



Talk 16 – How Can I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?

Duration 44 Minutes
HTB Transcripts

Key:

Personal Story / Testimony that Nicky Gumbel tells in the classic Alpha talk. These may be replaced with a live speaker's personal story or the speaker may tell the story about Nicky in the same way Nicky tells stories about others.

Story that Nicky tells about someone else (about a friend or a story he heard or read about).

Quotes are key to the talk to emphasise a point and to enable guests to engage and relate to a point made. There is now a way that people can seek permission to omit or replace quotes used in the original talks. A quote should be replaced with something equally effective to maintain the balance of teaching, story, and references to other information sources.

Key Quotes will need approval to change (these will be identified by a comment in the left column). Please email publications@alpha.org with your request.

Key Bible Passages are identified and you may wish to display these visually for your guests.

Red type identifies a part of the key teaching text that may be removed or altered for contextualisation.

Text left untouched is the standard key message content of the Alpha talk.

NOTE: Key elements of this script are: personal stories, humour and reference to media / popular culture to draw the guests in to engage with the talk.

Parts of the talk may need to be contextualised for other contexts or cultures but make sure you maintain the key elements of humour and personal testimony. Notice how quotes, and stories are used throughout to add emphasis to the main points of the talk (theology and testimony).

Well, welcome again!

KEY: **Personal Story** **Story** **Quotes** **Key Quotes** **Key Bible Passages**

16) How Can I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life? - Nicky Gumbel - HTB Alpha - 14/02/2009

We only get one life. We might wish for two. D. H. Lawrence said this: 'If only we could have two lives — the first one in which to make our mistakes, and the second one in which to profit from those mistakes.' But there are no dress rehearsals for life — we're on stage straight away.

And the question is: how can we make the most of the rest of our lives? **All of us, or certainly I, have made many mistakes in my life.** And the question is: what about the future? How can we make the most of that? St Paul's answer is in Romans 12, 1–2:

'Therefore, [he says] I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.'



Talk Point 1

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

First of all, what should we do? The first thing St Paul tells us here is: break with the past. We're called to be different — verse 2: 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.' By the 'world' here St Paul means the world that has shut God out. **J. B. Phillips translates this: 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mould.'** Now, that's not easy, because there's always pressure to conform.

[Reword according to your course weekend or day away context/timing.]

Here, if we're honest, on a weekend like this all the pressure is to be Christian. But the moment you get back to work on Monday morning, all the pressure is the other way. And it's hard to be different.

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[This is a key story to the talk point and adding humour to the talk. Try to keep this in if possible.]

I heard about a young police officer who was taking his final exam at Hendon Police College in North London. And the first three questions in this exam were relatively easy. And then he got to question four. Question four went like this:

'You're on patrol in outer London when an explosion occurs in a gas main in a nearby street. On investigation, you find that a large hole has been blown in the footpath and that there is an overturned van lying nearby. Inside the van there's a strong smell of alcohol. Both occupants, a man and a woman, are injured. You recognise the woman as the wife of your Divisional Inspector, who is at present away in the United States.

A passing motorist stops to offer you assistance, but you realise that he is a man who's wanted for armed robbery. Suddenly another man runs out of a nearby house shouting that his wife is expecting a baby and the shock of the explosion has made the birth imminent.

Another man is crying for help, having been blown into an adjacent canal by the explosion, and he cannot swim. Bearing in mind the provisions of the Mental Health Act, describe in a few words what actions you would take.'

The police officer thought for a moment, picked up his pen and wrote:

'I would take off my uniform and mingle with the crowd.'

[The text in red links the story above to the main talk point.]

That's always the temptation — to take off our Christian uniform and mingle with the crowd, to be like everybody else, because it's so much easier. But what we're called to be is distinctive — to retain our Christian identity wherever we are, whatever the circumstance.

It's the difference, if you like, between a chrysalis and a chameleon. A chrysalis is a pupa that turns into a beautiful butterfly. A chameleon is a long-tailed lizard that changes colour

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according to the background it's on. And that's the temptation that we face: to be one thing, to be Christian if the environment is Christian; but if the environment is different, just to fit in with the background.

And that always creates a tension in our lives, because we're one thing in one situation and we're another thing in another situation.

Apparently they did an experiment with a chameleon one time. To see how it would respond to tension, they put it on a piece of tartan, and apparently it exploded!

Now, we're called not to fit in with the background but to be different. Being different does not mean being odd. We're not called to speak in some kind of weird religious language or to wear weird clothes; we're called actually to be normal. That's what a relationship with God brings.

Let me take three examples where we are called to be different. First of all, the area of backbiting, character assassination behind people's back. This is a very common thing, isn't it? Somebody goes out of the room and all the conversation turns to that person, and we're called to be different — maybe to try and think of something positive to say about that person. It may not be easy, but ... maybe they're nice to their cat!

And then in the whole area of grumbling and complaining.

[Try to replace this with an example of your own.]

Again, I remember so well when I was practising as a barrister. We used to come back from court and we used to have tea in chambers, and the conversation so often was kind of negative and complaining and grumbling. We'd grumble about the other lawyers, we'd grumble about the client, we'd grumble about the judge, we'd grumble about the weather, we'd grumble about the tea, we'd just grumble about everything!

And we're called to be different. Then the whole area of sexual morality. Again, we're called to demonstrate the blessing of keeping God's standards. God loves us. God loves you. And God is the Creator of marriage. God is the Creator of sex. It was God who invented sex. He

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came up with the idea of sex! He's not looking down from heaven thinking, 'Goodness me! Whatever will they get up to next!'

C. S. Lewis said: 'Pleasure is God's invention, not the Devil's.'

Comment [sd1]: C. S. Lewis quote for permissions

And the Bible affirms our sexuality. God made us sexual beings. The Bible celebrates sexual intimacy — the delight, contentment, the satisfaction that it brings. But the Inventor and Designer also tells us how this beautiful gift is to be enjoyed to the full.

And the biblical context is lifelong commitment in marriage. Jesus quoted the Creation account: 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' In other words, first of all there's a public act of leaving — in other words, the making of a lifelong commitment.

Secondly, there's a gluing together, being united. Not just physically and biologically, but emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, socially. And in that context the one-flesh union takes place. It's God's perfect plan that children should be brought up in an atmosphere of love and commitment and security. And the Creator, the Inventor, then warns us of the dangers of going outside the boundaries, of ignoring the instructions, if you like.

There's no such thing as casual sex. Because every act affects this one-flesh union. I sometimes demonstrate this by taking two pieces of corrugated cardboard: one with a picture of a man, and the other with a picture of a woman, and gluing those two pieces of cardboard together. That's what the Hebrew word means: they're glued together. And if you then try and pull those pieces of cardboard apart, there's this ripping sound, and little bits of each person are left on the other.

And that's what we see all around us. And in contrast we see the blessing where God's standards are kept — in Christian marriages.

[Delete red text if not applicable to your context, or amend the wording to use this as an example.]

And I've never met anybody who's said to me: 'I really regretted that I waited until my

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wedding day.' I've met lots of people who said: 'I really wish I had waited, because I've made a mess of my life.'

And the wonderful news is: it's never too late. This is all about God's love for us, and God's redemption in Christ. That's why Jesus died for us — so that the past can be forgiven, so that the past can be wiped clean, so that the scars, if there are scars, can be healed.

Jesus wants to restore wholeness to our lives and to give us a new start. But St Paul does not write this to condemn people. He doesn't say, 'You terrible people!' He was writing this probably to a group of people whose past lives were ... The ancient world was a very immoral world, and their past lives were probably far from ideal. So he's not writing to condemn them; he says: 'Don't conform any longer to the pattern of this world.'

We're called to change the world rather than to be squeezed into the world. Now, I'm conscious that all this is very kind of counter-cultural, because the world around us is not like that any more. The standards of the world around us are very, very different. And it takes a great deal of courage to take a stand and live out these standards today.

Because the pressure to conform is huge, particularly, I think, with young people.

[If you replace this illustration, try to find one that effectively makes the same point of how easy and tempting it is to go along with the crowd, even when you know they are wrong.]

A team of doctors conducted an experiment to see the ways in which group pressure influence young people. And what they did was they got three cards, each with a different length of line on it: one was an obviously long line, one was a medium-sized line, and one was an obviously short line.

And what they did was they got ten young people together. Nine of those young people had been secretly instructed to vote for the second-longest line, the medium-sized line, as being longer than the long line. And there was one student who didn't have a clue what was going on. And that was the person they were conducting the experiment on.

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So what happened was the people conducting the experiment held up ... They said, 'We want you to vote for the longest line.' They held up the medium-sized line, and the nine students who'd been instructed all raised their hands and voted for that as being the longest line. The tenth student looked round in just total disbelief! And he admitted this is what he thought: 'I can't have been listening to the instructions. I must have missed the point. I'd better do what all the rest are doing, or they will laugh at me.' So he carefully raised his hand together with the other nine.

So the directions were explained again. They said, 'We want you to vote for the longest line.' And again they held up the medium-sized line — nine hands went up. This time the guy just looked around, completely — just couldn't believe what was happening! And yet again he put up his hand.

Over and over again he voted with the group. 75 per cent of young people tested behaved in the same way. They sat there time after time, saying that a medium-sized line was longer than a long line. Only 25 per cent had the courage to stand against the group.

It takes courage not to conform to the world around us, even if what we're doing we know deep in our hearts is right.

So that's the first thing: break with the past. Second, make a new start — 'be transformed'.

[You may choose to personalise or adapt this to introduce the next story and talk point.]

But if you're anything like me, I have a bit of a fear of change, because I like routine — I get used to my life as it is, and even when I see — sometimes I see somebody so radiant with the love of Christ and I think, 'I'd love to be like that!' But then I think, 'I wonder what that would mean in my life to become like that.'

Apparently there were two caterpillars sitting on a leaf one time, and they saw this beautiful butterfly flying past. And one of them turned to the other and said, 'You won't catch me going up in one of those!' True story!

[You may choose to use this story or replace it with your own.]

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Just shortly after I was ordained, Sandy Millar, my boss, the Vicar of HTB, asked me to take a funeral. And this funeral was for a woman who had lived on the streets. She was a homeless person. And some of the people, as you know, some of the people who are homeless are great characters and actually have quite a lot of friends. But this woman, because she was quite an aggressive woman and always asking for money and being very rude to people, she didn't have many friends — she was one of those people who went around with a kind of Sainsbury's trolley, plastic bags and all the rubbish she took around the streets in our area.

So for the funeral, and in a situation like that, you wouldn't expect there to be many people at the funeral. But what Sandy told me was that this woman was actually a very rich woman. Some years earlier she had inherited a huge fortune — millions of pounds. She actually owned a flat in Pont Street, she owned several valuable paintings. And as Sandy pointed out, 'Where there's a will, there are relatives!' And so it proved when I turned up at the funeral!

There were second cousins from Australia; all kinds of people came to this funeral. And I thought, 'Why ...' I just couldn't understand it! Why would someone who had all this money choose to live on the streets with all their rubbish?

And eventually somebody said, 'Well, I think the problem was she didn't want to leave behind the life she knew.' I said, 'For me that's absurd!' — but there are many people who are doing something even more absurd — they're hanging onto the rubbish in their lives and they're missing out, not just on a flat in Pont Street! — they're missing out on all the treasures that God has for us in our lives.

What are these treasures? St Paul gives us a glimpse of it, in chapter 12, verses 9–21. He says:

'Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another with mutual affection. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.'

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'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.'

'Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it's possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it's written: "It's mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.'

'On the contrary: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they're thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you'll heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'

What are some of the treasures? Here's the first one: sincere love — verse 9. The literal Greek word is *anypokritos* [ανυποκριτος], which means 'without hypocrisy'. That was the word that was used in a Greek play: when the actor wore a mask — that was a *upokritos*, from which we get the word 'hypocrite'.

And 'mask', I suppose, is what we put forward when we don't want people to see how things really are. So we say, 'I don't think people are going to like this, but they might like this.' When the Government does it, I guess we call it 'spin'. When we do it, we call it 'image'. We're projecting something.

And the result is that if we're doing this — and we're all tempted to do it — what happens is you get two masks meeting. And one of the wonderful things is when we experience God's love for us, his love being poured into our hearts, and we know that God accepts us, even though he knows the very worst about us, that sets us free to say, 'Well, if God accepts us, then I can be myself. I can take down the masks.'

[You may choose to use or delete text in red.]

And what happens then is you get real people meeting with real people and a closeness of relationship — **which I have never found, in my own experience, outside of the Christian**

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church. A level, a depth of relationship.

Sometimes we use this illustration about marriage: if God is there and a husband and wife are there, the closer they are to God the closer they'll be to each other. But the same applies to every relationship: the closer we are to God the closer we'll be to one another.

Sincere love. Then enthusiasm for the Lord — verse 11: 'Never be lacking in zeal' — enthusiasm for the Lord.

The initial experience of God, of the Holy Spirit, of Jesus is not meant to wear off. He says, 'keep your spiritual fervour'.

[You may use or reword the text in red depending on your context eg whether you are on a Alpha weekend or an Alpha day.]

I don't know what happened to you last night. I suspect, looking round the room, there were some people here who were having amazing experiences of God. Others may say, 'Well, actually, to be honest, I felt absolutely nothing.' And there may be even some of you here who say, 'Well, to be honest, I found it really difficult. I didn't find last night easy at all. For me it was quite a difficult time.'

Do you know, it really doesn't matter, in one sense. What matters is, where are you going to be in ten years' time in your relationship with God? Sometimes people have amazing experiences but then they kind of drift away. These experiences, they ... We go up and down, our feelings go up and down. Monday morning, you may wake up feeling absolutely dreadful! In fact, if you stayed up till five o'clock last night you probably will wake up feeling absolutely dreadful! Does that mean that nothing happened? No, not at all. Just means you're tired.

There's also such a thing as spiritual warfare. The moment you give your life to Christ, the moment you begin to experience the Holy Spirit in your life, and move in that direction, you're bound to feel a little bit of a tug in the opposite direction. That's why on Week 8 we look at the whole subject of spiritual warfare: *How Can I Resist Evil?*

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So what matters is not what you experience or don't experience, but the long term. It's like in marriage. Some people have great honeymoons, and some people don't have great honeymoons. But what's important is having a great marriage.

[You may delete this text.]

I have some friends who on their honeymoon they both got so badly burnt that they couldn't touch each other! It was the first day of the honeymoon they both got so badly burnt! They couldn't touch each other for the rest of the two weeks!

[Light-hearted story leading in to the next point.]

I was talking to someone this morning whose grandparents on their honeymoon, they went on a barge and the barge sank the first night, and they had to bail themselves out, and then they had to get a bus home! But 61 years later they're very happily married! That's what matters.

Next, harmonious relationships. Look at some of the words in verses 9–21: 'love, joy, patience, faithfulness, generosity, hospitality, blessing, rejoicing, harmony, humility, peace, where good is not overcome by evil, but evil is overcome by good'.

These are some of the treasures which God has in store for us. But in order to receive that, we have to leave behind the rubbish. Break with the past — make a new start.



Talk Point 2

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

How do we do this? St Paul says here: 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices.' This is an act of the will — to offer all of ourselves to God, all of our lives.

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That means giving God our time. Our time is our most valuable possession. Giving him all of our time doesn't mean we spend all of our time reading the Bible and praying —of course our jobs are also our vocation. It's a very important part of our Christian calling — our work, and everything else that we're involved in.

But one of the things, I think, that happens is when we say to the Lord, 'Lord, you can have everything. You can have all of my time,' is that our priorities change. It's easy to get our priorities a little bit wrong.

[Humorous quote to illustrate the next point.]

I came across something that... This was a genuine advert in The East African Standard — and actually a friend of mine saw this advert when it first came out — in the personal columns. It was a farmer who was looking for a potential wife. And this is how he advertised. He was from Nanyuki. It said this: 'Nanyuki farmer seeks lady with tractor, with view to companionship and possible marriage. Please send picture of tractor.'

I think one of the things that happens when we give everything to the Lord is that people become much more important than possessions and things, even if that wasn't the case beforehand. And of course our relationships become of supreme importance.

Number one, our relationship with God. I don't think that if you say, 'Where am I going to be in ten years' time?' — I don't think there's any chance that you're going to be still in a relationship with God unless you communicate. All relationships break down if there's no communication.

[You may use or reword the section in red according to your context.]

So spending time with God in prayer, in reading the Bible. Personally — there's no law about this — but I would really recommend, **from my own personal experience**, starting the day by reading this book and by praying. I think however we start the day, it kind of has an impact on the rest of the day.

Second, with the church — other Christians, the body of Christ. **I don't know whether you've**

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had this experience at all yet: you come along on a Wednesday night and you think, 'Oh, I really feel quite excited about this. I really enjoyed it.' And then as the week goes on, that feeling kind of declines, and the following Wednesday you're thinking, 'Mm, I'm not sure I'm going to go back this week.' You think, 'Well, maybe I'll go back.' And you come back and you think, 'Oh, it's quite fun. I quite like this!' And then the following week it kind of declines.

[You may adapt text in red to suit your context.]

You know why that is? Because we need one another. It's in the community that our faith blossoms and grows.

Next, we give to the Lord our ambitions. Sometimes people say, 'Should a Christian be ambitious?' Jesus' answer to that question: 'Yes!' In fact, Jesus commands us to be ambitious. He says: 'Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these other things will be yours as well.' In other words, get your priorities right, get your number one ambition right, and all the other things that people chase after will be yours as well.

But don't make those things your number one ambition, because they're not worthy of being made our number one ambition. There are some people, aren't there, who, you say, 'Well, what do you want to achieve in life? 'Well, I want to make a lot of money. That's my aim in life — I want to make lots and lots of money.' But I mean, isn't that a bit of a sad ambition! I mean, what's the point? You make 1 million pounds — 'Mm, exciting! Now what do I do? Oh, well, I could make 2 million pounds, 3 million, 10 million pounds!' Get to 10 million pounds: 'Now what do I do? Ooh, 11 million pounds.' I mean, what is the point?

You get to the end of your life and God says to you: 'What did you do with your life?' — 'Oh, I made 11.5 million pounds in my life! Look, here it all is!' God says, 'Great! We can play **Monopoly** in heaven!'

What is the point! Other people, you know, the whole of their life is focused on fame or success or power or status. They say, 'I want to be the chairman of a major public corporation. I want to be the **Chairman of ICI or BP or General Electric. I want to be the Governor of the Bank of England!**' What a pathetic ambition! Isn't that sad! I mean, so what!

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When you get to heaven, 'What did you do with your life?' — 'I was the **Governor of the Bank of England**' — 'Wow! We haven't had one of those here before!' What is the point! It's pathetic! It's pointless!

Now, as a secondary ambition, it's wonderful. If you're saying: 'My priority is to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness, and I think the way to do that is to have an influence on society. And I want to be the Governor of the Bank of England in order to make a difference to people's lives' — then it's a noble ambition, it's a wonderful thing to want to do. Or to make lots of money in order to give it away — to make a difference. That's great. But simply in itself, it's pointless.

Our money — we give to the Lord our money. There's no ban on private property or making money or saving it or enjoying the good things in life, but what is wrong is the selfish accumulation for ourselves, an unhealthy obsession with money, putting our trust in riches. And that just brings perpetual insecurity and leads us away from God. And the way to break that kind of thing is genuine giving, generous giving — which is the appropriate response to God's generosity and is the way to break materialism in our lives.

We give to God our ears — what we listen to. Do we listen to gossip or do we listen to what will build us up?

Our eyes — do we look with jealousy or lust, or do we look at people through God's eyes: 'How can I bring God's blessing to that person?'

Our mouths. James, chapter 3 talks about the mouth being such a powerful instrument. He says: 'with your tongue you can destroy someone.' How many people can look back to something that was said to them, maybe at school or by a parent or by somebody, that cut them and maybe has had a negative influence on their whole life. On the other hand, think what encouraging words do.

Our hands — do we use them to take or to serve? Our sexuality — for our own gratification or do we reserve it for the good and pleasure of our marriage partners? You can't pick and choose. St Paul says 'present your bodies'. And you know what? This is the extraordinary paradox: if we live for ourselves, we find ourselves in bondage, in slavery. But if we present

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everything to God, we find freedom.

So he says 'present your bodies as living sacrifices'. Sacrifice means that there will be a cost.

William Berkeley wrote: 'Jesus came not to make life easy but to make people great.'

If you want an easy life, if you want a life of ease, please don't become a Christian. Because it's not easy being a Christian. But if you want a great life, a fulfilling life, life at all its best, life at its best, then follow Jesus.

We may have to give up stuff that we quite like and we'd like to hold onto. Actually, long term it's only rubbish that God asks us to give up. But sometimes giving up the rubbish is hard. And to some extent it's a lifelong struggle, giving up the rubbish. Some of it we put away immediately, but sometimes we struggle in our lives just to get rid of it. But we need to do that.

[You may adapt the text in red to suit your context.]

The second thing is: we have to be willing to fly his flag in what can be quite a hostile world. I don't know what will happen when you get into work on Monday morning and someone says to you, 'Did you have a good weekend?' — 'Yeah, yeah, great weekend, thank you very much!' — 'Oh, what did you do?' — 'Oh, well, I went to the country.' — 'Oh really, where did you go?' — 'Umm ... Sussex.' — 'Whereabouts in Sussex?' — 'Er, near Chichester.' — 'Oh really? I know Chichester quite well because my parents are down there. Where were you?' — 'Oh, it was a place, it's called umm Bracklesham Bay, you probably won't have heard of it.' — 'Oh, I know Bracklesham Bay quite well! Where were you in Bracklesham Bay?' — 'Oh, just-just-just in Bracklesham Bay, really!' — 'Isn't that the place where there's that New Horizon, that kind of Pontin's site, isn't that in ... Were you anywhere near that?' — 'Umm, well, actually I was in it!' — 'What were you doing in a Pontin's site?!' — 'Oh, well, I went with a few friends.' — 'How many friends did you go with?' — 'Well, 300 friends.' — 'What were you doing with 300 friends in a Pontin's site for the weekend?' — 'Well, I'm — I'm on umm Alpha.' — 'Alpha? What's Alpha?' — 'Well, it's a - it's a - it's umm a ... it's umm ... it's — it's kind of umm Christian — agghhh!'

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[You may adapt the text in red to suit your context.]

I don't know what the response will be, but they won't kill you! They won't put you in prison. Many people round the world, once they say they're a Christian, they're in danger of imprisonment — or even, in some places, death. More people have died for their faith in Christ in the twentieth century than in all the other centuries put together. So it's not always easy to be a Christian.



Talk Point 3

WHY SHOULD WE DO IT?

Why should we do it? First of all, because of what God has planned for our lives — verse 2: 'Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.'

[You may adapt or personalise the text in red.]

One of the things that I think is almost demonic is a kind of false view of God that so often ... Certainly I had a totally false view of God before I was a Christian. I thought God was a kind of spoilsport — God was the kind of person that if you gave your life to him, he would destroy it — he'd take away all the things that were fun and good in our lives.

How absurd that is! God loves us — far more than we even love our own children! God's will for our lives is the best. It's pleasing — it will please us long term. That doesn't mean to say it's going to be easy or problem-free. And Christians go through suffering and difficulties as much as anybody else, and in addition they have to share in the sufferings of Christ — the rejection and so on that sometimes happens in the world.

So it's not that it's problem-free. But long term, at the end of our life, we'll say, 'I'm pleased that I did this.' And it's perfect — we can't improve on God's will for us. Sometimes I think we think we can do better than God! I suppose in a sense that's the essence of sin. It's a kind of

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independence.

[You may re-tell this as a story you heard, or you may replace it with your own story to illustrate the talk point that, often, we want to do things our own way and end up getting ourselves in to a mess.]

When our children were younger, my son came home — one of my sons came home from school one time, and he'd been asked to make this poster for a Roman slave-market. And he spent all weekend on it, he really worked hard on it, and it was beautiful what he produced. He got a lovely italic pen and he wrote on it, and he produced this wonderful poster for this Roman slave-market.

And then he said at the end of the weekend, on Sunday afternoon, he said, 'Now, what we've been told is we need to make this look like a parchment. And the way to do that is to hold it over a very low gas flame. You just burn these holes and it makes brown marks and it makes it look like a parchment.'

So my wife Pippa said, 'Oh, that's great. Let's do it together — I'll help you.' He said, 'No, no, no, I'd like to do it on my own.' She said, 'Well, it's quite difficult: you know, fire and paper ... It might be a good idea if we did it together.' He said, 'No, no, no, I want to do it on my own!'

Well, there was about that much left of it, and lots of tears. But the good news is there was time to do it again. And this time he said, 'Mum, would you give me a hand with this?'

And you may feel that about your life: 'I've made a bit of a mess. There's this much left.' And the good news is God is the God of the second chance, and the third chance, and the hundredth chance. And we can start all over again, and this time we can say to the Lord: 'Lord, for the rest of my life could we do it together?'

So we do it because of what God has planned for our future, and secondly because of what God has done for us. His amazing love, his gifts to us — the only adequate response ... Paul says: 'I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy ...' And that's really a summary of chapters 1—11 of the book of Romans: all that God has done for us.

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And the little sacrifices that we may have to make for him are nothing compared to the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, that God made for us in Christ on the cross. And when we look at the cross, we see how much God loves us. And if God was willing to do that for us, it's absurd not to trust him with all the other things in our lives.

St Paul wrote this: 'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?'

I heard about a wealthy English baron called Fitzgerald. This man had one son. And his son left home and, while he was away from home, he died. And this wealthy man never got over the loss of his son. And as his wealth increased, he invested in old masters — valuable paintings.

When he died, his will called for all the paintings to be sold. And because he had such a great collection collectors, museums came from all over the world and a crowd gathered. On the day of the auction the lawyer read from his will, and what it said was this:

'The first painting to be sold in this auction is *Of My Beloved Son*.' It was by an unknown painter, it was poor quality. The only person who even bothered to bid for it was somebody who'd worked for the family and who'd known the boy and had loved him, and he bought it for sentimental value and for the memories it held.

Then the lawyer read the second clause of the will: 'Whoever buys *My Son* gets everything. The auction is over.'

St Paul said: 'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?'

'Whoever buys my Son gets everything.'

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Talk 16 – How Can I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life?

Duration 44 Minutes
HTB Transcripts

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