

**Grace and Prayer in Pastoral Ministry:
Interviews With David Torrance**

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Introduction

This is a transcript of five interviews conducted as part of the *You're Included* series, sponsored by Grace Communion International. We have more than 100 interviews available. You may watch them or download video or audio at www.gci.org/YI.

In normal conversation, thoughts are not always put into well-formed sentences, and sometimes thoughts are not completed. In the following transcripts, we have removed words that did not seem to contribute any meaning to the sentence. In some cases we could not figure out what word was intended. We apologize for any transcription errors, and if you notice any, we welcome your assistance.

Grace Communion International is in broad agreement with the theology of the people we interview, but GCI does not necessarily endorse every detail of every interview. The opinions expressed are those of the interviewees. We thank them for their time and their willingness to participate.

We incur substantial production costs for these interviews and transcripts. Donations in support of this ministry may be made at www.gci.org/donate.

Our guest in the following five interviews is David Torrance, a retired Church of Scotland pastor and the younger brother of Thomas and James Torrance. David and his brother Thomas edited the 12 English volumes of *Calvin's Commentary on the New Testament*. He contributed to and edited *The Witness of the Jews to God*, and together with George Taylor, authored *Israel, God's Servant*. He also contributed to and edited *God, Family and Sexuality* and wrote *A Passion for Christ* with brothers Thomas and James.

The interviews were conducted by Michael Morrison and J. Michael Fezell. Michael Morrison received his PhD in 2006 from Fuller Theological Seminary and is now Dean of Faculty at Grace Communion Seminary. Mike Fezell received his D.Min. from Azusa Pacific University in 2000. At the time of the interviews, he was vice-president of Grace Communion International; he now teaches part-time at Grace Communion Seminary.

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The Grace of the Finished Work of Christ

Michael Morrison: David, it's a pleasure to have you here.

David Torrance: Thank you. It's a privilege to be here.

MM: I'd like to begin by finding out who you are. I associate the name Torrance with Thomas and James, and you're the third brother?

DT: The third brother. Yes. The youngest.

MM: You have all studied theology and written on theology.

DT: My brothers have. I...rather more modestly, I'll put it that way.

MM: You've helped in writing some of the books, haven't you?

DT: Tom and I edited 12 volumes of John Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries* from Latin to English. That was a big effort. That's still in print. That was quite a while ago. Various other articles and so on in journals.

MM: But you didn't go into an academic teaching role like your brothers did.

DT: No. I embarked on the same course at university...went through classics, honors philosophy, Bachelor of Divinity, specialized in Dogmatics and Christology, as they did. I also went on and studied on under Karl Barth and Oscar Cullman as they did. Then I began to question what I called an academic career, to the parish ministry. I thought I was called to parish ministry, and I believe that's so. I've enjoyed it immensely.

The joy of parish ministry

MM: What's been the most enjoyable part of your work?

DT: When people are converted, they discover the reality of salvation and new life in Christ—it's a tremendous joy. It's a tremendous privilege to be allowed to be present when someone comes to Christ, or again, when people's faith is deepened and they come to a new sense of freedom in Christ. I don't think there's any job that's more satisfying than ministry. I didn't believe that at one time. It was quite a struggle for me to enter the ministry, but having entered it now, it was a marvelous calling.

MM: Many pastors, in the U.S. at least, drop out. There's a high turnover rate because of the demands of the job. You've had a different experience as a parish minister. What's the key to your role in leading a parish? Why do you see so much joy in it, whereas they might see a

burden?

DT: The key to the ministry is to keep your eye on Jesus Christ—Jesus the Son of God, Jesus who became man, who lived, who died, who rose again, ascended. Here we are face to face with God the Father, God the mighty Creator and our Redeemer. If he is central in our ministry, then our ministry should grow more exciting and fresher as the years go by. Take your eyes off that, and we could try and carry though the responsibilities of ministry on our own strength, and people fail.

Put it a different way: I feel strongly that (I think this to myself) if you look at ministry today, probably 90 percent of all our preaching is telling people what to do. We lay tremendous burdens on the congregation. Our congregations get weary and tired, and many slip away. The ministers themselves get frustrated and leave. They're trying to go ahead in ministry, but under their own steam, using their own efforts, their own resources.

I believe strongly that in the ministry we are called to proclaim Christ, the person of Christ. We can't separate the person of Christ from his work and the atonement. That's what we are here to proclaim, so that predominately, our preaching should be the person of Christ and the atonement. If we keep our eye on Christ and seek to present Christ to the world...this is something exciting, something living and alive...we see people coming face-to-face with God in Jesus Christ. That is an exciting thing. I thoroughly enjoyed the ministry. I still do.

Christ has done everything for us

MM: How would you describe what Christ has done for us? Why are people so excited about it? I could have my word for it, what's yours?

DT: He's done *everything* for us. When Christ came into the world, we read in John's Gospel, he said, "I have come that you may have life, life more abundant, life to the absolute full." When we come to Christ, we are coming face-to-face with God, we're entering into the family of God, but we're discovering life itself, and that's a good thing.

MM: Does that mean I don't need to do anything?

DT: No, I wouldn't say that. God has done everything for us in Christ. Christ has come, Christ has redeemed us. When Christ on the cross said, "It is finished," that was a triumphant call, the triumphant shout of a victor. He's done everything for our salvation. All we can do is accept it.

Many years ago (I mentioned that I was involved in mission) when Billy Graham carried out

an “All Scotland Crusade” in Edinburgh in 1955, some 2000 people went forward in his crusade in Edinburgh district. I was heavily involved in the follow-up. We had classes for them for 12 weeks. We took away 800 or 900 in three residential conferences.

I became involved in conversation with a man who was an office-bearing elder in the church, a fine man. He said, “I’ve done everything that Billy Graham has asked. I came forward, repented, prayed, asked Christ into my life.” He said, “I never seemed to have got there.” As I listened to him, I said, “You know what you’ve got to learn? Nothing at all.”

He was startled. I said, “You’ve got to learn to do absolutely nothing, because when Christ said on the cross, ‘It is finished,’ he’s done everything for your salvation, and there’s nothing left for you to do except to say *thank you*, and to go on and on saying *thank you*. Your thanksgiving is your acceptance.” I still see that man in my mind’s eye as it broke home to him. You could see his face relax, and he laughed. The whole burden had departed. He was set free to live, and to share the gospel with other people.

MM: He had been trying too hard.

DT: One of the disasters of the Christian church today...I love the church, I grew up in it...is that we tend to say, God has done his part in Jesus Christ. Christ has come, he’s died, he’s redeemed—now it’s over to us. We call on people to do their part. We say: come, repent, believe, pray, worship, read the Bible. But we’re throwing a tremendous responsibility back on the people.

MM: Do this, do that.

DT: ...so that their salvation, to put it crudely, we’re saying that salvation is partly what God does and partly what you do. That’s wrong. It’s entirely of God, and all we’ve got to do is to thank him, and that must be a wholehearted thanksgiving. It’s a total letting go, a total surrender.

MM: If we realize what a gift it is, then we are thankful.

DT: Absolutely. It is a total thanksgiving where we thank God with our whole being. The Psalmist said that in Psalm 103: “Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me, bless, praise, his holy name.” It’s that thanksgiving where we’re letting go... we accept the wonder of what God has done in Christ. We’re receiving new life. In that freedom, there’s joy.

MM: If he’s done everything and he gives that to us, theologically, that’s grace. People misunderstand grace, though.

DT: Grace is a tremendous outpouring of the love of God in Jesus Christ. God, our Creator,

came in incredible love to give himself to us in Jesus Christ—to give himself in his love, in his forgiveness, in his continuing redemption. If we were to stand under a waterfall, we'd be drenched, we'd be soaked. You and I stand under the waterfall, as it were, the outpouring of God's love and grace, of his forgiveness, of his redemption. That's grace, the outpouring of the love of God, because we don't deserve anything.

We deserve nothing. But God, as love, comes and gives himself to us, forgives us, redeems us, gives us life, through the Holy Spirit brings us in, we are adopted into the family of God, able to call God Father. Know that we are in Christ, sons and daughters of God, heirs of the everlasting kingdom. That all is a free and abundant gift. That's grace.

MM: You said not just that he gives forgiveness, but he gives us *himself*.

DT: We can never separate the grace of God from the person of Christ. One of the great, dare I say, sins of the church through the ages is to separate the person of Christ and the work of Christ and separate Christ from grace. The medieval church was tempted to believe that grace is something that the church possesses, something that the church can dispense. That's nonsense. We can be possessed by Christ, but we can't possess Christ. Grace is wrapped up with the person of Christ and across the work of Christ, because we can't separate them.

The covenant of grace

MM: You talk about grace as God giving himself to us. But he also gives us forgiveness, and he gives us a promise of what he's done, of what he will be for us. That's kind of a covenant that he makes with us, this covenant of grace. In Reformed traditions, a covenant of grace is a key term. Maybe you could explain more about what it means.

DT: Covenant grace is exceedingly important. Ultimately God made a covenant of grace with all mankind, and that covenant embraced all creation. Within that covenant, God made an inner covenant with Israel when he called his people of Israel into partnership with himself for the redemption of the world.

In Jeremiah 13, we have this astonishing statement – God says, “As a man would bind a belt around his waist, I have taken my people Israel and bound them onto me around my waist.” He will never let them go for the working out of his salvation. In a wider sense, God has come and made a covenant of grace with all humankind in order that he might redeem humankind, in order that he might work out his salvation. That covenant of grace is where God, who is absolutely holy, comes in love in tremendous condescension and binds to himself a sinful people. Israel was

a sinful people, a representative people of all of us.

In a wider sense, God has bound all of us to himself—an eternal bond of grace so that we can't escape the grace of God. We can't escape the embrace of God. This is a great mystery. The fact that God in all his holiness bound a sinful people to himself meant that Israel suffered, because in their sin they rebelled, and yet God in his love would not let them go, because he's determined to strip away their sin and redeem them. In that extraordinary painful situation, Israel passed through a situation when she had shattered herself on the rock of God's love.

Ultimately, that's what we're faced with on the cross because that is gathered up in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has bound the whole world to himself so that when Jesus is a particular man, he's a representative man linked to all creation in an everlasting bond. He's taken hold of all humankind so that when Jesus died, we all died. It's one of the things I've often pondered. In 2 Corinthians 5, when Christ died, we died. What does that mean? It means that our natural death...well, there's no such thing as a natural death. We die because Christ died. We're joined to Christ in his incredible bond of grace. The fact that Christ rose again means that all of us will rise again in the resurrection.

Here's the mystery—that sin has interposed between us and God so that, as Jesus says in John 5, whereas we are all resurrected, "some will be resurrected unto righteousness, some unto condemnation." Grace is where God comes in love giving himself to us. Not only giving himself to us, but becoming us and remaining himself holy, and yet at the same time becoming *us* in order to redeem us, to cleanse away our sin, and to give us new life, that we might enter into the fellowship of God in Jesus Christ.

There are many aspects of creation, of grace. For us to accept us it, it must be whole-hearted...it's an all or nothing. It's a letting go in thankfulness, and then we accept all that God has done, all his love, we accept life, and joy, and salvation.

The importance of forgiveness

It equally means that our lives must be transformed, if we forgive one another. If we don't forgive one another, we're not able to receive the grace of God. That I find important, because in the ordinary practical ministry, you meet that again and again. There are divisions in the church. Church people, Christian people, find that they cannot forgive their neighbor. That lack of forgiveness means that there is a barrier between them and God. It will hinder their faith. It's the spirit of evil. Grace means that we receive the love, the forgiveness of God, but in receiving it,

we must allow the grace of God to flow through us, and we forgive one another.

An interesting case of that: Some years ago I had a meeting in the headquarters of our church in central Edinburgh. It was a morning meeting, and I agreed to meet my wife afterwards for lunch. Our meeting ended early, and I was standing just outside the church offices waiting for my wife. I was idly dreaming, my mind was far away, and I suddenly heard a voice accosting me and saying, "Are you a holy man?"

I had never been called a holy man before, and my first inclination was to laugh. But he was a man, an Indian, looking at me, very serious. Instead of laughing, I said, "Well, I try to be a holy man." He told me a story. He had come over to study engineering. He had come from a strong Hindu background; I think he had been Brahman. He had been converted in Scotland, and he said for a while he was full of the joy of the Lord, and in a week's time was due to be baptized. But something had happened, and all the joy had departed. He said, "What's wrong with me?" Quite a challenge.

I said, "Only God knows. I can make a few suggestions. You alone will know whether any of these suggestions ring a bell and are true for you. Maybe you stopped praying, maybe you stopped reading the Bible, stopped going to church, perhaps you've been disobedient to God and done some things wrong, perhaps you can't forgive someone who has hurt you."

He suddenly said, "That's it." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "That's it. Forgiveness." Someone had done something or said something or hurt him badly, and he couldn't forgive.

I didn't ask him what the situation was, but I said, "If that's the case, you can forgive. That has come in between you and the Lord, and you've got to allow God to work through you and give you the grace to forgive. Forgiveness is not a human quality. You can't, out of your own resources, forgive someone who's hurt you. Forgiveness is a gift of God. All you can do is to tell the Lord the situation and ask God to give you the gift to forgive. If you do that, you'll find peace with God."

So I said, "Shall we pray?" We stood there and prayed together, and off he went. About three days later I got a lovely letter from him. He said he'd gone off, found this person, and been reconciled. He said all the joy of the Lord was back, and that's very important.

MM: It reminds me of the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus said if you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven.

DT: Absolutely.

MM: You're saying that even though God does everything for us, our relationship with others somehow is clogging the pipeline or something or God's gifts don't reach us...

DT: Very much so. That is a common factor in the parish ministry. In one parish I was talking to one of the people, and she told me that she had never talked to her daughter for 12 years. I said, "You can't say the Lord's prayer, you know." "Oh, but you don't know my daughter." (She lives in a different part of the country.) I said, "No. I don't. But I don't really know you, do I?"

I said, "Whatever the situation, God has forgiven us for everything, and we don't deserve it. It's a free gift. He loves us. He's forgiven us. That means that he's asking you to show that forgiveness to your daughter, whatever the situation. You're commanded by God to go and phone your daughter and to tell her you love her and forgive her." I said that rather frank. Two days later she called me over and told me, "I talked to my daughter the first time in 12 years, and things are put right." Yes, it lies at the very heart of the Lord's Prayer and is very basic... It's a practical thing in the ministry.

The other important thing about grace, forgiveness, is that forgiveness is prior to repentance. God forgives, and we are called to receive that forgiveness, but he doesn't forgive on condition that we repent. Conditional repentance has crept into, I suppose, all the churches. Sadly, it's crept into my own church in Scotland.

Calvin and Knox, our Scottish reformer, followed the teaching in Scripture that God comes, and he's forgiven us in Christ, and we are summoned to repent. We are summoned to receive. But because of sinful human nature, we have turned it around that God forgives *if* we repent—on condition. So in the church in Scotland we have what we call a *Book of Common Order*, and that is an outline of suggested services for various usages and forms of worship. We have another *Book of Common Order* for use in what we call the courts of the church. The minister is ordained, inducted to a parish, and so forth. In those services, say for an ordination of a minister or induction to a charge, there is what we call a preamble, a statement of what's happening, and we have the words that "God offers forgiveness upon repentance." Every time I hear that, I squirm. Forgiveness upon repentance. Forgiveness if you repent. It's conditional. No.

In my own experience, I joined as a soldier in 1942, a long time ago. Before going abroad, I served for a period in England and used to join a small group, about 12 or 15 other soldiers, for

friendship, Bible study, and prayer. Despite my Reformed upbringing, I was somewhat influenced at the time by this presentation of the gospel, which is conditional repentance. If you repent, God will forgive you.

That troubled me, so I found myself praying and trying to confess all the sins that I could remember, to receive forgiveness of God. In this process, my prayers got longer and longer as I tried to remember and confess all the sins. I found myself probably confessing sins I hadn't really committed because if I don't repent, how do I get forgiveness? Then the question came, but what about the sins you don't remember? I tried to answer that by saying, "Lord, have mercy on me. I am a sinner." That covers a lot.

But then the question: How do you know you're repenting? I had no answer to that, and that really troubled me, because if I didn't repent, I would have no forgiveness. How can I be sure? Sometime after that I was reading Romans 6 in Greek (I studied Greek in school) and it hit me powerfully. If you take verses 2-6, the aorist tense, that's a past tense, that when Christ died, something very decisive in repentance happened: I died with him. And when he rose, I rose with him. That happened a long time ago, before I was born, 2000 years ago.

It hit me powerfully that Christ had died, he had risen, he had forgiven me before I sinned, before I was born. It was all done and completed. All I was asked to do was to receive it in thanksgiving. If I didn't receive it, I was lost. We're not compelled to receive it. Hell is real. But the fact that all I was called to do was the thanksgiving, was a tremendous relief to me. You are just full of joy, the assurance, and never again did I doubt it.

MM: You accepted that *you* had come to the point where you see in parishioners that was so exciting, whenever they come to that realization that God has done it for them, for all of us...already.

DT: Right. Last April I was preaching on the subject of grace and the fact that God has done everything for us and all we have to do is thanksgiving. I was preaching in the morning with a lay preacher, what we call a reader, taking the evening service. Shaking hands at the door after the service, this man, all he could do was laugh. He said, "I've been set free. I've been set free. I've been set free." He just kept repeating it. He said, "Set free after 30 years." He didn't explain, there wasn't time to explain, people were going out shaking hands with him.

We had a coffee after the service. I went into the church hall and again he said, "I've been set free." He said for 30 years he had had with him the lack of assurance. He said, "I came to the

point that I felt I had to give up. How could I preach? How could I try to help other people when I'm not certain myself?" But he said, "I've been set free." He was full of joy. He said, "This woman, you speak to her, she's been set free as well." I find that moving. It's where we in the church have failed to present Christ and the finished work of Christ. I feel it very strongly... I found it in my own life, and I try to preach it.

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Not I, But Christ

The faith of Christ

MM: You've been a parish minister for many years, and you've seen God's grace being given to people in the parish, and you see how people respond to that with faith. I'd like to ask you about what faith is.

DT: Faith is very important. I hesitate to use the word, a theological term – faith is bipolar. Are we justified by Christ's faith or by my faith? We're not justified, I'm not justified by my faith. My faith can go up and down, and sometimes be almost nonexistent, sadly. I'm justified by Christ's faith, the faith of Christ. My faith is important, but my faith is really a response to the faith of Christ. The primary thing is Christ's faith.

When we look at the New Testament, Galatians 2:20, I am crucified with Christ, but the life that I now live I live by the faith *of* Jesus Christ...*of* the Son of God. I don't know of any modern translation of Scripture that uses that translation. Every modern translation of Scripture that I know of says "faith *in* Christ." That means to me that the translators have altered the Greek to make faith *in* Christ. If it's "faith in Christ," in Greek you'd have a preposition and the dative, in Christ. But the Greek is not that. It's the genitive: *of* Christ. So...the life I live, I live by the faith *of* the Son of God.

That comes out many times in the New Testament. In Romans 3, Paul has been talking about the righteousness of God apart from the law, which is by the faith *of* Jesus Christ. Modern translations say faith *in* Jesus Christ. But am I justified by *my* faith in Christ? Never. I'm justified by Christ's faith. My faith is a response to that. So if you say "the faith of Christ," that's the Authorized Version, we're laying the whole weight of our salvation upon Jesus Christ.

If you think back to the Old Testament, the great lesson of the Old Testament, which Israel found hard to learn, was that salvation is entirely an act of God. God delivered Israel out of Egypt. They couldn't deliver themselves out of Egypt. That was entirely an act of God.

Such is human sin that very shortly after that, Moses went up on Mt. Sinai, he was away for 40 days...they prevailed on Aaron to make them a golden calf. We have these words, "Here are the gods which brought you out of Egypt." That golden calf, you might say, they were paying lip service to the fact that their deliverance was an act of God, but it was an act of their own human

ingenuity and strength. That's a great sin — that by their own strength they could deliver themselves. The great lesson they had to learn was no, they'd been saved entirely by an act of God.

When God gave his word that was revealed through Moses, he gave them the laws of worship. All those laws of worship which accompanied the word were to teach Israel they could only worship God in God's way, and therefore these laws of worship are given meticulously. The tent, in every detail, the furniture of the building, every detail of worship, in the sacrifices and the great feasts were given to them. They could not worship in their own way, they had to worship only in God's way because each of these forms of worship and sacrifices are symbolic, representing God breaking through to make atonement for the people.

They are given circumcision. They were a sinful people, and yet a reminder that despite their sin, God, the Holy God, had entered into a covenant of grace binding them to himself. That circumcision, that perpetual reminder that they were sinful, a perpetual reminder that despite their sin God had bound himself to them in a bond of love, was a symbol anticipating the day when God himself would come and break through to be cut off, circumcised for his people.

The great lesson all through the Old Testament was: salvation is entirely of God, not of us. That's the great lesson that's picked up in the New Testament, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, encapsulated, if you like, in that phrase, "The life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God."

Take the two parables in Luke 15 — the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin. If we ask ourselves who suffers by the loss...there's no indication the sheep was the least bothered by being lost, and certainly the coin wasn't bothered because it couldn't feel a thing. It was the owner who felt the loss. It was the owner who suffered. It was the owner who took the initiative, who came in search of the lost, and who searched and went on searching until he finds, and then rejoices.

We have in those two parables a gathering up of the whole story of the gospel. It is encapsulated in those two parables. Here is God who feels the loss of this world, of humankind who are lost to God — not lost in the geographical sense, but lost in the sense that men and women are no longer living in fellowship with God. God feels that loss. He suffers. God takes initiative. God comes and searches and searches, and that search takes him to the cross and to the resurrection, and God rejoices. Those two parables set up the whole story of the gospel.

It shows that the gospel is totally different from every other religion in the world. Every other religion is concerned with man seeking to obey certain rules and regulations in order to achieve salvation. It's what man can do, how man can work out his salvation. The gospel is entirely different. It's a joyful announcement that God has come in Jesus Christ. God has searched, in the cross and resurrection. Here God finds and restores and God rejoices. That's a glorious thing.

So that little phrase in Galatians 2:20 rounds out a number of passages in the New Testament. We are saved by Christ, by Christ's faithfulness. We've got to respond, we've got to receive, and that is a wholehearted receiving. It's a wholehearted surrender.

MM: That's our faith that comes in?

DT: That's our faith, but our faith is a response to his faith. Jesus' faith is prior.

MM: But if we are saved by his faith, don't we have to do anything, or has he done it all for us?

DT: He's done it all for us. Absolutely everything. There's nothing left for us to do but to accept in thanks. If you come and give me a present, a gift, what can I do? I can answer, "No, I don't want that" and turn away, or I could say, "Thank you" and simply accept. God comes to us and offers himself to us, he offers his forgiveness, his gift of life. All we can do is accept it or reject it. As we say thank you, that's our acceptance.

MM: Doesn't the New Testament say that we *should* have faith in Christ?

DT: Indeed. We are called to believe. But what does that mean? Faith isn't something that we produce out of ourselves out of our own resources. It's a response to his faith, and it's the gift of God.

MM: So I can't take credit for it.

DT: Paul says that "by grace are you saved through faith, and that not in yourselves, it is a gift in God so that no one can boast." As a church, and again I take this personally as a minister, we have not clearly got that across in our preaching and proclamation. Far too often we present what Christ has done. We say Christ died for you, has forgiven you, now it's over to you to accept. You pray, you repent, you read the Bible, and so on. We're laying a burden on people to do something. Salvation in that context is partly what God does and partly what we do. We cooperate — and that is totally wrong. We can do nothing at all except accept it in thanksgiving.

MM: If Jesus has done it all for us, would we say that he has prayed for us? Has he done our

response for us?

DT: Everything for us. Absolutely. Many evangelicals limit Christ's salvation to the death of Christ. They say that Christ died for us and that is something apart from us and because of his death, we can be forgiven and receive salvation. As my brother James used to say, that if you're sick, a doctor can come, he can diagnose your problem, this is your illness, write out a prescription, give it to you, go away. You take that medicine, you get well. Far too often, that's the kind of gospel that we preach. Christ has died, Christ has risen, and there you are, you get on with it.

MM: Like the forgiveness is some commodity that's handed over to us.

DT: It's not like that. Christ has done everything — he's given himself, and his life for us. That's what we're asked to receive. We can't separate the work of Christ, the death of Christ on the cross, from the whole ministry or the resurrection, but sadly, many Christians do. In a great deal of preaching we often do.

The life of Christ

MM: The Gospels have a lot more information in them than just a story of the death of Christ — they've got a lot about his life as well. What are those stories there for us? What are they showing us about Jesus' life for us?

DT: We can't separate the person of Christ from his teaching and from his work. The whole thing belongs together. Calvin used to use a phrase that we're not presented with a naked Christ. He comes to us clothed in his life, death and resurrection. It's all important. He lived out his life for us, and we're asked to receive him in all his fullness.

Put it this way — that when God became man, we're faced with an incredible miracle where God broke into this world. It's a staggering fact that he came down to our level in Jesus Christ, and he took our flesh and blood. He remained God and at the same time, he became man. Not only an individual man, which he was, but a representative man, where he identified himself with each one of us — with you, with me, with all of us.

In identifying himself with us, you might say he did two things. He took our sinful life with all its faults, failings, sins and sicknesses, and he brought on the condemnation, died, and took it all away. At the same time, in becoming man, he sanctified our human life and turned our human life around, living a life of perfect obedience or righteousness. In the resurrection, he gives us himself, he gives us that new life, his life and our life. It's a total thing. We are totally letting go

of our old life with a total receiving of this new life. There are no half measures. Paul says, “Be clothed with Christ in his righteousness.”

MM: It’s not just his life before the crucifixion and resurrection but his life afterwards as well.

DT: He rose as man, and ascended as man, and he reigns as man, and he’s our high priest as man, and that’s important. The whole of our life, it is not I, but Christ. In every situation, in every area of life, we’ve got to learn to live that out in such a way that in every situation, it’s not I but Christ.

New life in Christ

MM: Once we realize that and respond to that, how does life change for us? What difference is it going to make in our life? Can we live a rotten life until we die and just before we die say yes, I’d like to sign onto the program?

DT: Three times in the epistle to the Romans, Paul is answering questions that were put to him — can I sin that grace may abound? He says no, that’s impossible. To receive Christ means that we’ve shared in his death — death to our own life, death to all our sins, that we might share in the resurrection. We can only enter the kingdom of God through death and resurrection, and that’s a total thing. It’s a death to our old way of life, it’s a death to our sin. If we have received Christ, sadly, we’ll go on sinning, but death is no longer the power that reigns over us. We can’t go on sinning. John brings that out in his epistles, “We can’t go on sinning and yet believe in Christ,” in other words, if we go on sinning, we don’t really, in a deeper sense, believe in Christ. We’re not really followers of Christ.

MM: Is that what the Bible is talking about when it uses the word *salvation* — that it’s not just a ticket into heaven but it’s this entire package of taking on Christ, of dying, of rising — is all that encapsulated?

DT: Yes. It’s a receiving of a totally new life in Christ. We receive Christ once and for all, and we go on and on receiving Christ as a continuous process. It is a total thing. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. You can only serve one or the other.” If we seek to receive Christ as our Lord, he is the one we serve. There’s no half measures. As long as we are here on this earth, none of us are perfect, sadly, we go on sinning. But the Lord is our Lord and king. He is dominant. So he picks us up, cleanses us, renews us — day by day we start afresh.

MM: Some days I don’t feel very fresh or new. It feels like the old person is still there. How

do these go side by side?

DT: That's true, but we don't go by our feelings. We go by what is real. When Christ gave himself to us, he gives himself to us. That's something very real. We've got to keep looking away from ourselves to Christ. If I look inward upon myself, it's only darkness. There's no certainty. We're full of doubt. It's when I look away to Christ and say yes, he is life, he is light, he is salvation, there is joy, there is assurance. Life is a constantly looking unto Christ. As long as we look unto Christ we are able to share in the victory of the cross and the resurrection. As we look unto Christ we are able to manifest something of the real life and power of the Holy Spirit.

MM: You talked about the resurrection of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in us. Is that the way in which we are sharing in the resurrection of Jesus now?

DT: Yes, it's through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, you might say, is Jesus' other self, although the Holy Spirit is distinct from Jesus, and yet the Holy Spirit is Jesus' other person. The Holy Spirit comes to live within us, to reign over us. That's Christ living in us. As the Holy Spirit comes, he seals within us the finished work of Christ, the new life of Christ, so that Christ is there, and Paul says, "It's not I who live, it's Christ who lives within me." He lives within...by God, the Holy Spirit.

Forgiveness

MM: You say that the forgiveness that we give others, it is really the forgiveness of Jesus working through us.

DT: It has to be. If we're not forgiving other people, then there's a blockage. The Holy Spirit isn't able, isn't working, isn't flowing through us. He demands it, to receive that love and forgiveness, that we show Christ's forgiveness one to another and forgive one another.

I was chaplain to a fairly large hospital in my last parish, and they had one wing for people who had a nervous breakdown. Doctors and nurses used to sit with patients. I would go in and chat to them all. One day I went into the sitting room, and there was a woman, maybe about mid-30s, sitting on a couch looking at family photographs. I sat down and she showed me her photographs — son and daughter about 12 and 14.

I kept wondering why she was in the hospital, and I looked at these photographs, and I said, "You love them." She said, "Oh, very much so," absolutely she loved her son and daughter. She showed me a photograph of her husband, and I looked at him and said, "You love your husband." She said, "Oh, very much. He's a marvelous man and it's a great privilege to be

married to him.”

When we were finished, I looked at her and said, “Why are you here in hospital?” She said, “I don’t want to live.” I said, “You don’t want to live? You’ve just shown me the family photographs, your son and daughter and husband, you tell me you love them.” She said, “Yes, I do. I have a marvelous husband.” “Why don’t you want to live?” She said, “I have no idea, but I’m terrified to be alone. If I’m alone, I’m going to do something violent, and that’s why I’m here in hospital.”

I asked her the question which I often ask as a minister, “Have you had a happy childhood?” She said, “No, not at all.” She told me one of these sad, dreadful stories, that her parents were both alcoholic and separated when she was 5. Her mother had married an alcoholic who physically and sexually abused her. Out came this terrible, ghastly story, so I felt pain as this woman told me this story. I said, “I’m terribly sorry.”

I said, “Could you ever forgive your parents?” She said, “Never.” I said, “Have you ever thought that there is a relationship between the fact that you can’t forgive your parents and you don’t want to live?” She said, “No, I’ve never thought that. No one, no doctor has ever suggested it.” I said, “I’m suggesting there’s a real relationship. You’ve been sinned against. I’m pained by your story, you’ve suffered, you’ve been wronged, and what can I say? I’m horrified and sad. But God has forgiven us everything, and we deserve nothing. But to receive God’s forgiveness, it does mean that we have to share God’s forgiveness with other people and forgive them.”

Then I said, “You can’t forgive them. You’ve been sinned against, you’ve been hurt dreadfully. All you can do is to ask God to give you a gift which you haven’t got, and none of us have, but a gift to forgive these parents of yours.” So we talked away — she was a nominal member of the church in another parish. At the end I said, “Would you like to pray?” She said yes. So I prayed with her, committed her, and this sad story, to the Lord, and asked God to give her the gift that she might forgive her parents. The result was dramatic, and the hospital discharged her within the week. To forgive is healing. It allows the Holy Spirit to flow through us, giving us life, the life of Christ. That’s the important thing.

MM: Forgiveness doesn’t mean that the initial act was somehow okay.

DT: No — it was an evil thing, a ghastly thing for the parents – their behavior, the treatment of this daughter, for her to be sexually abused. It was totally wrong. But from her point of view, it was a real grace to be able to give in that situation. That’s what God demands.

MM: The gift wasn't so much for her parents as it was for her.

DT: It had a profound effect on her, in healing. But she had to forgive her parents.

Hopefully, that will bring a sense of healing to them where they might be able to turn to God.

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Not My Will, But Yours

Missionary life in China

J. Michael Fezell: I wanted to ask you about your childhood, your story, how you came to be interested in ministry, how that came about, and what it was like to be in the Torrance household.

David Torrance: I was born into a very privileged home in the sense it was a very committed Christian home; both parents that were missionaries. My grandfather was a small-dairy farmer. But father, as it were, broke away. He went into the ministry. He went to China, and he there was a minister evangelist for 40 years. Mother went out also as a young missionary, and they met in China and married in China. So my family, six of us, were all born in China. I'm the youngest of six.

Those were turbulent days in China. West China was ruled by warlords. One might also call them brigand chiefs, because each had their own army, they fought, they plundered, they killed. Life was turbulent. But in that context of missionary serving, father served. His base was Chengdu, 1500 miles upriver from Shanghai, and from there he worked up into the mountains toward Tibet.

It was a life of faith, tremendous commitment to Christ, and we always had family worship. I never remembered a time in my life when we didn't have family worship — when the family came together, they were reading from the Bible, they prayed, and that carried us on through our childhood, through our student days, until finally we married and went our separate ways. We still continue, when we come together, but there's only two of us left in my family now. We still would meet and pray together.

Prayer was an important thing in our household. We always had it. I don't suppose our family would have survived, literally, without prayer, because, as I mentioned, these were very turbulent years when the family was in China. When the family left, there had been severe rioting. A missionary friend of my mother was beheaded in the street near the home. They rioted, wanting to break into our home. But we were wonderfully protected...there was a tremendous faith in God.

The Bible was central in our family life. When I had reached my sixth birthday, Mother

showed me the calendar and said there's seven days a week, there's 52 weeks in the year. If you read three chapters of the Bible every day, five on Sunday, you'll read it through in a year short of a week, you'll read it by Christmas. She said that when you take the Bible, always pray and ask God to speak to you through it. When you hear God speaking to you through it, you'll know that this is the word of God.

She said, form that habit, because when you grow up many people will say all sorts of terrible things about the Bible and dismiss it, but when you have heard God speaking to you through the Bible, you'll know that that is God's word. Nothing will shake it. So the Bible played an important part in our whole upbringing. I was never given any doctrine of Scripture – I was simply told it was the word of God, and if we prayed and asked God to speak, he would speak.

In addition to our family prayers, books played a big part of our family life. My youngest brother, Tom, always called my father the evangelist of the family, and he called my mother the theologian of the family. They guided us in our reading so that they introduced us to a lot of Christian works in our school days and discussed the Scripture, discussed doctrine, theology, in a simple way. It was very much part of our upbringing and family life.

JMF: What was it like for you as a child and with your siblings living in China? Under the circumstances of the dangerous conditions politically, what sort of freedom did you have to go far from the house or to be in the city alone, or what was it like?

DT: I was too young when I came home from China – I was three. The older members of the family remember it vividly because they went to school there. Apart from the turbulence, it was a marvelous country in which to grow up. There was a freedom which people didn't enjoy here. Father had a mule and a horse, and that was part of the family, so the family went to school on horseback. Father used to complain. He said that once Tom got on that mule, he would no longer walk – that mule insisted on galloping. Now, not many children go to school on the back of a mule and a horse.

JMF: Especially a galloping mule.

DT: Tom was mischievous. He was called by the Chinese a mischief. It had its dangers, but it had its freedom and its excitement.

JMF: There must have been a number of people who were glad you were there ... You mentioned that there were riots later on. Where did the animosity come from?

DT: On one hand, as people came to Christ, they were friendly and loyal. Dad, for the last 25 years of his ministry, he was agent for the American and British Bible Society. Not that he looked after printing or anything of that sort (the Chinese did that), but he was superintendent (when he retired there were many tributes to father written in Chinese...I have some at home on the wall) ...and one of the things that means a lot to me is that in his last year, he and his co-laborers distributed over a million portions of Scripture in West China. When he retired, the church said that no one had done more to forward the gospel in West China.

On the other hand, you had these brigand chiefs, and it was their way of life. But after 1917, the Communist revolution in China, the Communists began pouring in rifles, weapons, and communistic, atheistic literature. The weapons came into the hands of these brigand armies, and also the literature. That aroused a tremendous or increased an antipathy to foreigners and the Christian faith. That's what led up to the final rise, when the family came home.

They took a difficult decision. Father was fluent in Chinese. He had quite a knowledge. After he came home, Father and I were invited by a Chinese noble, an emperor, if we would have a meal at his home. His parents had come over and fled from Communist China. The mother had no interest, and the father very little, so this noble wanted them to meet my father. He said to me he could not get over my father. He said when his back was turned you would not know that he was not Chinese. He had quite a remarkable knowledge.

He went back alone, for seven years; that was quite a sacrifice for the family. We remembered him and he kept in touch...we wrote every week. Mother insisted that each one of us write to him, and he wrote to us, so that despite the gap, it was still, you might say a remarkably close family, and once again there were great answers to prayer.

For example, just after father went back, the family settled for a short period near Glasgow in the west of Scotland and then moved to Edinburgh. Mother went to the local church, attended a local prayer meeting of about 27 led by one of the elders. She said she didn't know anyone there, but the elder said, are there any subjects for prayer tonight, any people you would like us to pray for? Mother said yes, her husband was a missionary in West China and she had a deep feeling that he needed prayer at that moment. She said it was lovely that one after another in that room prayed for my father though they didn't know him.

Mother wrote to father and told him, and he wrote back and said, could you tell me the day of that prayer meeting and the time of day? It so happened on that particular day and the very

time of day, his life was spared, in the sense that a communist army... (I say communist; I don't know how much communism they really do, but they were influenced by their atheistic literature and nationalism)... came up to this mountain village to search for my father and a fellow missionary, and they searched every house in that village bar one. They walked past the door at the same time as that prayer meeting in Glasgow. The family saw many answers to prayer like that. Prayer was very much part of the family life of all of us.

JMF: How long was he separated from the family during that period?

DT: Seven years. It was difficult... Father opened the Christian work in West China up among the tributaries of the Yangtze River, the Min was one of the main ones, and among people called the Qiang [Sichuan province, west of Chengdu]. I suppose he would be the first Western missionary ever to enter those parts. He had the language, he had the dialect, there was no one else to take over. He felt that God wanted him to continue this work and to establish it, so he went back. The church there was smaller perhaps than in other parts of China, but it nonetheless became deep-rooted.

Shortly after he came back, he received a parcel. He opened it (and I was there in the room with him), and he was a bit astonished at first. It was a Chinese Bible, but he had several Chinese Bibles. When he opened it and he looked at what we would say the back cover...but that is the beginning — they start in what we would say is the back and work forward — there was a story of that Bible. This Communist had come up to this mountain village, it was a Christian village. They would take the grain, the food, and they'd burn it – tragic things – to try to wipe them out. They would burn every Bible. The Christians had forewarning, and they took the Bibles and buried them in a cave, and when the Communists passed over, they dug it up again and sent one of the Bibles to my father. The story was inside the cover with the words that just as this Bible has been resurrected, the church in China will be resurrected, which I found moving.

I had that Bible in my possession for a number of years, but when my brother Tom went back on one of his visits to West China and up to those villages where my father worked, he took it with him because of the shortage of Bibles, and he gave it to the son of the man who sent it to my father. I was sorry to part with the Bible, but they needed the Bibles and that was the right thing to happen.

Moving into ministry

JMF: How did you then begin to or become oriented toward ministry after your father came

back?

DT: I believed in the Lord all the days of my life. A living presence of Christ was real to all of us in the family. Prayer was real. I read the Bible every year (but nowadays I read it three times a year). The faith was real to all of us. The Christian life was real. The turning point for me was the army. I did a year at university, did classics for a year, and then joined the army in the end of 1942. I felt I would say yes, I would enter the ministry, but I didn't want to be a minister.

I moved through different units in the army – in wartime you're shifted around according to where you were needed. I was part of special assault troops doing beach landings. We did a lot of rock climbing, explosives, and on and off boats. We were the British Army and they were Americans. We were due to go to the Channel Islands, because that was the only part of Britain that was occupied by Germany. We were on standby, so we knew that it tomorrow, next week, we may be sent over...

I remember saying to myself, many people were not going to come back, and I hope I don't come back, because if I come back, God will put me in the ministry. Quite mad, absolutely mad when I was young, and I felt no, I'd rather not come back than be put into the ministry. I had a deep feeling underneath that by hook, by crook, God would make sure I came back, because he was determined to put me in the ministry. That hung over me as a tremendous cloud.

JMF: Why did you not want to go into ministry?

DT: I suppose it was an anomalous situation, because the Lord meant a lot to me. I continued to read the Bible; I carried a Bible in my pocket in my army uniform and had it with me all through the army life. A passage which really troubled me was Acts 2, that here the disciples, Peter and the others, were preaching, and some in the multitude thought they were drunk and laughed and scorned at them. Somehow or other that horrified me. I didn't want to be up there on a platform and be mocked. Perhaps I was strange. I lived in this anomalous situation where I read the Bible, I prayed every day, the Lord meant a lot to me, but I was afraid to let go.

There were a number of incidents that happened that spoke powerfully to me. We were in a training scheme in the hills north of England. I was in a tent with another three lads. In that type of army exercise, you don't get into pajamas, you lay down in your uniform, your coat, you're allowed to take off your pack. When I thought they were asleep, I pulled out my Bible and started reading it, and one of the lads who wasn't asleep said, "Dave, are you reading a Bible?" I said yes. "Why not read it to us all?" I knew God was speaking to me. They weren't Christian

folk, they didn't go to church; one of them was a hard swearer. They listened attentively, and I felt very humble. I felt God saying, you are called to speak the gospel.

In this assault brigade where I had said I'd rather not come back than go into ministry, there was a church three miles away. I walked down there, and came back. I had a letter to my parents, and I hunted around for a postbox. I asked another soldier where there was a postbox. He said, "I'll show you." He took me, and we got chatting, and he asked, "You want a cup of tea?" So we had a cup of tea. He said, "What have you been doing?" I said, "I've been to church." I didn't say anything more. We were in the same assault brigade but in a different unit. He had done about two years at university and we got chatting away. We finally agreed that we both had a Saturday afternoon off, next Saturday, so we would meet and go sailing.

When we came in, he said to me, "When I saw you last week you had been to church. Are you going to church tomorrow?" I said yes. He said, "Can I come with you?" That happened for three weeks. We went out on Saturday afternoon sailing, went to church, and when we were coming back the three miles, he suddenly turned to me and said, "Dave, you're a Christian." I said yes. He said, "You've never talked to me about Christ."

That shook me. I felt God was saying I put you here, this is what you've got to do. That spoke heavily to me. He was one of those remarkable men who you shared the faith and he simply accepted...he believed. He was a university man. I had to give him a Bible. I don't think he had ever in his life been to church before. Yet you just shared the faith and he believed, and he entered the Christian faith in the mildest way. I felt very much the hand of God in me.

There was a third incident... I went to India and met on the boat a man I was very attracted to. He had been at university for four years. He was an atheist, or I should say an agnostic. We had many vigorous discussions on his humanism, which I felt was wrong. Apart from his humanism, we got on well together and we shared a tent together when we arrived in India. In the tropics it's noisy — all sorts of insects and creatures, and I was lying in my bunk in the tent and he came in. He saw me, and I knew he took a swipe at me and he said, "Oh this marvelous world we're in."

I was a bit, to use an army term, browned off. He disturbed the peace of my evening, and I said, "Shut up." I said, "You're talking dunces and you know it. Sit down." Very blunt, very rude. He sat down and was quiet. Then he suddenly said, "I'd like to become a Christian." That shook me. For weeks we had discussed and not a single suggestion that he wanted to, was open

to the faith. We knelt and we prayed. He committed his life to Christ.

I felt that God's hand was on my shoulder and said this is what you're called to do, and you'll do it. It should have filled me with joy. It troubled me. There were other experiences. At the end of the war I had a marvelous leave climbing up in the Himalayas, came back, picked up smallpox, which wasn't very helpful.

JMF: In the Himalayas?

DT: On the way back. In smallpox, your temperature goes up, it dips down, and it goes up a second time. The second time is usually fatal. It's an interesting experience. I was in the jungle division, and I was put in a little hut by myself. It made me feel like a leper, all isolated, no one came. It didn't bother me in the slightest, and I wasn't downhearted in the slightest. I never thought I would die, although I knew I was pretty ill. I had the most incredible experience of the presence of Christ — sheer joy and thanksgiving. Maybe I was delirious, but I knew the closeness of Christ. I was filled with a sense of thanksgiving that I'd never had before.

I recovered, went back to my unit, because although the war was over, this was maybe October '45, the east was in a turbulent state, so the armistice, if you call it that, didn't mean a great deal to some of us. India was in uproar... To split India/Pakistan, two million people perished in those riots, never reported. Malaysia, Indonesia, the east was in turmoil.

I began to think, by the end of the year, the time is going to come when I'll leave the army. What am I going to do? I knew God was saying the ministry, and I said no. I'll be a medical missionary. Didn't want to be a doctor – anything rather than a minister. I was quite happy to go out. I'd seen enough of the poor and the destitute to spend my life with the poor and the destitute. For three days I was in total turmoil. I don't think I could talk civilly to someone. I might punch someone in the nose, which I didn't do, you'd be court-marshaled in the army if you tried that.

I had a tent to myself. I approached that tent, I can't put it into words, I knew God was there. As I entered that tent, I knew God was saying the ministry, and I said no. Hard to put into words, I felt physically that God had caught me by the scruff of the neck and said all right, you'll never again have any peace of mind, and no joy. I knelt down on the ground and said, "All right, Lord, I'll be a minister, it's your lookout." That was my words. It was the most disgruntled prayer I've ever prayed.

Something incredible happened. That whole cloud that hung over me vanished. It was like the birds were singing, and the ministry, I couldn't get over this, became very attractive. I was

staggered that whereas I had hated the thought of the ministry, I now really looked forward to ministry and wanted to be a minister.

When I left the army I came back to university. I did four years of philosophy degree, then on to theology. I felt that God was with me in the ministry. I've often looked back to that because there are times in the ministry I don't think there's anything more rewarding than the life in the ministry. What could be more rewarding than to see people come to faith in Christ and be converted, to see people helped, comforted, filled with the joy and freedom of the Lord? It's been a marvelous life, a marvelous calling. It's a tremendous privilege, but at times difficult. Many a time I've said to the Lord, you made me a minister, and it's up to you to do something about it.

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The Importance of Prayer in Pastoral Work

JMF: When you first became a pastor and then through the course of your ministry, what are some of the experiences that stand out? What kinds of things did you find that churches need, that individuals need, and what did you have to have, and be as a pastor, to serve in that day?

DT: In the Bible, in Acts chapter 6, when a dispute arose about the expressing of some of the supplies to the poor, the needy, of the church, the apostles said, it's not right for us simply to give ourselves over to the practical affairs of distributing the poor, and they appointed seven deacons and he said (which I think is very important), "we will give ourselves to prayer and ministry of the word."

Looking back at my college days, although I had a very fine teacher, in college days we were each divided up. We each had a pastor. About 12 of us were given to Professor James S. Stewart, who is well known, a very godly man, professor of the New Testament...and we had a Bible study. He met with us individually, he met with us in a group, and he met with me individually. He was a very shy man, but he got there, he said, "What did you read from the Bible before you came to college today?" I was reading Exodus, I told him. He asked us, did we say our prayers? I don't think that's done today. I admired the man immensely.

We are called, as ministers, to be ministers of the word in a ministry of prayer. Sadly, in the ministry, we pass over that question of prayer, but it's there. The apostles said, we appoint deacons to look after the ministerial side so that we can devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. I find that very important. I had three parish churches. I had a period of evangelism, and then three parish churches. In my second parish, although there were great rewards — I saw people converted — nonetheless there were great difficulties in that parish, and I found myself having to pray an hour every morning before breakfast for that parish. When our prayer life flags, our ministry flags, even if we do all the right things.

I came home to it very early in the ministry. I remember preaching a sermon on the atonement. People were moved and stirred. I was a probational minister at that time. I didn't have my own parish and I was called to preach in another church. There, it went entirely in the wrong way, and I preached the sermon without prayer, and it fell flat. I felt rebuked, that this is God's word, there's nothing automatic about it. It's so important that at each fresh occasion we

give ourselves to the Lord and we pray for the Holy Spirit to work.

That came home to me powerfully when I was still probationary. I was a post-graduate student and I was invited to preach in July in a glorious summer weekend over in the west of Scotland, the west highlands. They said they'd put me up in a hotel, and I'd do services. I went in the wrong way, a lesson I never forgot. I put six sermons in my bag and went off. I went early after lunch, I arrived at the hotel, and I thought I'll have a quick look at my sermon and go for a long, five, eight mile walk in the sunshine in the west highlands — it's a lovely country. So I prayed, opened my bag, pulled out six sermons, read them, and I couldn't preach them at all. I felt frustrated, so I knelt down again — my parents always knelt when they said their prayers at home — and prayed and asked what God wanted to say. It came to me clearly — the resurrection. That bothered me.

I read through my six sermons again, and they were further away than ever. So I knelt a third time and prayed, and this time it was absolutely clear — the resurrection. I thought no, I've got to have one of these sermons. I read through these six sermons, and I couldn't preach them at all. The one thing that really kept, the resurrection...so I said, all right then, it will have to be resurrection. I felt frustrated, because now I would have to sit down on a glorious sunny afternoon and write a new sermon on the resurrection.

But in my state of frustration, nothing would come. I sat there in my frustration thinking of this sunshine, the warmth, the west highlands vanishing away. Here I was, how would I prepare this sermon? At 10:00 at night, I had one sentence on the paper, and I said, "Lord, if it's the resurrection, you have to speak to these people. I have nothing to say." I went to bed, slept, got up in the morning, my mind was still a blank. I said to the Lord, "Lord, if it's the resurrection, you have to do something about it." I went to church early and met the session clerk, who greeted me and said, "Could you make the intonations?" Because last night, their beloved senior elder died, and he wanted to break the news to the congregation. In some astonishing way, that sermon just flowed. I felt very rebuked.

A few years later, I was in Oban, again this time in the west highlands. I was sitting in the car. We were going to go to an island, Lismore, but my wife was shopping. As I was waiting, the session clerk came out on the pavement, so I rolled down the window and we greeted one another. He said, "Yes, I remember you. You're the minister who came all prepared on the occasion that our senior elder died."

I said, “Would you like a coffee?” He and I went for a coffee. I said, “Could I correct... I’m afraid I went to your church entirely in the wrong way. I did not go prepared. But by the miraculous hand of God, he took over that situation because I did not go the right way.” I’ve never forgot that lesson. The ministry is not like a normal job. We can’t just write a sermon. It may be doctrinally, theologically, correct, a good sermon. But we have to go with the Spirit of the Lord, and we have to pray. I take seriously those words that the apostles said, “We will not handle the administration. We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

The focal point of the ministry which I’ve always tried to keep before me is preaching, proclaiming the word, teaching the word, and the pastoral work — meeting people face-to-face. I’m not very good at administration. I’ll do it, but I don’t particularly enjoy it, and often I have let it go, because people are what matters. Your preaching and your pastoral work go hand-in-hand. When you’re meeting people, I always, as a minister, had a reading and prayer. I’d visit the homes, visit people in hospital. I always felt it was right to read something of the word of God and to pray.

Again and again, I’ve found that the real pastoral work opened up after you prayed with someone. You can meet a family, you can greet them, you can ask about their welfare and about their children, their holidays, but once you’ve had a prayer, then they open up and the real pastoral work begins. We are here to share the gospel, to help people come to Jesus Christ. As we meet face-to-face, we are there to help people come and meet the Lord. That’s the key of our ministry.

The vicarious humanity of Christ

JMF: Let’s shift gears and get into pastoral ministry a bit. The same principle seems to apply to the Christian life itself. Let’s talk about what we call the vicarious humanity of Christ and how that works in a person’s life and how God deals with sin and with righteousness in the life of a believer.

DT: You used the word *vicarious*, which is a Latin word used by theologians. It means someone acting, speaking on behalf of someone else, for their benefit. This is precisely what God came to do in Jesus Christ—he came to take our place, act on our behalf, and work out a great salvation.

Many Christians, unfortunately, many evangelicals, restrict the atonement to the death of Christ, and therefore interpret it in a legal or judicial way. They’re correct to do so. There is a

judicial element there, that Christ died for us and he rose again, and the virtue is that our guilt is removed, we are set free. But if we *restrict* the atonement to the death of Christ, then many problems arise. We are saying that the death of Christ is not part of the whole ministry of Christ and is separate from the resurrection. If we restrict it to the death of Christ, we are also throwing people back on themselves, their own resources, and almost inevitably, they become legalistic.

JMF: For an average person listening to what you're saying, let me try to recap and you tell me if I'm saying it correctly. It's common for Christians to think, and many times they're taught, that the key element of Christian faith is that "Christ died for your sins, therefore believe in him and your sins will be taken away — now go your way and do the best you can to be a good person." The focus is on the death of Christ paying the penalty for your sins and therefore removing your sins, and it stops there, as though that's all there is to it, but there's far more to it than that. Is that somewhat what you're saying?

DT: Indeed. If we restrict the atonement to the death of Christ, it creates a multiplicity of problems. Often the great tendency there is to want the blessings of Christ rather than the person of Christ. That is a problem which we see in the liberal world, like Bultmann. It's equally a problem in the evangelical world — a tendency to want the blessings of Christ and not the person of Christ. A key phrase in the New Testament is the little phrase, "in Christ," the Greek, *en Christou*, in Christ. That phrase, "in Christ," in Jesus Christ, in the Lord, occurs something like 132 times in the New Testament. So if you ask me what is salvation, how are we saved? Yes, we are saved by the work of Christ, but by *union* with Christ. We can't separate union with Christ and the work of Christ any more than we can separate the work of Christ and the person of Christ.

JMF: You're saying that most of us want to receive the blessing of having our sins forgiven, but we don't want Christ to be part of our life, in fact *being* our life, we want the pain of sin taken away, but we'd rather...now that you're done, would you please just stay next door?

DT: That's common, and it runs through all the churches. It is unbiblical. If you were to ask me, "How would you sum up Paul's doctrine in his epistles?," I would have to say that we are saved by grace and union with Christ. We're not simply saved by grace, we're not simply saved by union with Christ, it's the two together — union with Christ and salvation by grace — because God came down — an incredible, staggering fact — that God came down to this earth and took flesh and blood as the man Jesus, although remaining God.

As man, he entered into our humanity. He was a particular man, and yet also a representative man at the same time. As he entered into our humanity, he took all our sins, all our weaknesses, all our sufferings, and he died bearing the connotation. But he did more than that. In taking our humanity, your humanity, mine, he became you, he became me. He sanctified our humanity, he turned it roundabout. He perfectly obeyed God the Father on our behalf. He prayed to the Father on our behalf. In the resurrection he offers himself to us. He offers us this new life, his life for our life, your life, my life, renewed, sanctified, so that to receive salvation is to receive Christ, to receive the new life of Christ. It's a total thing.

To receive Christ is to receive the fullness of God that Paul talks about — the fullness of the Spirit. It also means on our part a total surrender, a total letting go. There's tremendous joy in that because it means that in so far as Christ has done everything for us — he is for us in every situation in life, in every event in life, in every occasion. There's no situation in life that we face but Christ is there, and it's always "not I but Christ." Not I but Christ when I have a great decision to make, not I but Christ when I worship, because worship means that Christ alone is the one who worships the Father, he alone enters the presence of the Father. When we are united with Christ, Christ is with us, in us, we are in him. In Christ we enter the Father. So it's in Christ we can worship, in Christ we pray. We don't know how to pray. We try to pray in our own efforts, and prayer is then a frustration. We try to pray and set aside times we pray, we know how we fail. But Christ prays. If we keep our eyes on Christ and remember that all through life, every step of life it's not I but Christ, we're on the victory side.

Many years ago I had a friend who became a minister, who in turn had a close friend who was a professional footballer. His friend, a footballer, was a Christian. But he thought of the Christian life in terms of football. He said one day, it was like me trying to play football. Jesus was standing at the touch line watching, and every time I came near the goal, I missed it. It was frustrating. But something marvelous happened. Jesus and I changed places. I now stand at the touch line. I watch Jesus playing, and he scores the goal every time, and all I can do is stand and cheer. It may be a simple story of a professional footballer — that to me is the Christian life. The whole of the Christian life is centered on Christ, it's in Christ, it's a union with Christ where Christ takes over because he's accomplished everything for us — for our forgiveness, for our redemption, for our reconciliation with our Father, our entry to the Father's presence, our entry to the kingdom of heaven.

JMF: So in speaking of faith, faith is in Christ himself, not in specific things or actions per se, but in him. It isn't even a matter of our faith, we are actually entering into *his* faith.

DT: Absolutely. Faith is a way of being related to Jesus Christ. Our faith is important. Without faith we are lost. You can come and give me a gift, and if I say no, I don't want it, I go without it. God comes to us with his gift, and we can say no, we don't want it, and we're lost.

A story that means a lot to me is of the announcement to Mary of the birth of Christ. Here was this young maiden, and the angel came and announced to her God's will for her life. He announced that she would have a child. That child would be born of God and would be the Son of God. Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." She responded, saying, "Yes Lord, let it all happen just as you want it." Mary had the freedom to say yes, and she said yes. She had the freedom to say no, in which case God would have chosen some other young woman. The marvelous thing is that Mary said yes. But when she said yes, that's all she could do. She couldn't create that child in her womb — that was a miraculous happening from God.

When you and I first come to Christ, God comes, he confronts us, he says, "I love you, I've forgiven you, I'll give you all the fullness of God, I'll bring you into the fellowship of the Father." All you and I can do, like Mary, is say, "Yes Lord," or "No Lord," "Thank you Lord." Our thanksgiving is our response to God's glorious announcement of his love, forgiveness and salvation. It's very important. But what matters is that our faith is a response to Christ, to his faithfulness, but it's not a work.

Far too often we throw back the responsibility to men and women. That's utter frustration. We get weary. Ministers, I'm afraid, approach the same way. They throw themselves into the ministry — I speak as a minister — it could be easy to let our devotional life, our time with the Lord, slip into the background. We try to go on under our own steam and our own effort, and we utterly fail.

JMF: What often is asked is something along this line, "You're telling me that Christ has done everything necessary for my salvation and that everything I experience he is doing for me and through me, and that sounds like I don't have to do anything, and Christ does it all. I don't see how that's consistent with the Scripture. It just sounds like some kind of universalism." How do we respond to that?

DT: It depends what people mean by the use of the word universalism. On one hand it might mean, and rightly mean, that God loves the whole world and that when he came in Jesus Christ

he redeemed the world — the salvation, the offer of salvation, is for the whole world. In that sense, I'm a universalist. It does not mean, however, that all people accept the salvation of Christ, that all people are saved. Sadly, no. The Bible never says that —we are free to accept or reject. God doesn't send anyone to hell. He weeps over this world. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He loved the people of Jerusalem and was sad that they were rejecting him. Because they're rejecting him, they would suffer, and suffer terribly. If we reject Christ, we reject his salvation, we reject life, we're lost. That's the horrors of hell. I believe in hell. If we talk about the wrath of God, the wrath of God is really the wrath of the Lamb. God doesn't want us to perish. He doesn't want any sinner to perish. He loves everyone. The glorious thing is to be able to go to anyone and say that God loves you and God has forgiven you and he wants you. But we have to respond, and if we don't, we're lost.

Responding to Christ

JMF: What is the nature of our response?

DT: Our response is, as I have said, a response of thanksgiving. It's an acknowledgement. As a pastor, I have often asked people to read certain portions of Scripture. When I've asked them to read a passage of Scripture and I've gone back to that home, they told me they read it. There are certain passages I use a great deal. Psalm 51 is a prayer of confession where David, a man of God in a remarkable way, called a friend of God, nonetheless sinned. The Bible doesn't gloss over the fact of his sin and that he committed adultery and murder in the sense that he was responsible for the death of Uriah the Hittite.

I've talked to people and we've got so far, and I've said, "Will you read Psalm 51," and I've found that they're converted on that Psalm, that God has spoken to them through it. I've generally said, when I've given them Psalm 51, to read another Psalm, one of the Psalms of thanksgiving, maybe Psalm 103 or like that. I remember being on mission and speaking to a couple of young people, aged about 21, on the street, inviting them to our meeting. I thought he was very aggressive, and if I had mentioned the name of Christ again I think he would have physically assaulted me. So I said, "Can I invite you to a cup of tea?" And she came. He was a young person that I don't suppose had ever been to church. But I tried to share the faith over the cup of tea, and I said, "Can I ask you to read Psalm 51?" She woke me up at 7:00 in the morning. I was still in my pajamas. She was on her way to work. She asked me about this Psalm, and that was her conversion. She was given words to pray. People come in different ways — some

impressed by the love of Christ, a great many by an acceptance of the reality of sin.

Many years ago I met a brilliant student. He'd been done with school and was embarked on an honors course at university and said that after that, he hoped to go on to ministry and added the words, "But I'd like to go to a liberal college." That bothered me. Something didn't quite ring true. I felt compelled to pray for him. The more I prayed for him, the more I felt an extraordinary compulsion to pray for him. I found myself praying continually for this chap. Finally it came to the point that for a fortnight I saw him every day either for a coffee, or an occasional meal.

Then I asked him to read 1 John chapter 1, and he told me he read it and as a result he could no longer pray. That bothered me. I prayed a lot about that. Then I phoned him up and said, "I asked you to read 1 John chapter 1, and you told me you did. Having read it, you told me you could no longer pray." He said, "Yes." I don't find it easy to talk to a person — frankly, my knees shook. I felt I had to. I said, "The reason is because you're a sinner, and you won't acknowledge it. You want to gloss over it. It says if we say we have no sin, we're a liar. The truth is not in us. It equally says that if we confess our sins, he is just and willing to forgive us our sins." So I said, "Your problem is that you're a sinner, and you have to confess it."

I thought we parted company. The next three days if he saw me he'd cross the street. He wouldn't come near me. I thought, "That's the end of that relationship." Then he phoned me up and said, "Who's been talking about me?" "No one's been talking about you." He said, "Yes, why did you say what you did? You've been talking." I said, "I haven't mentioned you to a single mortal soul. I never mentioned you to a member of the family." He said, "Then why did you say that?" I said, "I'd been praying for you. I felt God wanted me to say it." He said, "Can I come round and see you?" So he came around and he told me his story. He had got into bad company and asked if I would pray for him. I said, "No, not unless you're prepared to confess your sins." He says, "Yes, I am." So we prayed, I prayed, he prayed. I can still see his face — the sheer joy of the Lord. He said, "I feel all the joy of my childhood is back."

Some people come that way. Others come in a different way — they've had problems, they feel the love of God has helped them, very often an illness. They've been comforted, they've been helped, or miraculously healed, and they see the hand of God. Everyone's different. As pastors we have to learn to love people, to befriend people, and everyone's different. There's no uniform way of going about things.

But we have to pray... I found it helpful as a pastor when I was visiting a parish, the home

of a parish, to have a brief word of prayer before knocking on each new door — that somehow God will take over and I didn't know what to say...would God just say whatever he wanted to say. You just relax, you try to love your people, to enter into their joys and sorrows and interests and family life. And yet within that situation try to help them to an understanding of God.

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Already Forgiven

The Christian life

J. Michael Fezell: Reverend Torrance, it's a joy to have you back with us. I want to ask you to draw on your many years of pastoral experience to talk about a topic that has to do with how a Christian lives in light of the fact that they are union with Christ, and how a pastor should work with a congregation in light of the sin that so easily besets us and that we're surrounded with. How do those things work? We know that we're complete in Christ, we know that we're in union with Christ, we know that it's the vicarious humanity of Christ that makes us who we are. Yet, that doesn't mean that we can just not put any effort into serving God obediently. How does that work together?

David Torrance: That's a searching and important question. How do we live the Christian life? How do we, as pastors, help people live the Christian life, or indeed, to receive Christ? I think that's what you're asking. What I feel strongly about and I would say to myself as a minister (because I am part of the church in all my faults)...

Too often we say to people, "You must live the Christian life with the *help* of the Lord or with the help of the Holy Spirit." I think that's wrong. I have a car about three years old, and if it breaks down I'm not going to take it to the garage and say, "Could you lend me some tools so I can fix my car," or I'm not going to say, "Will you help me and give me a hand?" I hand him over the car. He fixes it. We can't come to Christ and say, "Lord, will you help me live a good life, will you help me, guide me, in this line of activity." He is Lord. We have to surrender and hand over everything.

That is our problem of the Christian life. How do we hand over everything? It's vital. I always find it amazing, staggering, that the almighty God came to this earth and became a man. He became a particular man, a representative man, and yet at the same time remained God. Jesus is man and he is God. As man, he has come because in the end we can do nothing. We are helpless. We've been caught in sin, we are bound by sin. If you take the parable that Jesus told about the strong man, he said, "No one can enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods without first binding that strong man, then he can take his goods." In our natural state, we are overcome by the power of sin, which is a real power, and we are helpless. But God has

lovingly come down, broken into our situation. He has, in Jesus, bound the strong man. He died on the cross and he has risen victorious.

But he has done more than that. In binding the strong man and setting us free, he has lived out on our behalf a new and a perfect life, a righteous life, and he wants to give us that life. As we come to Christ and open our lives and we ask Christ to come, he comes as our Savior, he comes as our Lord. He comes to give us that new life so that we receive forgiveness, we receive redemption, we receive reconciliation with God. It's a marvelous thing because with Jesus ascended, we are made to ascend to the Holy Spirit. We are made to enter the presence of the Father and we are welcomed by the Father into his family.

What I always find staggering and amazing is we look at John 17...we are made to share in the fellowship of the Trinity itself, that God treats us as if we are Christ. But that's only because in Christ we become new creatures — new men and new women. Jesus has lived our life for us in a double sense, that he took away our sin, our life...but he sanctified our life, turned it around, made it holy. So day by day, month by month, you and I, as we open our eyes to Christ, keep our eyes in Christ, are appropriating Christ in every situation in life.

I think it's a disastrous thing to have people pray, "Lord, will you help me to do this?" Who's in charge? If God helps me, I'm in charge. I can't treat God as my servant or the Holy Spirit as my servant. He is the almighty God. He is Lord. I, myself, can do nothing. So every step, every day, every moment of the day has to be a looking unto Christ and surrender to Christ, but rejoicing, rejoicing that Christ is in control. Paul can say, "It's not me, but it's Christ who lives in me." That's what we've got to try to get over to our people. The sheer joy, freedom, release from the shackles of sin, the sheer release from all the worries, fears and anxieties is a letting go of God.

Personally, I had a happy marriage. We celebrated our 50 years. My wife was a doctor. She was, before we married, a missionary doctor in Africa. We came up to university together and...my career was broken because of the army and the war. We met when she came home on furlough. She would have gone back to Africa, but she didn't go back. We married...had a happy time. But latter day she wasn't well. She had Parkinson's suddenly, and she died. People said, "What did you do?" I never thought of tomorrow. I never thought of the future. I felt we were in the hands of God. God loves her, he loves me, and we had a very happy time together.

Her illness brought us closer together. I had to do an awful lot for her. She passed away in

peace. It's hard to put into words... I remember vividly the day two and a half years ago. It was a lovely sunny day, and after lunch I asked my wife what she wanted to do. She said she would like some sunshine, so I took her out in her wheelchair and we sat in the sun. We came back a little late, at 5:00, and that night our youngest daughter came in, we had a meal... Normally she would go to bed at half past eight, but this time it's half past nine. I helped her get ready for bed. We had prayers –we always had prayers together. I kissed her, told her I loved her, helped her to bed, and a quarter of an hour later, she was gone. She was restless. I said, “Would you like to sit up?” So I helped her sit up. She was in my arms as she passed away peacefully.

It sounds strange to say, but I had a tremendous feeling of the love of Christ and the presence of Christ that she didn't suffer, she had no prolonged illness, didn't have to go to hospital. She departed — it was in the hands of God. I felt the kindness of God. People would say, what about the future? I never thought about the future. We were in the hands of God. He is our Lord and master, and we day by day looked to him, thanked him that he's our lovely, glorious Savior. He's our Lord. He looks after tomorrow. Maybe that's oversimplified, but I feel that's the way I try to live so we don't have the worries, the fears.

On one occasion, she wasn't doing well and full of anxiety. I directed her to that passage in the Sermon of the Mount, “The birds of the air, they don't care about tomorrow, the heavenly Father feeds them.” She told me a long time later, it was a great help and comforter, that the Lord provides. Yes, life can be difficult, it can be hard, we can face the dark and stormy days, but we know that the Lord is there. Not only is he there, but he is our mighty Redeemer and Lord who has total control over the whole situation.

In the ministry I tried always to direct people to Christ. The most disastrous thing to do would be for the church to draw attention to itself, and what the church is doing. Sadly, the church is good at doing that. But our task is to turn people away from us to Jesus Christ, and as far as possible to turn them away from their problems and throw them to Christ.

Dealing with sin in our lives

JMF: If I have a sin or a destructive habit that I'm struggling with or that's bringing me down, or that is not the kind of behavior that reflects one who is in union with Christ, what is my role? How do I deal with that, and what is the pastor's role? How does the pastor deal with that sort of thing in the congregation?

DT: We all have these problems, sadly, we're all sinners, and as a pastor, I'm a sinner. How

do I go about it? If there are bad habits, what do you do about those bad habits? Sadly, there's a lot of illness in the world, and what do we do about that? We have to look to Jesus Christ. When Christ came and gave himself for us on our behalf and died for us and rose again... We have that great shout of triumph, the shout of the victor, "It is finished." He had accomplished everything for our salvation, everything to solving all our problems and anxieties of life, perplexities... He has done everything for our complete physical healing. There's nothing left to do. So we look to him and thank him for what he has done in the finished work of Christ, that he is the answer.

I attended a conference on prayer and healing on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd of July. I responded warmly to that conference, and I've never witnessed so much physical healing ever before. I responded because when someone comes who is sick, he doesn't pray, "Lord, here's this person, he's sick, he's got cancer, please, take away the cancer." He said when that person comes – this is what he does in practice – you try to help that person look away from their problem, away from their sickness, or if it's a bad habit like drugs or whatever, look away from that problem and look to Jesus Christ and look to the cross and the fact that Christ has died and has risen, and say, "Complete victory belongs to me in the light of what Jesus has done. Complete deliverance belongs to me from this evil habit because of what Christ has done. Complete healing belongs to me because of what Christ has done, thank you Lord," and go on and on saying thank you. As you thank the Lord, the miracle happens.

It might sound simple...it is very simple. But the gospel is very simple. It's you and I who make it complicated with our sinful ways. Or the church makes it complicated. In that conference of prayer and healing, he had sessions on Thursday night and Friday night. Friday morning was ministers and leaders, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, then we had a prayer. There were some marvelous healings. That's all we did. Those who were asked to join in that prayer, and I shared in it, to help people to look at Christ, the finished work of Christ. He would say: "Now you say, 'Because of what Christ has done, complete healing belongs to me, complete healing, because of what Christ has done, thank you.'" There were some remarkable healings. When we approach our people and they share the problems, we try to do that.

Take a common situation in a parish ministry — broken marriages. I've tried all my ministry to visit people whose marriages had a problem. I find that to be the most difficult side of the ministry because of hardened hearts. I've equally found some incredibly lovely stories of people who have been reconciled and whose marriage was healed. That has always upheld me and

comforted me. I've had many failures at that and some lovely answers to prayer.

I've always said, when two people have a marriage problem, and I could see very vividly in one parish... a couple, they were in their 60s, married over 40 years, and he happily went off with another woman. I went back and forth between husband and wife for over three months, and I thought I was almost battering my head against a wall, because these are not easy situations. I tried to tell them that both had to first and foremost kneel at the foot of the cross and receive God's forgiveness for themselves. They had to think of their partner, as a wife not to think of a husband who had gone off with another woman, but to kneel at the foot of the cross and receive God's forgiveness for her life and receive the whole fullness of Christ, the life of Christ.

I told him he had to abandon the other woman. I said, "You've got to kneel before the foot of the cross and receive Christ. Only as you both die to yourselves, you'll be raised up as one new person. And after 40 years, it means you start again from the beginning. But as you both kneel before that cross and in the light of all that God has done for you, forgiveness, he will raise you up with new life." I went off on holiday. When I came back, they were side-by-side in church. They were there every Sunday. They were the last people to say goodbye when I left that parish.

It's trying to help your people... We're all sinful... I can't look down at that, I'm in the same boat as a fellow sinner sharing as a fellow sinner with my people. But helping them to look away from ourselves, from our sins, from our problems, or from our physical illnesses to Christ, to the finished work of Christ, what Christ has done in his life, in his death, his resurrection, ascension, absolutely everything... that finished work of Christ. When we think of the atonement, it is the entire ministry of Christ... his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost. We are reliant on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

JMF: Is there a time for the pastor to admonish the congregation about some prevailing sin?

DT: Yes. But we have to be very conscious that *we* are sinners. We are not standing on a pedestal. We are fellow sinner. We're seeking to come together and to ask God's forgiveness.

When I entered my first parish, the ministry had gone wrong. It's sad when the ministry goes wrong. Everything is turned around about. Office-bearers wouldn't speak to one another, they were at loggerheads. In my first board meeting, I walked in, and they were there before me, standing in a circle... The two leading office-bearers were in the center, about to have a physical assault to one another. I had to stride into the middle and push the two apart. I wondered as a

young man, what do I do now? I've never been taught about boxing in Christianity.

They were a bit appalled that here is a minister having seized two men, pushed them apart. I said, "Now we begin our board meeting." This is my first board meeting in the church. It was the fastest meeting I had ever had, because no one would speak — it was over in half an hour. I was asked for a quick session meeting with the superior body, so I said to one of the elders, my session clerk, my leading elder, "What's the problem?"

He got up, and I would say blew off. For about 20 minutes he told us all the problems, the animosities, the back-biting, and all sorts of dreadful things. I had to silence him after 20 minutes and thank him, and ask the other elder to say what was on his mind. He marvelously stood up and apologized. I looked at that, thanked him, and read the passage from the Bible, "Little children, love one another." I didn't know what to do. That's all I could think about.

I said, "We have sinned against God. Here we are, office-bearers of the church, striving. It's God's church, and we're quarrelling. The Lord is grieved with us! We are absolutely sinners." I included myself. I said, "We have to pray and ask God to forgive us." So we prayed and asked God to forgive us. Every one of us, "bring us together." Then I shook hands, and they went away. I went home that night with a headache wondering what sort of church I had come to. For the next 18 months I preached through the Sermon on the Mount, preached on requests for forgiveness...we receive forgiveness as we give it. I said to them I would never appoint to office anyone in the church who was not at peace with God, without peace with everyone in the church, with everyone in the parish. In the end they came wonderfully together, and those two elders who fought became good friends. Another two, who hitherto wouldn't speak, asked to share the car together in visiting their district.

You stand with them as a fellow sinner. You together ask God's forgiveness, and you try to speak about the marvelous love of God and the fact that God is sad that we quarrel. He loves us, he's forgiven us, he wants us to come enjoy that love and love one another. We can't beat around the bush, but it's not easy.

JMF: You mentioned thanksgiving as part of the repentance process. In asking for forgiveness, we already know we have forgiveness, so in one sense we are giving thanks, aren't we, for knowing that we're forgiven, but we're giving thanks for the forgiveness even as we ask.

DT: In the small Bible class, one of the teenage girls, a lovely person, said, "How often must I ask for forgiveness before I receive it?" I said, our Lord says in the Lord's Prayer,

“Forgive us our debts, our sins.” We ask, but we don’t go on asking. That would insult God — that we don’t believe that God loves us, that he’s forgiven us. Christ *has* forgiven us. So we come and ask, “Lord, forgive us our sins,” but as we look to Christ we thank him that he *has* forgiven us, forgiven us before we sinned, and before we were born. I find that a staggering thought. I always tried to say to my people, You must ask for forgiveness every day, but having asked for forgiveness, always say “thank you” that you *are* forgiven.

JMF: So the asking is like a participation in the fact of forgiveness.

DT: Absolutely. It’s a sharing in Christ’s finished work. Paul says, “In all things, in all times, in all circumstances give thanks to God.” We’re not good at that. But it’s important that we pray at all times with thanksgiving. If we don’t pray with thanksgiving, we have no faith. We’re not believing, we’re not accepting the marvelous love of God.

JMF: Paul gives admonition in Scripture, but he always does it from the context of “this is who you already are in Christ, this is who Christ has made you be, and therefore act like it.” He never turns it around and says, “You’re behaving badly, and if you don’t stop it then you’re lost.”

DT: Absolutely. Perhaps the severest forms of judgment we see in the gospel are out of the lips of Jesus. He was frank. When we look at the cross, we might belittle our sins. We might think it doesn’t matter. I say to people, “You look at the cross, you look at the fact that sin was so serious it took everything that God himself had got, to remove our sin and deliver us.” I think of that great cry, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” There you see the depths and the horror of sin. Sin is real, but thank God that we’re delivered from it. Our church needs to be cleansed, I pray every day that our church will be cleansed, purified. We must — but we thank God that there is complete cleansing, complete deliverance.

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About the Publisher...

Grace Communion International is a Christian denomination with about 50,000 members, worshipping in about 900 congregations in almost 100 nations and territories. We began in 1934 and our main office is currently in southern California. In the United States, we are members of the National Association of Evangelicals and similar organizations in other nations. We welcome you to visit our website at www.gci.org.

If you want to know more about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we offer help. First, we offer weekly worship services in hundreds of congregations worldwide. Perhaps you'd like to visit us. A typical worship service includes songs of praise, a message based on the Bible, and opportunity to meet people who have found Jesus Christ to be the answer to their spiritual quest. We try to be friendly, but without putting you on the spot. We do not expect visitors to give offerings—there's no obligation. You are a guest.

To find a congregation, write to one of our offices, phone us or visit our website. If we do not have a congregation near you, we encourage you to find another Christian church that teaches the gospel of grace.

We also offer personal counsel. If you have questions about the Bible, salvation or Christian living, we are happy to talk. If you want to discuss faith, baptism or other matters, a pastor near you can discuss these on the phone or set up an appointment for a longer discussion. We are convinced that Jesus offers what people need most, and we are happy to share the good news of what he has done for all humanity. We like to help people find new life in Christ, and to grow in that life. Come and see why we believe it's the best news there could be!

Our work is funded by members of the church who donate part of their income to support the gospel. Jesus told his disciples to share the good news, and that is what we strive to do in our literature, in our worship services, and in our day-to-day lives.

If this e-book has helped you and you want to pay some expenses, all donations are gratefully welcomed, and in several nations, are tax-deductible. If you can't afford to give anything, don't worry about it. It is our gift to you. To make a donation online, go to www.gci.org/donate.

Thank you for letting us share what we value most — Jesus Christ. The good news is too

good to keep it to ourselves.

See our website for hundreds of articles, locations of our churches, addresses in various nations, audio and video messages, and much more.

www.gci.org

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You're Included...

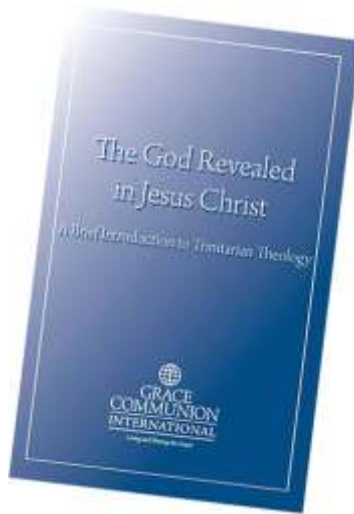
We talk with leading Trinitarian theologians about the good news that God loves you, wants you, and includes you in Jesus Christ. Most programs are about 28 minutes long. Our guests have included:

Ray Anderson, Fuller Theological Seminary
Douglas A. Campbell, Duke Divinity School
Elmer Colyer, U. of Dubuque Theological Seminary
Gary Deddo, InterVarsity Press
Gordon Fee, Regent College
Trevor Hart, University of St. Andrews
George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary
C. Baxter Kruger, Perichoresis
Jeff McSwain, Reality Ministries
Paul Louis Metzger, Multnomah University
Paul Molnar, St. John's University
Cherith Fee Nordling, Antioch Leadership Network
Alan Torrance, University of St. Andrews
Robert T. Walker, Edinburgh University
William P. Young, author of *The Shack*

Programs are available free for viewing and downloading at www.youreincluded.org. Most interviews were conducted by J. Michael Feazell, who was then the Vice-President of Grace Communion International. He has a D.Min. degree from Azusa Pacific University. Some interviews were conducted by Michael Morrison, who has a Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary. He is now Dean of Faculty at Grace Communion Seminary. Some interviews were done by Gary W. Deddo, who is now the president of Grace Communion Seminary.

Speaking of Life...

Dr. Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International, comments each week, giving a biblical perspective on how we live in the light of God's love. Most programs are about three minutes long – available in video, audio, and text. See www.speakingoflife.org.



Want to read more?

Readers in the United States are eligible to receive a free booklet, *The God Revealed in Jesus Christ: A Brief Introduction to Trinitarian Theology*. This booklet explains, in simple language, how all our most important questions are answered by a simple starting point: Who is God? We can be confident that God has planned something excellent for us. To have a printed copy mailed to you, phone 1-800-423-4444. Readers in other nations may read the booklet online at www.gci.org/god/revealed. It is also available as a free e-book in the same place as you obtained this e-book.



Grace Communion Seminary

Ministry based on the life and love of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Grace Communion Seminary serves the needs of people engaged in Christian service who want to grow deeper in relationship with our Triune God and to be able to more effectively serve in the church.

Why study at Grace Communion Seminary?

- **Worship:** to love God with all your mind.
- **Service:** to help others apply truth to life.
- **Practical:** a balanced range of useful topics for ministry.
- **Trinitarian theology:** a survey of theology with the merits of a Trinitarian perspective. We begin with the question, “Who is God?” Then, “Who are we in relationship to God?” In this context, “How then do we serve?”
- **Part-time study:** designed to help people who are already serving in local congregations. There is no need to leave your current ministry. Full-time students are also welcome.
- **Flexibility:** your choice of master’s level continuing education courses or pursuit of a degree: Master of Pastoral Studies or Master of Theological Studies.
- **Affordable, accredited study:** Everything can be done online.

For more information, go to www.gcs.edu. Grace Communion Seminary is accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, www.deac.org. The Accrediting Commission is listed by the U.S. Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency.

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