

What God Can Do Part 1 of 3

by Yorrie Richards

Yorrie Richards shares his journey from a troubled childhood through struggles with alcoholism to discovering faith and hope in God.

Duration: 48:05

Scripture: Isaiah 41:10

Topics: "Personal Testimony", "Gods Redemption"

Description

This sermon shares the life journey of Yori Richards, from a miraculous birth to struggles with speech impediments, a fulfilling career on the railway, battles with alcoholism, and encounters with Christian influences that eventually lead to a pivotal moment of surrender to God's calling through dreams and a hospital visit.

Transcript

I was actually born at 158 Bridgend Road, my state, and the month was October, it was October the 24th, 1935, a lot of years ago, and it wasn't a very happy birth actually, what I can, my mother had actually told me what had happened at birth. I was born, still born, so really I was dead, and tragedy. So the only person that my mother thought of to call upon was the wife of the pastor who pastored the local apostolic church, which my mother attended, and a certain Pastor Norman, and she sent for his wife, and his wife came down, and she saw me laying on the bed, what I have heard, I had been placed on the bottom of the bed, and I actually was dead, and Mrs. Norman took me up in her arms, and she prayed over me that day, and miracle of miracles, the result of that prayer is, I'm sitting here this morning, talking to you people who are watching this DVD, because God answered Mrs. Norman's prayer.

My life as a young, young man wasn't really a very happy one, it was perhaps due to the many domestic upheavals that were happening at our home in those days. I haven't got very good memories of my young days, and what was worse, as I began to talk, it was discovered that I had a serious impediment in my speech. I stuttered, and I can't remember a time when I didn't have it.

And it plagued me all through my school days, and my life, I say at that time, wasn't a very happy one. One instance that I remember to this day with such clarity, was one night I went outside of the house, when my mother and father started quarrelling, and I remember crouching down underneath the windowsill of the living room window, out in the garden, and I crouched down, and I could hear the shouting, and I was greatly affected by this. That has actually stayed with me for all these years, and I

suppose the first break into a life of happiness, if happiness is what I was needing, was when I left school.

I left school at the age of 15, and after finding work in one or two little jobs, one of them was a brickworks, but I hated it there, and so I sought work. I tried to get onto the railway. Now I suppose it is, you know, the dream of many young men to be an engine driver or an engine fireman.

It used to be in the days of steam anyway. I tried to get onto the railway, and lo and behold, I was successful, and after passing two medicals, one at Newport, and the other one was an overnight one at Swindon, and the joy was that my name was called as one of those who was successful in his application. So we were sent into this small room, and we were fitted out with the now famous shiny top, engine man's cap, and two sets of overalls, and so on, and I began my career at an engine shed at a place called Tondi, which was in South Wales, and that to me was a great joy because I felt totally motivated, and for the first time in my life, my mind was occupied with something other than rows, and I began my life on the railway as an engine cleaner.

Not a nice job, but I loved it. It meant that we were given mainly two engines on a shift to clean, so the team of us cleaners, we would have to climb all over this engine, wiping it down with a certain oil, and then with these pieces of waste, we had to wipe off the oil, leaving underneath a nice gleaming engine, and how I loved it. How I loved my job.

I lived for the railway, totally motivated by it. It was all that now occupied my mind, and as a cleaner, I was working more arranged hours, two till ten, and six till two, and so on, and when I would travel to my home at my stage on the train, sometimes I would catch the train home, and I'd put my cycle into the guard's van, and I would ask the fireman or the driver who was on the engine when the train arrived at the station, I used to ask them, is there any chance of me riding with you on board the footplate? And more often than not, yes, the answer was yes, and so I used to ride on the footplate, couldn't have enough of it. Once you get the taste of sulphur in your mouth, I was hooked on the railway, it's all I thought about.

Sometimes I would even stop on the engine, and go right through the station of my stage, and go right up to the destination of the train, and stay with them, getting off the engine on the return trip. So I would be arriving home, perhaps about three hours later than I was expected, but I was so happy, and I began to learn on these occasions, when I would ride on the footplate to the train, I was gaining instruction from the various firemen on these trains, and I was getting to know the skill of how to fire a locomotive, because there was more to it than throwing coal on a fire. I once termed my time on the railway as my romance with a steam locomotive, because no doubt about it, I was in love with steam locomotives, and anything about the railway was such a joy to me.

But then, in the office of the engine shed, where I was at Tondi, was posted up a list of engine sheds that were asking for firemen who wished to transfer from one shed to another, and I saw the name Slough in Buckinghamshire was on the list of places, and so I applied for a transfer to Slough, and eventually I got my transfer. This time, I wasn't a cleaner anymore, but I had gone up onto the next stage of my footplate career, I was now an engine fireman. When I got to Slough, I was entering into a new phase of my life.

Really speaking, I had always wanted to get away from home, I wanted to get away from my family life, because it wasn't a very happy one. And this opportunity to go to Slough was, I felt, just what I was wanting. And so I began the next stage of my career in Slough, that's near London, and we had bigger engines, we had faster trains, and this was another stage in firing some of these massive beasts.

But I was so happy, I was so contented. But now I was living at a railway hostel, and I was mixing with other people, other firemen, and so we began to drink. I used to go out with the other firemen, and we used to go to the pubs of Slough, and sometimes if I was on a weekend off work, I would go up to London.

Now I shan't say the things that I got into in London, but you can well imagine. Here's a young man from the Welsh Valleys going up to the city of London, where there was so much to attract my attention. And so I began to get into the things that weren't quite very good, and I began to drink.

I began to drink heavily. But working on a job that I loved with all my heart, I suppose adding on to it the drinking sessions, were part of a new form of life to me really. And I stayed at Slough for some years, and then I had actually gone up another rung of the railway ladder.

I had reached the position of a fireman that could handle any kind of train, an express train, which we did, heavy goods trains, vacuum goods, and there's nothing so exhilarating. Nothing so positive than to be on the footplate of an engine that's rocking from side to side. You would almost think it was going to bounce off the rails sometimes.

And especially at night, regarding the fire, the fire would be a great white hot glow, and it used to penetrate right up into the smoke that was passing overhead from our engine. Oh, it all spoke of life to me. It was such a wonderful period of my life.

But alas, that didn't last for too long. Because one day we were heading on a fast train, and the signals which were green right along the track, we had green signals all the way. And then I noticed that one of the signals, when we were nearing Slough station, we weren't going to stop at Slough, we were going straight through.

And I noticed that one of the signals was orange, which means slow down, caution. And then when we slowed down, just when we passed through Slough station, the signal was red. And obviously that means to stop.

So we stopped the engine, and my regular driver, Jack Matthews, he was wondering, looking at his watch, and wondering what's the reason for this stop. And then I saw coming from Slough shed, a fireman was coming across the rails, and he came to our engine, climbed on board, and he said to me, Yori, you were called for at the shed foreman's office. And I said, what for? He said, no idea.

But he said, it's the railway police are there, wanting to see you. So I'm sent across to relieve you on this train. So I, coming across the rails, as I made my way back to Slough shed, I went into the office, and there were these two police officers.

And they asked me my name, I told them, Yori Richards, and they said, well, we've got some bad news which we have received from your home in South Wales. Your father has passed away. So on the next available train to me, I was now a passenger on the train going down to Wales.

And when I reached home, there was the coffin, because in those days, in Wales, they used to keep the coffin in the front room. And there was my dad. I cried over my dad, because I love my dad so much.

He was a miner, and I cried over him. Strange enough, I never cried after my mother. I never cried after my mom.

But now I was home, back in my stag again. I think it was a very cruel blow, actually. But I was made to believe that I was now responsible for the upkeep of my mother and the family.

Now that meant that I would eventually have to resign from the railway. You can imagine what that meant to me. And I remember it very clearly.

I got vivid memories of me sitting down in the kitchen of our house in my stag and writing out my notice for the railway. I felt my life had come to an end. I would have nothing left.

It was a devastating blow to me. I came home from Slough, as I said, and never went back. It was devastating.

Now I had to find work, because I had left the only job that I loved with all my heart. And even today, even these days, many years later, if I should see a steam train thundering up a mainline on one of these steam specials that we see, I must confess that I always have tears running down my face when I see these trains thundering up the track. I see myself, I know what's going on, on the footplate.

And I can see exactly the fireman doing the things that he has to do. And that is tremendous, but it affects my life so much. Just to see a steam train today, it's still in my blood.

But then I found work as a miner. Like father, I suppose, like father, like son. I was now training to be a coal miner.

I was now going to dig coal instead of burning it. And from that moment when I finally left the railway, I felt the bottom dropped out of my life. Because I detested my job as a miner, hated it.

And from day one, I knew I wasn't going to be motivated by anything. I knew nothing would appeal to me from this job. I felt totally alone.

I felt totally devastated. My life meant nothing to me. And the sheer boredom that gripped my life, even as a young man, I was still a very young man, and I had nothing to live for, and certainly nothing to die for.

But a life of boredom and sheer frustration, so the drinking continued, going out on a Saturday morning. Sometimes, you might think this a bit strange or a bit extreme, but I used to eat salt so that I would stimulate a thirst. And by the time that the public houses opened on a Saturday morning, I was ready for drinking.

And me and my friend Billy Evans used to eat salt. And so once we go out on a Saturday morning, goodness knows when it was that we would be arriving home. Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, sometimes on a Sunday night, we would be heading back home after these nights out.

But my life meant nothing to me, and I remember sitting on a hill near my home in my state, looking down onto the valley below. And across the valley, I could see the colliery, St. John's, where I worked at that time. And I could see the great slag heap across the valley, and I would think to myself, Surely that is not all that I've got to look forward to? Is that all that my life is going to be made up of? And I could see no way out, and I got from bad to worse.

I had had the freedom of actions while I was at Slough. I did what I did when I wanted to do it, and I wouldn't stop now. And so we used to go out drinking.

I had tasted freedom and wouldn't give it up. And then one time, my friend Billy, I was in bed about eight o'clock one Saturday morning. I could hear my name being called out outside on the road, and it was Billy.

So I looked out of my bedroom window and saw him there, and he beckoned to me, Come down for a drink. And I thought, Eight o'clock in the morning? And so I went down, and what had happened, I had been working afternoon shift on the Friday. So I wasn't around to do what the rest of the gang did.

There was going to be a jazz band competition held at the local rugby field, and of course, all the bar was being loaded with drink. And the men that I used to go around with, they had robbed this bar on the Friday. And they'd hidden all the loot.

They'd hidden all the drink underneath the hanging grass of a little brook that used to run through this children's play park. And Billy and I, he called me out of bed, and Billy and I, round about half past eight, maybe nine o'clock, we were climbing over the steel fence of the play park because they hadn't opened the gates yet. And we went through and we found the spot where all this drink was hidden.

And through the night, this little brook was full of labels that had been washed off the bottles by the brook, and there was these labels going all the way down the brook. And it was a beautiful morning, beautiful sunny morning, and I remember it so well. So I sat down, and then all I had to do was to just reach under the overhanging grass, and I could feel the cold shiny surface of a bottle.

And I would pull it out, and nearby was a very convenient rock. So I smashed the neck of the bottle on the rock, and we were drinking. I drank some small beers first, things like stouts and that, and then I put my hand under again, and I pulled out a bottle of gin and, of course, smashed off the neck on this rock, and so I began to down this gin.

And I do remember I stood up to go to the brook to find something else, and when I stood up, the only thing that I remember was seeing the floor coming up to meet me. As I collapsed on the floor. I knew nothing after that, but when I woke up, I was in a building, and I saw the family doctor leaning over me.

A certain Dr. Kidd, K-I-double-D, and he had got a stomach pump into my stomach and was pumping out the stuff that I had put there. And when I came around, he said to me, look in the mirror. So I looked in the mirror, and there was great red blotches all over my body, and it was the effects of the drink on the liver.

And I looked such a mess, and I thought it was something very awful to me. And the doctor was so sharp with me, because he knew the family, he knew my mother and my father so well. And now he actually swore at me, because he was so upset at what I was doing with my life.

By now, I was becoming a noted drunk around the place. People in my state knew me for what I was. But I couldn't stop.

The one great thing, I suppose, the point when God began to work in my life, was when I had a transfer from one colliery from St. John's, and I went to another colliery to work, a colliery near Port Talbot called Bryn, Bryn Colliery. And I began working there after having a transfer. And it was there one day that I met a young man.

I didn't know him before, but this man, young man, he was a fitter at the colliery. He was to become one of the main men within my life. God had put him there, because Johnny Jones was a Christian brother.

I didn't know him. But one day, he was on the pit top, and he was handing out trunks. I met Yorrie some 52 years ago, on the surface of Bryn Colliery.

I was distributing Christian literature, and Yorrie happened to come across my path, and I put a truck in his hand. And Yorrie showed interest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I spoke to him several occasions after that, regarding his soul.

And I understood that Yorrie had visited an Ealing church in Bridgend on a few occasions, but never made a full commitment to the Gospel of Christ, or to the way of Christ. And I followed this up, because I felt in my heart that the Lord had his hand on his life. He said to me, recently, that he went through a lot of stick, because he had dared to speak to me.

It did become a bit of a joke, in the colliery I worked at, because Yorrie, after I contacted him, would visit me in the fitting shop. And because of his background, and his past history, he was very well known in the locality. And people would say to me, John, you'll never change that man, it's impossible.

And my answer always was, I can't convert anybody, but Jesus Christ does it. And it's only through his work on the cross that a person can be converted. Yorrie then made a commitment of a sorts to the Lord, and it was never really a deep experience.

Because I tried to keep in contact with him after this, and Yorrie was controlled and governed by alcohol. His life went around the local pubs, the pub scene, and he had great difficulty in giving up the drink. And on many occasions, I'd arrange to meet Yorrie on a Saturday, to try to lead him away from the pubs.

We'd go off somewhere for the day, to a meeting, to a church service somewhere, rather than him spending his time drinking in the local pub. And sadly, on many occasions, Yorrie failed to turn up to meet me, because he had great difficulty in walking past the pub. When he smelt the beer, Yorrie went into the door, because that was the hole, the stranglehold really, it had in his life.

I introduced Yorrie to our family, he came back and brought her to our house. I got five sisters, and my mother and father were alive at the time, and Yorrie spent quite a bit of time in our house. And this also had an impact upon his life.

But on many occasions, when I'd arrange to meet Yorrie on a Saturday, Yorrie would fail to turn up because he failed to pass the pub. On one occasion, he never turned up for us to go out together on this particular Saturday, and I went to his house to speak to his mother. And she was in a bit of a state, she was crying, and she said, I don't know what we're going to do about Yorrie, he's living a terrible life, and I don't think he'll ever come to know Christ.

I sometimes wish he'd never been born. And she was in a bit of a state that day because of what Yorrie had done in the previous week. But I believe there's nobody too far from the Gospel of Christ to be converted.

I began getting, I began getting dreams. I believe, I know it with all my heart, that God was now taking a grip upon my life. You've seen these dogs, haven't you, somebody walking their dog on a lead that's about 40 foot long.

So the dog can go anywhere he wants to within the bonds of the lead. But when the owner wants him to come back on board, all they have to do is to wind in the lead. And I believe God was doing that, winding

in the lead.

And I began getting dreams. Now I know the Bible talks about many people that had had dreams. Pharaoh had had dreams, Jacob had had dreams, and God was speaking to them through these dreams.

Could it be that God was talking to me? One dream that I vividly remember, I saw this giant cat. And the cat was playing with a mouse. And when the mouse was wanting to run and escape, the cat allowed it to go so far.

But then with a swish of its paw on its outstretched claws, the mouse was drawn in again to begin another session of playtime with the cat. But the mouse wasn't playing. And one of the most serious dreams that I had, I vividly remember this.

I shared with John my first dream when I met him at the colliery. And I remember talking to him in the canteen, and I shared with him the dream with this cat and the mouse. And he said, God is wanting you to surrender your life to him.

But then I went through this dream that shook the life out of me. I was so frightened. I saw myself in a sheer panic.

I was running, running from something. And I was falling over. While I was in the process of running, I was falling, and I was picking myself up.

Then I would continue to run. And behind me, I could hear this low and echoey voice. I have warned you.

I have warned you. I have warned you. I woke up that night.

I remember it so well. I woke up out of my sleep, and I sat up in bed. I was absolutely soaking in sweat.

I was so wet and frightened. I shouted and screamed. God was obviously talking to me.

And when I shared this with John, he said, Yuri, God is very seriously calling you. And I don't know how long he is going to stay calling. He said he wants you to surrender.

I really was getting frightened now. Really was getting frightened. And then I had to go into hospital.

Because I had an abscess. And the abscess would develop. Then it would burst.

But the root was lodging itself inside, and the root was not coming out. So the doctor sent me to hospital to have this minor operation to take the root of this abscess out. And it was then, while I was in hospital, going through, first of all, the preparation to go through this minor operation.

But a minister of the Apostolic Church, a certain Pastor Ivor Davis, came to visit me in hospital. And he spoke about Christ. He spoke about what the Lord Jesus could do in my ramshackled life.

So I said to him, perhaps just to get him out of the way. I said to him that when I come out of hospital, that I would come and see him at the church. But I had no intention of going to the church.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/yorrie-richards/what-god-can-do-part-1-of-3/>

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