



## Open arms

Church of the Spirit, Kingstowne April 10, 2009

### Multimedia: Still haven't found what I'm looking for

*music recorded by U2*

**Introduction to solo:** So many people in this world still have not found what they are looking for. Sometimes I know exactly what I'm looking for, like my car keys, but I can't remember where it is, and don't know where to look. When it comes to bigger things, when it comes to the real things in life like what makes life worth living and what makes life good ... then the same problem arises. Where do you go to find the answers? Who can you go to? And can you really trust someone who says they're the man with all the answers?

### Solos: AM53

#### Catch me when I fall

#### Don't go no further

*all music recorded by Tommy Lepson*

**Welcome:** Thank you. So if you really got to find love and have somebody love you, well that's what today is all about. It seems logical to me to go looking for love in all the right places. It's just that the cross seems like an odd place to find love. 'Course there's that bumper sticker which tells you, "It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus on the cross, it was his love for you and me." It's just that the cross is hard to understand. Today is known as Good Friday. Around the world Christians will take time to remember that it was on this day, in the year 28 AD, that Jesus was tortured, beaten, nailed to a cross and left to die. Now if that's called a good day, I'd hate to consider what God calls a bad day. Yup, a lot of this is hard to understand, or is it just hard to accept?

You know, it was from the cross that Jesus said some amazing things. At one time he offered forgiveness to those who were responsible for his brutal death, and who were even then laughing at him. That could not have been easy to do. It's a good thing for me to hear that there are no limits to God's forgiveness. It reminds me I can be forgiven. It also challenges me to forgive people I don't think deserve it. And both of those are good things.

At another time, feeling the weight of the world, not figuratively but literally, truly, the weight of the world's sins on his back,

Jesus cried out quoting the Scriptures "*Why have you forsaken me?*" Even that was a good thing. Jesus was saying he knew what that felt like. I know a lot of you know it too. You have confessed there are times you've felt forsaken, alone. You get that feeling when you look at your bills, or when you get into another argument with someone close to you, or when it's the middle of the night and there's no one else to talk with, and you are being chased by fears and doubts and haunted by lost hopes and broken dreams, and you wonder if you have not been forsaken too. Why does God seem so far off at times like that? Where did he go? Even Paul, one of the fellows who helped put the Bible together, asked that question. He wrote: "*Who will rescue me?*" Who indeed? Can a thinking modern person actually believe God is there, that he listens and cares? Can it make sense to trust in a God you don't see? Well, let me offer a simple reminder ... just because at times you can not see God does not mean God is far off. God can be right near by, close and not almost as Tommy says ... Have you ever considered that the reason you can't see God very easily is you've turned away from him? God's still there, and ready to help. If only you will put aside your pride long enough to ask for help, God is never gonna let you down ... I mean, look at the cross, and you will see he's been through a lot already just to show you he'll be there for you. That cross says he'll go to hell and back again to show you that you're forgiven and free.

### Multimedia: So help me God

*music recorded by Ray Charles*

*I am lost, I've been led astray  
Once again I need your light and life to lead the way  
I know I don't deserve it but I promise it's the end  
So if you rescue me just one more time  
You'll never have to do it again  
So help me God, help me God ...  
It's the truth, I can't tell you a lie  
You're the only one whose been there each and every time.  
Now I guess it's my turn to prove myself to you  
Go ahead, ask me anything at all and  
That's what I am going to do  
So help me God, help me God  
You've been so understanding and patient with me  
It took me some time, but now I see,  
I am awake, now I have been found  
You can count on me forever more,  
I'm never going to let you down  
So help me God, help me God ...*

**Message:** Paul asks, "Who will rescue me?" His answer was simple enough. He realized he could not rescue himself. If you've ever tried it you know you can't really pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. Nice idea but unscientific. Instead it was God's plan to show you a new way. "I had tried everything and nothing helped. I was at the end of my rope." Yup, been there and tried that myself. He continues: "The answer, thank God, is that Jesus acted to set things right in this life ... God's gift is real life ... delivered by Jesus, our Master. When Christ died, he set me free to live a new life." [from Romans 6-7] You see, the cross was simply a game-changer. It changed how you can look at everything else in life. And what's amazing too ... this story of Jesus with his arms stretched out on the cross can help you experience how Jesus is reaching out to you today.

Here's how the story of that first Good Friday goes, according to the Bible:

### Reading: Mark 15:22-32

*The soldiers brought Jesus to "Skull Hill." They offered him a mild painkiller but he wouldn't take it. And they nailed him to the cross. They divided up his clothes and threw dice to see who would get them. They nailed him up at nine o'clock in the morning ... along with him, they crucified two criminals, one to his right, the other to his left. People passing along the road jeered, shaking their heads in mock lament: "You bragged that you could tear down the Temple and then rebuild it in three days—so show us your stuff! Save yourself! If you're really God's Son, come down from that cross!" The high priests, along with the religion scholars, were right there mixing it up with the rest of them, having a great time poking fun at him: "He saved others—but he can't save himself! Messiah, is he? King of Israel? Then let him climb down from that cross. We'll all become believers then!"* [The Message]

"Show your stuff, Jesus ... We'll all become believers if you'll only come down from the cross." You know if Jesus had the ability to do that, if he could have come down from the cross, well the temptation must have been great to give in to their demands, to give up the pain and to wipe the smiles off those faces. Of course the people making fun of Jesus never did believe Jesus had the power to come down from the cross once he'd been nailed there. Just like they didn't think Jesus could come back to life once he had been killed.

They didn't believe it. However, Christ Followers believe he did come back to life, and that this cross is not the end of the story. That's why we don't mourn and hold a very serious church service tonight. Instead we celebrate, because as we say each year, you can't mourn for someone who's not dead.

But do the math on this one folks. A Jesus who had the power to come back to life, had the power to come down from the cross. He could have, but he didn't. That means there was something much more powerful at work here. Get it right now, and remember that Jesus wasn't just some patsy who was

killed off by God the Father for the sake of others ... Jesus was God himself, here with us. So by not coming down from the cross God must have wanted to show us something really big indeed. No matter how sweet it would have been to show those hecklers a thing or two, Jesus wanted to show us all something more. He left his arms wide open on the cross, I think, to show us those arms would always be wide open to welcome us back again. Even if we wandered off. Even if we had made mistakes and bad choices.

That's what makes today such a good Friday. God has shown how wide he can stretch his arms. He has proven he will keep those arms open no matter what. He won't give in to hecklers and skeptics. His arms stay open. He won't lose patience, but forgives, and all the while his arms remain open. For there's simply nothing more important to God than to have you turn around, return to him, and let him take you in his arms once again.

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### Multimedia: Take me in your arms

*music recorded by Tommy Lepson, The Assassins*

Such good feelings come over me,  
Sun is shining everywhere I see  
And the future's looking bright, yes it's gonna be all right  
I was blinded but now I can see  
Since I met you, everything goes right  
No more worries, Lord I've seen the light  
No more troubles, no more fear,  
There's a reason you are here  
Take me in your arms again tonight,  
Take me from the life of loneliness  
Take me to sweet love and tenderness  
And wake me, before the morning light  
Take me in your arms again tonight  
Your sweet love and devotion, has been my guiding light  
Gives me the strength that I need  
To help me make it through the night  
And when my time is near  
I pray the good Lord will see it clear  
For you to take me in your arms just one more time  
Take me from a life of loneliness,  
Take me to sweet love and tenderness  
And wake me, before the morning light  
Take me in your arms again tonight

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So fill us with your Spirit, that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you into a closer relationship with you. Amen.