

Find the Worth You're Looking For

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Date: 08 March 2026

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[0:00] Thank you, Rachel. Good morning, everybody. Good to see you. As Craig has said, this is Passion for Life Month.! Churches all around the city here in the East of Scotland Gospel Partnership,! Churches up and down the entire country are wanting to share the good news that we can find life, true life, in Jesus Christ.

Now, something that we all need in life is a sense that our lives are valuable, that what we do matters, that we are worthy of respect and love from other people.

Nevertheless, many of us go through life with a sense that there is something missing, that in some way we are lacking, that we are inadequate, that we are unworthy.

Sometimes we look in the mirror, we wake up, we look in the mirror, and we think to ourselves, I'm not enough. I'm not good enough. I'm not smart enough. I'm not fit enough. I'm not pretty enough. If the list could go on.

So where can we find our worth, the worth that we need for a life that is full? Well, let me suggest to you, don't go looking at what you're made of. I've read that if you were to take a human being, boil them down to their chemical constituents, and then sell it, that you would be lucky to make enough money to buy two lattes around the corner at Costa.

[1:16] Your worth, when it comes to what you're made of, is not very much. So if you want to find your worth in life, you need to look somewhere else. And what we're going to see today is that in Christianity, you can discover that you are of infinite, inestimable worth, and in the sight of God, and in the person of Jesus Christ.

But to get there, we're going to start off with a film, maybe one that you have seen. But if not, it's called Chariots of Fire, and let me tell you about it. Chariots of Fire tells the story of two British Olympic athletes.

They are competing in the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. One of them is Harold Abrahams. The other is Eric Little. He healed from around the corner here in Edinburgh.

Now, Abrahams was a Jewish man, and he had faced a lifetime of anti-Semitic discrimination and prejudice. But that didn't hold him back. Rather, it propelled him, motivated him, to try and prove everyone wrong about him.

He wanted to prove his personal worth by winning a gold medal. But in the film, as Harold Abrahams is preparing for the 100-metre sprint final, there's this scene where he's in the changing rooms, he's with a friend, and he confides in his friend the stress and strain that he is feeling under.

[2:35] He says, this is what he's thinking whenever he's going to go out in the track. He says, I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor four feet wide with ten lonely seconds to justify my whole existence.

Abraham there is confessing that he believed that his whole worth and significance in life rested upon his performance, on his success, in how he ran that race and what position he finished in that race.

But he finishes confessing his self-doubt. He has ten lonely seconds to justify his whole existence. But will I? Will I achieve it?

Will I be enough? Here's a man who is at the peak of his physical fitness. Here's a man who has trained for years. He's at the top of his game.

But he doesn't know if it's going to be enough. Now, although a few of us here will be Olympic athletes, I think a lot of us have something in common with Harold Abrams.

[3:47] I think a lot of us are plagued with these kinds of self-doubts, these questions. Am I enough? I think that's partly because we live in a secular society here in 21st century Scotland.

The scientists and the philosophers, they tell us that we have come from nothing for no ultimate purpose. That we are blobs of carbon floating from one meaningless existence to another. No wonder we feel inherently, intrinsically worthless. And that we have to instead invent and achieve our worth. And it always feels like Harold Abrams that we have to justify our existence to prove to ourselves, prove to other people that we are worthy. Every day.

My value. Let me confess to you that I know an awful lot about this way of thinking. Tell you a little bit of my story. John, thank you for your story this morning, your testimony.

[5:09] I grew up in Northern Ireland during a time in our history that was known as the Troubles. A time whenever we teetered on the edge of civil war, two communities locked in conflict with each other.

As a teenager, young teenager, I began to get drawn into trouble myself with the authorities. In the end, my family, we had to leave Northern Ireland to get away from it all and have a new start here in Scotland in the year 2001.

And given the chance of that fresh start to leave behind the shame and the embarrassment and the trouble that I was in, I threw myself into achievement and performance, trying to atone for my sin and my shame.

I worked hard to get the best grades, to try to be top of the class, to become head boy of the school, to go to a prestigious university, to get a good degree, to build my CV, to get a good job.

I was falling into the Harold Abraham's trap. I was trying to justify my existence. I was trying to outweigh my bad, my mess with my accomplishments and achievements.

[6:15] Someone's called this treadmill life. Having to do more, do better, do it faster, just to keep standing up, just to have a modicum of sense for a fleeting second, I'm okay.

I'm good enough. I measure up. And let me tell you from my own personal experience, it's exhausting. It's not satisfying. It's not life-giving.

Some of you know that too. I'm here this morning to tell you the good news that you can get off the treadmill, that there is better life available in Jesus.

And to see that, I want to contrast two very different strategies for finding your worth in life. They're going to be illustrated from the film, Chariots of Fire, that we've started with this morning. The first strategy is the Harold Abraham's way of life, and it says that your worth must be achieved.

It's that equation we've already seen. My performance equals my worth, my value. This is the life of striving for success, to be the best or at least to be better than some other people, and then you can feel okay about yourself.

[7:28] I think many of us naturally, I think actually all of us come into this world thinking this way. This is our default setting, if you like. But the question is, does this strategy of achieving our worth, does it actually work?

Does it pay off? And I think you'll find, if you look at the people who have tasted success, who have reached the top, I think you'll find that they have discovered it doesn't work.

It doesn't satisfy. Let me give you a few examples. There's this man, Johnny Wilkinson, one of England's best rugby players. He led England to victory in the 2003 Rugby World Cup.

He scored his winning kick with only 23 seconds left on the clock. A few hours later, he should have been out with his teammates. He should have been celebrating. This was the greatest achievement of his career.

But he wasn't out with his friends celebrating. He was alone in his hotel room drinking. In the grip of performance anxiety, thinking to himself, I'm only as good as my last kick.

[8:31] Yes, his last kick had won the Rugby World Cup. But what about next time? What if it went wrong next time? Who is he then? Johnny Wilkinson.

Someone else, maybe you know him. Jim Carrey. Famous film star, comedian. He's played many memorable roles on the big screen. He's won many awards. He's loved by many.

But he confesses that he is nagged by this sense of not being enough and not having enough. He once said this, I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.

Someone else has reflected. People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that it's against the wrong wall.

I want to do any of these testimonies resonate with you and with the way you think and the way you feel and what you have experienced in life. I think there will be quite a few of us will resonate something here.

[9:51] But just as some people seek to justify their whole existence through their academic performance, their business success, their creative brilliance, their political activism, many other people around the world approach religion in the same way.

They use their religious performance to seek the ultimate verdict, to earn the approval and the blessing of God Almighty. They think that they can do good things and work their way up into God's good books.

You look around the global marketplace of ideas, philosophies, religions, there are an awful lot of them and they're all very different. But in this one respect, most of them are the same.

It's about you. And it hinges on your performance. If you are going to receive God's salvation, his wisdom, his blessing, then you better work hard because it's on you.

In Islam, it's the five pillars. You've got to do them. In Buddhism, it's the five noble truths. It's the eightfold path. You need to walk it. It's almost like there's this ladder from earth to heaven.

[11:06] And if you're going to get to heaven, you've got to climb up the ladder. It's on you. And if you don't make it, well, that's your fault. Christian author Tim Keller's written this.

He says, the atheists might say they get their self-image from being a good person. Performance leads to the verdict. For the Buddhists too, performance leads to the verdict.

If you are a Muslim, performance leads to the verdict. All this means that every day you are in the courtroom. Every day you are on trial.

That's the problem. That's the problem of all man-made human religion. It all hinges on you and what you do and how well you do it and how consistently you do it and for how long you do it.

But there is one religion in the global marketplace that is not that way at all. And it is Christianity. It does not hinge upon you and what you do.

[12:17] It hinges on what God, who God is and what he has done. If there's a ladder, well, he's come down the ladder and he's done everything to lift us up in his hands. Kim Keller writes, uniquely in Christianity, the verdict leads to the performance.

Jesus Christ, he releases us from the courtroom. He announces God's verdict on the last day, this day, that we are loved and we are pardoned.

For the Christian, because I am loved and accepted by God and being pardoned for my sins, that's why I want to live for God and do things for God. I live from the verdict, not for the verdict.

So that's the second strategy I would like us to think about now. The world tells us that your worth is something that has to be achieved. But Christianity announces, no, your worth is something that can be received as a gift from the hands of Jesus Christ.

And Jesus taught that all-important life lesson in the passage that Rachel just read to us in Luke chapter 10. To set the scene a few chapters earlier, Jesus began gathering his first followers.

[13:32] They were called his disciples. It just means students. In Jewish society, there was a great deal of prestige associated with being the student or the disciple of a rabbi.

In fact, the rabbis would have the ability to handpick their disciples, usually from the best schools or the most rich and influential families. But that's not the way that Jesus went about calling his followers.

He didn't choose followers from the elites. No, he chose ordinary people, perhaps people like you and me. And before these people had done anything to show themselves as being useful to Jesus, to do anything worthy of being recipients of Jesus' attention, Jesus approached them and he invited them, come and follow me.

Come and find what life's all about. Come and follow me. Jesus invited them to join his mission to spread the good news that the kingdom of heaven was drawing near in himself. And after a period of living with Jesus and learning from Jesus, the disciples were commissioned to go and share the good news about Jesus with others. That's what happens at the start of Luke chapter 10.

[14:48] And then we jump to these verses midway through the chapter when Jesus' followers return. And they bring all their stories, all their reports of all that they've seen, all that they have done. And that's when we read in verse 17.

The 72 returned with joy saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. And Jesus said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you. but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Now naturally, the disciples coming back from their mission trip, they're full of excitement. They're filled with stories of what they've seen God doing through them. Their work has been a great success.

They have preached powerfully to crowds. They have performed in Jesus' name signs and wonders. In the name of Jesus, people who have been possessed, tormented, and abused by the spiritual forces of evil have been set free.

[15:57] If your words, my words, had that kind of power to transform people's lives, then we would be pretty excited too. We'd be writing about it all over our social media feeds. The reason why the disciples speaking in Jesus' name have so much power is because in Jesus, the God of heaven has come into this world to overthrow the powers of evil.

That's why Jesus here talks about seeing Satan fall like lightning. He's being cast down off his throne. His kingdom is crumbling. His captives, his prisoners, are being set free in the name of Jesus.

But what I want to focus on here is how Jesus responds to his disciples and how he reframes their way of thinking about life. Notice that he shifts their focus away from what they have done and their performance, what they have done, to instead think about who they belong to.

Jesus is changing the equation. Not my performance equals my worth, but no, my worth comes from whom I belong to.

Notice Jesus says, don't rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you. Instead, rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

[17:30] Don't rejoice, guys, on what you've done. rejoice that you belong to God. That's the most important thing. Because even if it had gone really badly wrong, you would still belong to God.

Jesus says to them, don't rejoice in your signs and wonders you've performed. Perhaps Jesus might say to us, don't rejoice in your last essay mark. Don't rejoice in your job title.

don't rejoice in the letters and qualifications after your name. Don't rejoice in how many goals you've scored in the last match or your golf handicap when you last played.

Don't rejoice in your good looks. Don't rejoice in how big your house is or how flashy your car is.

Don't rejoice in how many people are friends of yours on Facebook or how many people follow you on Instagram.

Abraham. Jesus wants us to see that all of these performance indicators on earth, they're not the main thing. They're not the most important thing.

[18:37] Instead he says the most important thing is your name being written in heaven. I think that means and signifies if your name is written in heaven, it means that you are a member of the family of God.

That you have a home reserved for you in heaven. It's a little bit like what happened whenever you were born into this world. Your parents when you were born they were given by the hospital a little slip of paper and they had to make an appointment to go down into town to meet the registrar and register your birth.

And when they did that your name went on the central register of births. And then they got usually I think maybe in the olden days you got to you got for free. Now we've got to pay for the privilege to

get a birth certificate.

So if you've got a birth certificate well that says well you've been born in this country, this is your family, these are your people and it opens up other things. You can get a passport and you can do all these other things.

If your name is on the central register, well you're in the family. This is your home country. Well if your name is written in heaven, well that means that that is your family too.

[19:47] That you are a member of God's family and you have a home and a place reserved for you in heaven. And Jesus wants us to understand that that fact is far more important.

Whom we belong to is far more important than anything else that we can do on this earth. Our worth, our significance, our value in life comes through knowing the God who made us and taking up our place in his great story, the unique place in his great story that he has set out for each one of us.

There's a Christian psychiatrist called Glenn Harrison who's written all about this in one of his books called The Big Eagle Trip. As a psychiatrist he reviews all the literature thinking about this phenomenon throughout the last 20, 30 years that's been trying to help people who feel bad about themselves feel better by boosting their self-esteem, by thinking more positively about themselves, by reciting more positive self-talk, work.

But Harrison points out that the studies and literature shows that it doesn't actually work or at least it certainly doesn't help the people who most need the help. And he says the reason is this, it's really hard to believe your own propaganda.

It's really hard to believe that things you're saying to yourself, I am great, I am big, I am strong, I am. It's really hard to believe that for a long time. He says we need a better story.

[21:19] Rather than a bigger, better view of ourselves that we tell ourselves, instead we need a bigger, better view of God and understand that if he loves us, if we are precious and valuable in his sight, if he has a place for us in his great story, well that's the thing that gives me worth.

That's the thing that makes my life worth living. That's the thing that will really help. Instead of telling us to love ourselves more, Jesus comes into this world and tells us that in God's sight, you are loved.

And God's love, it is not based on our performance, because based on our performance, God has every reason not to love us. There is an awful lot that is true about us which is unlovely. We might be able to hide it from other people.

We might be able to put on a good front. We might be able to filter our pictures when it goes up on social media. But God sees the real us, warts and all, when nobody else is there.

He sees what goes on in our hearts and what goes on in our, sorry, wrong place, hearts and minds. He sees it all. He knows. He knows the truth about David Nixon. It's not pretty.

[22:33] It's not lovable. But still, he chooses to love us. Not on the basis of our performance, but on the basis of his grace.

God sees us at our worst and he still sends Jesus, his son, to save us out of that mess and to clean us up. The Bible tells us in Romans chapter 5, verse 8, that God has demonstrated his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Someone has said that the cross of Jesus Christ is the pulpit of God's love. Jesus proclaims to the world, God loves you no matter what you've done, no matter what you've not done.

He made you. He loves you. He wants to save you. And everyone who responds to that, Jesus' invitation, come and follow me.

They're the ones whose names are written in heaven. The good news about having your name written in heaven is that just as your name is written in heaven, not on the basis of your performance, not on the basis of anything you've done, but that also means that it cannot be erased or removed on the basis of anything that you go on to do or fail to do.

[23:56] Do you see that? Your name has been written there in the blood, the indelible ink, the blood of Jesus Christ, and it cannot be erased.

You ever got blood on some clothes? You ever had it woken up and your nose been bleeding and it's leaked onto your pillow? Do you know how hard that is to get out? Almost impossible.

Well, your name in heaven has been written in the indelible ink of the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It can't be removed. It cannot be erased. It is safe and secure forever.

Jesus has done everything that is necessary. He has come from heaven to earth. He has gone to the cross bearing your sins. He has died and risen again to bring you back to God, to lift you up to heaven.

Again, Tim Keller has written for Christians, the verdict is in. And now I can perform on the basis of the verdict. Because God loves me and accepts me, I do not have to do things just to build up my resume.

[25:02] I do not have to do things to make me look good. I can do things for the joy of doing them. I can help people to help people, not so I can feel better about myself, not so I can fill up the emptiness.

Jesus faced the trial that should be ours so that we do not have to face any more trials. And so in Luke chapter 10, Jesus wants to save and deliver the disciples from the performance trap mindset. He wants to get their eyes off what they've done and wants them to focus and rejoice instead on whom they belong to. They don't have to prove themselves.

They don't have to justify their existence. They don't have to earn God's blessings. No, Jesus assures them and he assures us. The verdict is in.

We can be loved and accepted on the basis of what Jesus has done. That changes everything. There's no ladder to climb. There's no treadmill to have to run.

[26:10] It's done. Your worth can be received as a gift. So we started off with the film Chariots of Fire.

We thought a fair bit about Harold Abrahams and that way of thinking, that way of working, that way of thinking that worth in life it has to be achieved by the things that we do. But there is an alternative as we've gone on to see.

That alternative way of life is what we've called your worth being received as a gift. In the film, Eric Little is the personification of this second way of living.

Eric Little was not just a great athlete but he was also a Christian. He understood that his life did not depend upon his performance. Little himself went on to win the gold medal in a race he shouldn't have run that he hadn't trained for.

He went on to win gold. But that wasn't the thing that defined him in life. In fact, he gave it all up and went off to be a missionary in China and ultimately would die in a Japanese internment camp. In the film, there's this scene between Eric and his sister.

[27:22] He's telling her of his plans to give up his athletics career, which had brought him so much fame, could give him so much fortune. But give it all up and go and be a missionary to China. And his sister is trying to talk him out of it, saying, what are you thinking?

What are you doing? Eric explains, I believe that God made me for a purpose. That's China. But he also made me fast.

And when I run, I feel his pleasure. You see, Eric Little was able to just enjoy life and the gifts that God gave him in life because he knew that he was running a greater race.

That his life was part of God's bigger story. That's where his meaning was. That's where his worth came from. From the God who made him, who loved him, who saved him.

And that's the kind of life that you and I can enjoy. If we would hear his invitation, Jesus' words to us are, come and follow me. And all you have to do is say yes.

[28:26] And then you can rejoice that your name is written in heaven. Didn't get there by anything you did. And it can't be taken away by anything that you go on to do or fail to do. That's where your security and worth and value can come from.

You're here this morning, you don't know Jesus and you've never said yes to Jesus. This morning is a chance to be able to say yes to him. And maybe in a moment or two, Craig is going to come and he's going to tell us what you can do to find out more about Jesus.

If you'd like to find out more about him and his passion for your life. Not just now, but for eternity. But first let me pray. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you love us.

Thank you that you have come to deliver us from our sin, but also from just the exhausting performance trap and all of the anxiety that comes from a life lived where all depends on us.

Thank you, Lord. It's not true. It doesn't have to be that way. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you've come and you've done so much for us to show us your love. Thank you that you have prepared a place for each one of us in your great story so that we might live for you and make a difference for you in this world.

[29:38] But thank you, Lord, that our hope is that our names can be written in heaven. Thank you that it doesn't depend all on us. Thank you that it depends on you.

Thank you for the freedom that represents. And I pray that you would help each of us to leave here this morning, tasting the sweetness of that, the lies that we often hear in our heads, the things that we think when we look in the mirror.

Pray, Lord, today your voice, your words would speak louder than all that stuff, that you would set us free. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.