

# Dial Good News



**A Short Collection of Inspiration and  
Evangelical Telephone Messages**

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In the mid-1970s, I was part of a group of people connected with the city-centre churches in Aberdeen who offered a daily telephone message ministry called “Dial Good News”. Every day, one of us would get up early and make our way to a church hall in which the rather primitive recording machine was kept. We would then record the message for the day. The tape lasted exactly two minutes, so the message could not over-run. It sometimes took several attempts to get it right, especially for people (like me!) who tend in the direction of verbosity. I found that all messages had to be thoroughly scripted and rehearsed.

Every message was introduced by the words “This is Dial Good News, Aberdeen 50294”. The idea was that anyone could phone this (now obsolete) number and hear an inspirational or evangelical message for the day. The service was well used in its time, although newer technology and rising costs eventually brought it to an end.

When the service ended, there was talk about publishing a book of messages. The idea never came to fruition. In the course of moving house last year, I rediscovered my “Dial Good News” file.

So, I am pleased to offer the 33 messages that I contributed to “Dial Good News”. Please remember that these are scripts for spoken messages, not great literature nor profound theology. They were written when I was still quite a young man. As I approach my three score years and ten, I might now express myself with a little more polish. However, even if the original messages are occasionally a little rough at the edges, I have resisted the temptation to re-write them.

Quotations from Scripture are sometimes slightly paraphrased.

I hope you will enjoy the messages.

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Hamilton, South Lanarkshire  
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In the Christian life we sometimes encounter what seem to be contradictions. Yet when you look at them more closely we see that they are not actually contradictions; rather, they are different ways of looking at the same truth. That is how the Bible often works, viewing the same truth from the opposite ends.

Here is an example. When we pray to God about something, there are times when we may feel that we should simply commit a thing to God and leave it in his care, knowing that he has the whole of eternity to work out the solution.

And there are other times when we really do want and need God's guidance in a particular situation and we believe that we must have an answer soon.

If we give God the honour and reverence that are his due he will not mind our insistence - our importunity - like the man who visited a friend at midnight to ask for a loaf of bread. In one way it was a ridiculous request. Yet because it was so ridiculous, the friend got up and gave him what he asked, knowing that he must really have needed it.

Don't be afraid to keep asking God and keep on asking him.

God does actually want to bless us and he also wants us to want his blessing.

I can remember a time when there was a great craze for the sport of hang-gliding. You know that this is rather like the established sport of gliding except that instead of being in a plane, participants wear a contraption rather like a large kite strapped to their backs.

The participants rely on currents of air and gusts of wind to keep them moving. They learn in particular to take advantage of the natural resources to climb up higher or come down lower. It is a sport that requires a good head for heights. It would not be for everyone. It would certainly not be for me!

Man has always looked for ways to exploit what God - or nature, if you prefer - has provided and has made both good and bad use of them. Today, we are increasingly aware of the earth's finite resources.

One of the most natural of all resources is the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John that it is like the wind. We do not see it and yet we can certainly feel it and know its effects. Sometimes God's Spirit blows so naturally and unobtrusively that people are tempted to forget just how powerful it is. Yet it is the most natural of all resources. If - as Christians believe - God created the universe and all that is in it, surely his power is the most basic and natural aspect of it?

The great thing about God's Spirit is that, unlike some of our natural resources, it will never run out. Do not be afraid to call on it.

Our society depends a great deal on lending and borrowing. Indeed our whole economy depends on lending and borrowing. The old saying "Neither a borrower nor a lender be" is not always helpful nor is it true in practice. Lending can actually bring great blessings. When Jesus walked the earth he had nothing of his own in terms of ordinary possessions even though he was King of Kings and Lord of Lords. "*The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*" were his own words.

Jesus often borrowed. He borrowed a boy's dinner on one occasion and used it to feed 5,000 people. He borrowed many other items such as a house, a boat and a donkey. In every case the lender received a wonderful dividend. But the greatest reward of all was to know that the Master himself had used them.

God gives all of us gifts, even those of us who believe we are unimportant and have little or nothing to give.

If we keep God's gifts to ourselves - whether these gifts are spiritual or material - they are unlikely to prosper. But if these same gifts are freely used in the service of God and others, they will prosper and increase to God's glory.

In the words of the old hymn

*I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be*

Some people will try to take a short cut into a new life. They will attempt to become different people by unconvincing means and without the Spirit of God. The result will be unconvincing and they will really just be the same "old" people thinly disguised.

As a Scottish man, I could try to belong to a different racial background. I could disguise my features, learn a new language, allow myself to be soaked and immersed in a different cultural pattern. If I could do this skilfully enough, it might even be convincing.

Yet, no matter how well I might be able to do it, nothing will get round the fact that I am a Scot, born and bred in Scotland. In my own strength, I cannot change who I am. I may take on a disguise, but I am still the same person.

In the same way, no one becomes a follower of Jesus by a mere change in behaviour or outward conduct. Fundamental change requires a greater miracle than moving from one branch of the human race to another. Yet that change is possible through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

The Holy Spirit can change anyone by making him a new person and putting a new heart within him.

And that applies to you.

There was no doubt that Jesus was dead. The soldiers, with the permission of the Governor Pontius Pilate examined the bodies of the three men on the crosses. The two thieves were still alive but Jesus was already dead. Pilate was surprised when he heard that news.

Thereafter, Pilate was approached by a devout Jew called Joseph of Arimathea to take custody of the body of Jesus and this request was granted.

Joseph placed the body in a rock tomb that he owned and a large heavy stone was rolled over the entrance. It is not possible, looking at the evidence objectively to come up with any other conclusion but that Jesus was really well and truly dead.

That is not the end of the story, but it is an important episode in it. In fact, it is as important to understand that Jesus was really dead as it is to understand that he is now really risen from the tomb.

Jesus, as the one without sin, had to share the penalty of sin. However harsh it may sound to modern ears, the wages of sins is death. That is why Jesus went to his death for *"the joy that was set before him"*. But let me say again that is not the end of the story.

*"The free gift of God is eternal life."* The story could not end with Jesus in the tomb.

Easter Sunday had yet to come.

Saint Paul once wrote these words: *"... but now you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God..."*

Two scholars were once debating with each other during a train journey. One, who was not a committed Christian, said to the other, who was, "No one can really say that he knows all that much about God." "True," replied the other "but what little I do know about God is so important that I want to treasure it and share it with the people I meet."

The first scholar was speaking of knowing things about God as a phenomenon.

The second scholar was speaking of knowing about God as a person revealed through his Son, Jesus Christ. There is a great difference between the two.

Let's go back to the beginning and look at Paul's words again. *"... but now you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God..."*

In other words, Paul goes a stage further and points out that it is important for us to know God, but perhaps it is even more important to be known *by* God. Indeed knowing that we are known by God is perhaps one of the most precious Christian experiences.

To know that God loves us and cares for us and has redeemed us, to know that we are saved, empowered and forgiven, isn't that really Good News?

In any town, we can see memorials in different places perhaps a few statues or plaques or War memorials. In older churches you will see everything from flower vases to pipe organs and even whole peals of bells. Some memorials contribute little to the community. Others are of great practical use or serve to enhance worship in the sanctuary.

But most of us just have to be content with the thought that the only physical memorial we will have after our death will be an inscription on a tombstone or an entry in a book of remembrance.

So what? Does that matter? Generations pass away and we may be completely forgotten.

But God does not forget. If God is not forgetful of a sparrow, surely he will not forget those whom he has created in his own image and likeness.

The praise and acclaim of men is fine. There is nothing wrong in having someone's memory perpetuated in a memorial. But as God's child, your name will never be forgotten by our Heavenly Father.

*God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

At the beginning of the week which many Christians call "Holy Week" we can remember that Jesus was a man faced with choices. We can easily think that because the life of Jesus seemed to follow a predestined plan it all more or less came about automatically and without any effort on the part of anyone.

That is really an illusion. Jesus' choices were very real and he had to battle over many an agonising and crucial choice. He was not play acting. He was not a passive pawn in a game of heavenly chess.

Willingly and indeed gladly he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem to face the cross. The letter to the Hebrews states that he did this for the *"...joy that was set before him."*

That doesn't mean that it was easy. The cost to God of seeing his son upon the cross and hearing his cries of desolation is something that passes our comprehension. But it does mean that he does not grudge us our salvation.

Perhaps traditional evangelists leave us cold when they talk about making a decision for Christ. But I suggest that, they are right. We cannot hold two views of Jesus at the same time. We are for him or we are not. However, whatever we decide, Jesus is always for us. He has already decided in our favour.

*We may not know, we cannot tell what pains he had to bear  
But we believe it was for us, he hung and suffered there.*

*O dearly, dearly has he loved and we must love him too  
And trust in his redeeming blood and try his works to do.*

Do you sometimes exaggerate? I expect you do. I certainly do, especially if it is to put myself in the best possible light. We all sometimes overstate, usually to put ourselves in the right and often at the expenses of accuracy.

There are even times when Jesus might, at first glance, appear to do the same. But when he does appear to exaggerate, he does it for the sake of emphasis and not for the sake of deception.

*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God*

*Take the plank out of your own eye before you take the splinter out of your brothers*

*If you have faith, you will say to this mountain "Move to yonder place" and it will move.*

Is this exaggeration? Well, not deceptive exaggeration, rather affirmative statements of the truth, the whole truth and (as they say) nothing but the truth.

Rail faith in God takes the seemingly impossible in its stride for, with God, all things are possible.

There is an old hymn that begins

*In the Cross of Christ I glory  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time*

I have never been quite sure what the "wrecks of time" are! But I wonder if you have ever thought that the whole history of the world revolves round the crucifixion of Jesus. There is a legend - and it is only a legend - that the socket in which the Cross was placed was the centre of the earth's surface.

Yet, in a figurative sense, this is true. In the Old Testament, the prophets looked forward to the one who was to come and who would be the Saviour of the world. In the New Testament, we see that the Messiah was God's own son, Jesus Christ.

Many things have been said about the Cross. Scholarly and devotional books have been written about it. I would invite you to think today on one aspect, namely the plan and foreknowledge of God.

The events leading to the Cross, the victory of God over the powers of sin and darkness were not thought up by God in a moment or as some panic reflex measure.

Before the world was created, the Cross was planned and predestined. And God wants you to be incorporated into his plan.

Does it sound complicated? God's plan is beyond our understanding - but this we certainly know - that God wants us to come to him through Jesus Christ. To quote another old hymn

*Jesus loves me this is know  
For the Bible tells me so.*

*Saint Paul once wrote: You are no longer strangers and sojourners but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone.*

Written to people who were not Jews, those words were greatly heartening and encouraging. In the ancient world, it was widely perceived that the Jews had certain religious privileges and insights which, apparently were not granted to others. They had the revelations, the blessings, the prophecies and the covenant. But (says Saint Paul) whatever might have been the case in the past, all these privileges are open to all people through Jesus Christ.

You may well say that this is ancient history. Yet many people today - and maybe you are one of them - think that the promises of God are only for "other people" and not for them. Maybe you say "I'm not religious". Well, you don't have to be religious (whatever that means). Listen again to some other words of Paul:

*The promises of God are to all who will hear and accept. The gift of faith is for all those who will gladly receive it. The promise is to you and to those who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.*

*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

These are among the most precious words of Jesus that you will find in the Gospels and indeed they lie right at the heart of the Christian message.

In modern times, unfortunately, the terrible practice of kidnapping and demanding a ransom has become more common, especially by terrorists. It is not unknown for vast sums of money or release of many political prisoners to be demanded in return for the life and freedom of one captive.

The awful thing about such a kidnapping is that it causes unimaginable anxiety and sorrow to the family involved. However, paying a ransom gives no absolute guarantee that their loved one will be returned. Equally, it does not guarantee that the victim will never be kidnapped again.

The ransom paid by Jesus is of a quite different order. Whilst it is a transaction, it is not a business transaction. It was freely offered by Jesus as man to his Father in heaven in complete obedience to the father's will.

God actually gave the sacrifice in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. It was no temporary appeasement of some savage heathen deity. But it was in full and final atonement for the sin of the world.

That is why the Christian Gospel offers such comfort and security. The work is already done and has been accomplished. The old hymn says

*'Tis done, the great transaction's done  
I am my Lord's and he is mine*

In the Christian Church we are still remembering the Easter promises and the miraculous ways in which the risen Christ appeared to the disciples at different times.

Saint John tells us of the occasion when Jesus appeared in the upper room to the disciples. On that occasion, one of them, Thomas (called "the twin") was not with them. We don't know why he wasn't there. Maybe he had good reason. Maybe he was cooling off in his attitudes to the others and what they stood for. It was when he was away from the other disciples that doubt came into his mind. That is why he was unwilling to accept the assurance of a whole room of witnesses that the risen Christ had come among them.

It is true that religion (whatever that means) can be a very personal thing. But that's not all there is to it. If we are followers of Christ, we are part of a huge world-wide fellowship. Whether we are truly part of it is a matter of personal choice. It is our attitude that comes first and foremost. Do we want to be lone doubters or present believers?

*"Blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed."* said Jesus.

We can all be blessed when we believe the testimony and witness of the faithful.

There was once a little girl who went to church every Sunday with her mother. The church they attended had many old and beautiful stained glass windows. When the sun shone on them the figures on the windows became lit up and seemed to shine.

The little girl said to her mother one day "Mummy, who are these men and women on the windows?" Her mother replied "They are the saints." That reply didn't mean much to the little girl but she didn't ask any more questions.

One day at school, the little girl's teacher was speaking about saints and asked if anyone in the class knew what a saint was. The little girl immediately raised her hand and said "Please Miss, someone the light shines through."

Actually, that was a pretty good answer: maybe not the one that the teacher expected. In the New Testament a saint does not just mean someone who is "good" all of the time. No human person can be "good" all of the time. A saint is someone who, in New Testament language, has been "justified", has been made and declared to be in a right relationship with God through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

A stained glass window is actually not much to look at until the light shines through it.

Similarly, you and I are nothing in ourselves but when the light of God shines through us, we too can be numbered among the saints.

One hymn - or rather Psalm - that most people know is the *Lord's my Shepherd*. Sometimes this great Shepherd Psalm can be perceived as being overused. Traditionally it has regularly been heard at both weddings and funerals alike. Yet there is another way of looking at this. The very fact that the Psalm is used on such widely different occasions shows just how much depth of meaning it contains. Perhaps the most helpful verse (using the metrical version) is "*goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me.*" Think of the word "*follow*".

The scholars tell us that this word really has a much stronger meaning in its original language. It really means to pursue or hunt down. It is an active rather than a passive verb.

Sometimes the good news of the Gospel can be presented in a somewhat off-hand manner as if to say "take it or leave it!" We need to remember that the grace of God will search for all of us, like a shepherd looking for his lost sheep and will not give up.

Sometimes when people are feeling low, there is the understandable tendency to think that God has left them to their own devices and to their own resources.

Sometimes people will feel that they have lost - or are losing - their faith. Maybe you are one of these. You may think you are on your own. If so remember that the goodness and mercy of God will keep pursuing you. He is on our side.

As Saint Paul said, *If God is for us, who can be against us?*

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