the shed. He said, you can have it.

I'll put new tires on for you. I took it. And with that bicycle, I visited every county from Land's End in the southwest of England to John O'Groats in the northeast of Scotland.

Oh, I roughed it. Slept under haystacks. Walked up and down the embankment all night in London one night.

Had quite a series of adventures. Why do I tell you these things? I can tell you the same things about how I went to Soviet Russia with two and a half dollars in my pocket in Stalin's day. Went right around the world just to encourage your faith.

It happened during the Depression. And God showed me he could answer prayer. I suppose you could have called it my apprenticeship of faith when I learned that what God says in his word is true.

Now he may not call you to go off on a bicycle with 65 cents, but he does call upon you to trust him. And to me, it's amazing how people can trust God for eternal life and yet worry about next week. Isn't that so inconsistent? You can trust God for life eternal.

Then you wonder how you're going to beat next week. Well, it's a lesson I learned and I just pass on my testimony. Now what did I preach about this morning? Repentance.

And I said I would mystify you further that not only does a person need to repent and be converted, but a person who is converted needs to repent again and again. And that's something many Christians don't understand. Let me explain.

A very famous American Bible conference speaker in the 1920s once told a story that when our Lord returned to Heaven's glory, the archangel said to him, Lord, is the work complete? And he said, it is finished. But who's going to carry it on? And the Lord Jesus said, Peter and James and John and my

disciples. But after they're gone, those who believe in me through their word.

But supposing they fail? Well, said the Lord, I have no other plan. Phillips calls his translation of the Scriptures Letters to Young Churches. Isn't it amazing to think that the Lord Jesus Christ committed his gospel to little groups of believers who met in homes.

Little groups that met for prayer and Bible study. Then went out to witness. There are no church buildings.

That's not the way Hollywood would have done it. Hollywood would have had the resurrection arranged far differently. They would have had pilots and all the high priests all convinced they were wrong.

They would have had the United States Marines coming in and everybody, you know, something triumphant. But the Lord Jesus committed the gospel to the young churches. Little groups of people.

What a risk! Yet that's how the church began. Now, did you know that he came to check up on them? I'm not speaking of the second coming. But after about 50 years, the Lord Jesus appeared to the only surviving disciple, John, on the island of Patmos.

And his first concern was with the young churches. And the first three chapters of the Revelation are called the letters to the seven churches. And the word repent, metanoia, occurs seven times in those seven letters.

Not, by the way, once in each letter, but seven times in all seven letters. You say, why not once in each letter? Because in the letter to Smyrna, which was the persecuted church, there was no message of repentance. For instance, when you go to Russia today, you're deeply moved.

When you worship with believers, it costs something to be a believer there. Nobody would join a church for advantages because as soon as a candidate for a degree at the university announces that he's joined the local Baptist church or whatever, they drop him from the university. They're the persecuted church.

They don't have the sin among them that we have here in America. They're purified by fire. And the church of Philadelphia, the missionary church, the revived church, the church on fire, they're not told to repent either.

But the word repent occurs in every other letter. Now, in a meeting like tonight's meeting, there isn't time to expound all these letters. Most of them begin with the same phrase, to the angel of the church.

The word angel is the word messenger. To the messenger of the church in Ephesus, to the messenger of the church in Sardis, and so forth. And then the phrase, I know your works.

In other words, how you behave, not what you say, but I know what you actually do. I know your actions, your conduct. I know your works.

And you'll find this repeated again and again. For instance, to the angel of the church at Smyrna, the persecuted church, I know your tribulation. Do not fear what you're about to suffer.

The devil's about to throw some of you in prison, that you may be tested. And for ten days you'll have tribulation. This was written during a great persecution.

Now, most people find the book of the Revelation very difficult to understand. I stumbled upon a key to it when I was in the Soviet Union. When I arrived in Moscow, I went to the First Baptist Church.

I went looking for the pastor on Saturday night and found the church packed. I said, do you have meetings on Saturday night? Well, he said, this is our midweek service. I said, I thought you'd have your midweek service in the middle of the week.

He said, we used to have it on Wednesday, but it got so crowded, we had to have our prayer meeting on Tuesday and Thursday. He said, now we have it Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Do you have a prayer meeting like that? That you have to meet three days a week to enable everyone to take part in the prayer meeting? The meeting lasted two and a half hours.

The choir sang ten times. I wondered why they sang so much. You see, nobody had hymn books.

A Zambian student, a black man, sat beside me and whispered that he was glad to talk English to someone, told me what they were preaching about. I could sometimes recognize the verses. First message, sure enough, was on repentance.

The second message on search me, oh God, and know my heart. Oh, those messages were real. Now, when I went right across Siberia, I stopped in a city called Irkutsk.

I remember it vividly. It was the first day of spring and the temperature was 25 degrees below zero. Siberia is much colder than Canada.

I wanted to find the Christians, but the communist guides told me there is no church here. Nobody goes to church anymore. I said, I don't believe that.

I knew they didn't want me to go. Now, a Russian will not speak to a foreigner in Russia because if he's seen speaking to a foreigner, the secret police will come along and say, we want you to come downtown. What were you talking to that man about? He doesn't want to lose a day's work, even if he's innocent.

But a Russian came and sat by my breakfast table and I got in conversation with him before he could move off. I told him that I had been a captain in the American Luftwaffe, the American Luftwaffe, the United States Air Force, and he was pleased because the Red Army had a great opinion of the American Air Force. We talked together.

He told me he was in the siege of Berlin. Then I said to him, where is the Baptist Church here in Irkutsk? He called it the Baptist House. It was only about a kilometer away.

So I used a little diplomacy when my in-tourist guide came back, this communist fellow, and said, you've been so kind trying to locate this Baptist Church for me, but now you don't need to bother anymore. I found out where it is. Oh, how did you find out? I said, I met an ex-Red Army officer and he told me it was only about a kilometer away, so thank you so much.

Oh, I see. I said, I've got an appointment. He rushed off, came back about an hour later.

He had gone to see the committee. He said, strangely enough, we've just found out where it is too, so I'll take you there. He didn't want me going by myself.

When we got there, there was no meeting on Thursday night. Oh, it was bitterly cold. But the lady, who was a kind of custodian, said that the pastor lived in this block of flats up here.

So off we went to see the pastor. The pastor worked as a machinist during the day and pastor of the church the weekend. One room apartment.

But he was suspicious of me. When I arrived with a communist official, what could he think? He was watching for a trap, to see if he would say the wrong thing. I couldn't break through to him until the communist guide said to me, the pastor wants to know what is your profession.

I said, tell him I have Philips profession. He said, Philips? He said, you mean the electric light people? I said, just tell him Philips. He said, you mean the Dutch company Philips? I said, just tell him Philips.

So I heard him say in Russian, I could guess what he was saying. I don't understand this myself, but he says, he's with Philips profession. I saw a glint in the pastor's eye.

He caught on. He knew that Philips was the evangelist. From there he opened up, told me all sorts of things.

You see, I've gotten something across to him. Now this book, The Revelation of John, was written in cryptic language to get past the Roman censor during one of the worst persecutions of all time. When they were burning Christians, throwing them to the lions, destroying their Bibles, you'll find the whole of it is written in this kind of cryptic language.

For instance, I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands. Anyone who knew his Bible knew the reference there. And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe, with a golden girdle about his breast.

His head and his hair were white as white as wool, white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were as burnished bronze.

His voice was like the sound of many waters. Why, this is a description of God from the book of Daniel. So you find that the book of The Revelation is written in language like that.

Everything has its reference, but the letters to the churches are pretty straightforward. If you take a letter to Smyrna, don't be afraid about what you're about to suffer. But to Pergamon, I know where you dwell.

I have a few things against you. You have some there among you that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel. You know the story of Balaam and Balak? Balak was the man, the king of Moab, who tempted the Israelites with immoral women.

In fact, Balaam, the prophet, who was supposed to be a prophet of God, told Balak, I know how you can get around these people. You can tempt them this way. He taught the children of Israel to sin, and God smote them down.

There are some Christians to this day who mix up sex and religion. There's a great deal of that today. Thyatira.

I know your works. Love, faith, service, patience, endurance. But I've got this against you.

You tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess. It is teaching my servants to commit adultery. I've given her time to repent, but she refused to repent of her morality.

There you find a warning. One church after the other. But the two that I want to speak on tonight, the first and the last.

Ephesus. I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance, how you cannot bear evil men, but have tested those who call themselves apostles, but are not, and have proved them to be false. Here was a good church.

Church history tells us that the church at Ephesus was the first one to be invaded by heresy. But the true believers got together and squeezed the heretics out. They took a stand for their faith.

He says, I know you're enduring patiently, bearing up for my namesake, but I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Most people misquote this. They say of a backslider, he has lost his first love.

It doesn't say lost, it says left. If I met someone going out the door who said to me, I've lost my wife, I would take that perhaps she went out this door. But if he were wearing mourning, and he meant he had suffered bereavement, I would offer him my sympathy.

But if a man came up to me and said, I've left my wife, I would realize he was accepting responsibility. And here's what it says, I'm reading now from the modern translation. I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

You have left, your first love. If ever there was a time in your life when you loved the Lord more than you love him now, you have left your first love. You don't love the Lord as much.

Then what does he say? Remember how far you've fallen, and repent, and do the work you did at first. If not, I will come and remove your witness from you, unless you repent. Twice they're told to repent, and what does it mean? Change.

You say, well, if I don't love the Lord enough, how can I change? I remember in Toronto, a man came to me, said his problem was he didn't love his wife anymore. I said, you're a backslider. He said, I resent that.

He said, it's quite possible for a man still to love the Lord and to live a Christian life, and not to be in love with his wife. The scripture says, husbands, love your wives. It's a commandment.

And if you don't do it, you're a backslider. By the way, did you notice it doesn't say, wives, love your husbands. The poor things are so constructed that if they're loved, they can't help but love in return.

But it does say, wives, respect your husbands. And there's a difficulty. Sometimes a husband makes it difficult for his wife to respect him.

But it says, husbands, love your wives. Well, he said, you just can't turn it on and off like a faucet, can you? I said, no. I'm going to ask you this question.

When you were married, were you married in a church? I said, yes. He said, yes. And did you take the usual vows to love and cherish? Yes.

But I said, you didn't mean them. He said, I did then. I said, I'm not a hypocrite.

Well, I said, maybe deep down you still love her. Why don't you go and tell her? That was a sequel. He thought over what I'd said to him.

He worked in a factory. And he got time off at lunchtime. Took a taxi home so that he could do it in the lunch hour.

They hadn't been getting on well. But he walked into the house. His wife said rather sourly, what brought you home? He felt temper rising.

He felt like saying, you'll never know slamming the door and walking out again. But instead of that, he found it hard to speak. She said, are you sick? You're not feeling well? No, he said, it's not that.

Well, what did you come home for? Well, he said, I just wanted to tell you that I still love you. And she just melted into his arms. The secret regarding lovelessness is very simple.

One reason why your love has grown cold is because you haven't expressed it. You haven't told the Lord how much you love him. I was talking to a charismatic friend of mine the other day.

He said, do you ever wonder why the charismatic movement has become so strong with the Catholics and the Lutherans and the Episcopalians and not so strong with some of the other fundamentalists? I said, I've often been puzzled about that. He said, I'll tell you why. The Catholics and the Episcopalians and the Lutherans, with whatever faults they have, have a worship-centered service.

They worship the Lord. Sometimes it's formality in liturgy. But once they get it, boy, do they know how to do it.

And that's a fact, for instance, tonight I heard you folks sing three Catholic charismatic choruses written by the Catholics. If I'd said that 40 years ago, nobody would believe me. I think the whole thing is a matter of expression.

If you feel your love has grown cold, just tell the Lord how much you love him. And if you won't, it says, I'll come and take your witness away from you. It says your lampstand, but that's a symbol for witness, unless you change.

What about the last letter, Laodicea? In chapter 3, verse 15, I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot.

So, because you're lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. Lukewarmness. Neither cold nor hot.

Sir William Ramsey, the great scholar, discovered that at Laodicea there was a tepid spring, neither hot nor cold. And the Laodiceans used to tease their visitors by saying, would you like to drink from our spring? Real spring water. And when they took a mouthful, they spat it out.

It had a bad taste, and it was tepid. Lukewarm. You say, well, does this apply to me? Well, I don't know you.

Certainly not well enough to speak. You're neither cold nor hot. I was born and raised in Ireland where the national beverage is hot tea.

By the way, I never heard of Irish coffee until I came to America. I think someone in Boston must have invented that. There's certainly, I suppose you can get Irish coffee in Ireland now because Americans ask for it.

But the standard beverage is hot tea. The Irish keep a teapot on all day. As soon as anything arrives, you get a cup of tea.

When you're ready to leave, you get a cup of tea. Most Americans think that the English are the world's greatest tea drinkers. They come in seventh, the first are the Irish, the second the South Africans, the third would be the Australians, fourth New Zealanders, the fifth, well, I think the English are about seventh.

So I think I can say in my 21 years in Ireland, I have swilled thousands of gallons of tea. I'm a tea expert. It wasn't until I came to the States that I ever tasted iced tea.

Never heard of such a thing. When I was back in Ireland, I said to my Irish friends, do you know how Americans make tea in the summertime? They heat it up to make it hot. Then they put it in ice cubes to make it cold.

Then they put it in sugar to make it sweet. Then they put it in lemon to make it sour. Now, I like iced tea.

I like hot tea. But I don't like lukewarm tea. My mother used to say, take that dishwater away.

What about coffee? Is it not common courtesy in America to say, let me warm up your coffee? Now, in Australia, they drink iced coffee, a bit like a milkshake. And it's very refreshing in summer. Hot coffee, yes.

Iced coffee, yes. But not lukewarm coffee. In the heat of summer, isn't it nice to order cold consommé soup and in wintertime, hot soup? But who likes lukewarm soup? Now, that's the idea here.

I wish you were cold or hot. But because you're neither, I'll spit you out of my mouth. You say, well, in what way would I be lukewarm? Well, take your prayer life.

You never pray from one end of the year to the other. You say, that's not true. All right, then.

You're not stone cold. But you pray without ceasing. You can say with Samuel, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.

When you meet a missionary who's gone to the field for the assemblies of God or some other society, and you say to him, I'll pray for you. You've always kept your word. You know full well if the poor guy knew how little you prayed for him, he'd come home.

You never pray. If that's not true, then you're not cold. But you pray faithfully.

That's not true either, so you're not hot. What are you? Lukewarm. You never read your Bible from one end of the year to the other.

You say, that's not true. All right, then you're not ice cold. But you read the word for nourishment.

You say, I'm not always faithful. You're not hot either, are you? What are you? Lukewarm. You never give a dime to the Lord's work.

You say, that's not true. Then you're not ice cold. But you tithe faithfully.

You just love to get up and tell everyone here how faithful you've been in tithing. You say, well, I haven't always been faithful. I'm a way behind.

Then you're not stone cold and you're not piping hot. What are you? Lukewarm. You never witness to anyone.

You say, that's not true. The people here have heard my testimony. But you witness to those people who need it most.

You witness to the people that you have more influence with than anyone else. You say, that's not true either. In fact, you find it difficult to witness to those people at work, don't you? Far easier to stand up in a meeting.

You're not hot. You're not cold. What are you? Lukewarm.

A man came to me not so long ago and said, what are you pigging on me for? I'm just an average Christian. I said, what's average between hot and cold? Lukewarm. And that's the message here.

And what does the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, say to the church that's lukewarm? Those whom I love, I rebuke and chasten. You ought to thank God when you run into trouble. I still remember when I was studying at Oxford, my son David, who's now a doctor of law.

He was a jet pilot in the Air Force and I was in London University studying international law. When he was a tiny little fellow, I was typing in the front room and I heard him talk to his mother. He says, Mama, do you always love me? My wife said, oh yes, always.

He said, no you don't. She said, yes, I do. He said, no you don't.

She said, yes, I do. He said, you don't love me when you spank me. She said, yes, I do.

Well, he said, that's a funny way to love people. She said, have you noticed, David, that naughty little boy down the street, I never spanked him because he's not my little boy. I spanked you because you're my little boy and I want you to be a good little boy.

It's because I love you. When I meet people who are not sure of their salvation, I say to them, when you disobey the Lord, do you get chastened? Does the Lord put obstacles in your way? Does he make things harder for you? That's a good sign. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.

But then notice, be zealous, therefore, and repent. We don't use the word zealous much Could I put it into slang? Get on the ball and change. That's what it means.

He said, what way to change? You never pray? Well, start praying, that's all. You never witness? Start witnessing. You don't tithe? Start tithing.

He said, yes, but I've tried these things, but I can't keep them up. Well, then you better change there too. He said, in what way? Because you've been doing it in your own strength and you've failed.

I turn to the Lord and say, Lord, I just can't live this Christian life. But the Holy Spirit can live this life in me. So I'll turn it all over to him.

It's my view that every time a believer falls short of God's will for his life, he needs to repent. He doesn't need to be converted again. He is converted.

But he needs to repent, to rethink, to change his thinking. And as I said this morning, it results in a change of conduct and a change of feeling. The greatest verse in the Bible, as far as my experience of the Bible is concerned, is Romans 12 and 1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

That was the verse that changed my life and made me from an indifferent Christian into a committed one. That's when I sought to be fully surrendered and filled with the Spirit, when I presented my body a living sacrifice. But the next verse says, be not conformed to this world, but rather be transformed.

That means again and again, it's in the continued tense, by the renewing of your mind. And I discovered to my amazement that the Greek word there is what we call a cognate for repentance. A similar word.

Repentance means the changing of the mind. Commitment means the renewing of the mind. And it means any time you fall short, you go back and renew your vows.

When we sing at the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light, we think of the cross as something way back behind us, 20 years or however. But every time you say, Lord, forgive me for Jesus' sake, you plead the blood of the cross. You go back to the cross because the blood of Christ, His Son, continues to cleanse us from all sin.

That's what it means, the renewing of your mind. You do it again. Just as a loving husband will say to his wife, tomorrow's our anniversary, let's go out to a Chinese restaurant or whatever.

Why does he do that? He's renewing his vows. He's not making a song and dance over it. He doesn't invite a lot of guests.

It's not like a wedding, but it's the renewing of his vows. And so as far as you're concerned, you've got to remember, any time you fall short, you must repent. Do you have any repenting to do? Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Is there any controversy between you and God? Is there something you feel uneasy about? Then I would say, make an appointment with God, pray the prayer, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. Let's bow together in prayer. Do you ever feel a hunger for God? You've been a Christian for a long time, but do you ever say, I wish, what do you wish? I wish I were more like Jesus.

I wish I were more what God wants me to be. I wish I were out and out. I wish I hadn't these secret sins that nobody knows about.

I wish I were a better Christian at home, or at work. Do you ever wish, for he satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness? What's the requirement for blessing? Longing and hunger. And the Lord Jesus repeated in another way, blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

What's the requirement for being filled? Hunger and thirst. Would you like to see God do a deeper work in your life? Would you like to see God deepen the life of this church? Well, why don't you ask him? Now's a good chance to pray. You've been weak in prayer, now there's a chance to pray.

Let's bow together in prayer for a moment longer. As the Lord has spoken to you, perhaps you'd like to ask God's blessing on you, or your family, or the congregation, whatever your burden is. Anyone, if you feel moved, pray, pray briefly, but at least express it to the Lord.

And remember, those who are closest to God are often the most conscious of their shortcomings.

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