

# When God Takes Away Familiar Things

by Carter Conlon

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*The sermon emphasizes the necessity of letting go of familiar comforts to fully follow Christ and embrace His calling.*

**Duration:** 52:08

**Scripture:** Isaiah 43:18-19, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 16:21, Matthew 16:24, Matthew 17:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 3:13-14

**Topics:** "Circumstances"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the danger of becoming too familiar and comfortable in our spiritual lives. He shares a story of a pastor who relied on a candy to determine the length of his sermons, but one day found himself running out of material before the candy melted. In his desperation, the pastor cried out to God and the Holy Spirit gave him revelation, leading to a powerful move of God in the church. The pastor warns against becoming prisoners of familiarity and encourages listeners to seek fresh encounters with God rather than relying on familiar routines.

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## Transcript

This message is one of the Times Square Church pulpit series. It was recorded in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in Manhattan, New York City. Other tapes are available by writing World Challenge, P.O. Box 260, Lindale, Texas 75771, or calling 903-963-8626.

None of these messages are copyrighted, and you are welcome to make copies for free distribution to friends. It was the spirit of truth. Now, Holy Spirit, I ask you to quicken me and enable me to preach Christ, crucified and risen again.

God, I thank you for every heart, for every life that you will touch in this house today. Lord, there's not one person who's here today by chance nor by accident. You have ordained that everybody who's come into this house should hear this word today, and I thank you that your kingdom is going to advance as your word goes forth.

Lord, nobody in you, you never stand still, and nobody in your kingdom stands still. Your kingdom will advance this day, and God, we thank you for that with all of our hearts, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Matthew chapter 17, beginning at verse 1. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John, his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them, and his face

did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. Behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here.

If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. And while he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.

What an incredible scenario we have here. Peter, James, and John really taken by Jesus into this mountain apart from everybody else, and all the, perhaps the hustle and bustle of the, what was going on in the daily life at that time. And Jesus is virtually transfigured before them.

Moses and Elijah appear on that mountain and begin to talk with him. And Peter responds to this like a natural man would respond. There's something in his heart.

Peter just didn't know when to be quiet. You see that about his life all the way through the Scriptures. And rather than just listening and learning something, Peter starts blurting out and says, This is good.

It is good for us to be here. I tell you, if I was on that mountain, I might be inclined to say the same thing. Lord, this is good.

You are transfigured. You're here in your glory. Here's Moses and here's Elijah.

Hallelujah. This is good. And Peter responding like a natural man says, Hey, let's build some tents and let's stay here.

There's no need to ever leave this place. This is as close to heaven as I've ever been in my life. And as far as I'm concerned, I want to stay here.

So let's imagine that. Let's build some tents. He's talking about sacred tents, tabernacles.

So let's build them and let's live here for a while. Maybe let's not even leave until the kingdom of God comes. Why not stay here? And you see, this is the inclination of the heart of a natural man.

He says the glory of the Lord is here. There's revelation here. Moses and Elijah in another passage of Scripture, when the other gospel said we're talking to Jesus about his demise, about what was coming up in Jerusalem.

They were speaking about the sacrifice he was about to pay on Calvary. And so here's the glory of the Lord upon this mountain. There's revelation of the heart of God.

There's revelation of the holiness of God. There's revelation of the word of God. There's revelation of the plan of God.

And so Peter says, Hey, let's stay here. Let's build three tabernacles. And so he's just frothing off at the mouth.

He's speaking out of his own heart. And in verse five, the Scripture says, while he yet spake. In other words, God came and interrupted him.

While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice out of the cloud. And so Peter's still going on about what he thinks should be done, how they should build and how they should

stay there. And a voice comes out of the cloud and with reference to Jesus.

He's not talking about Peter now. He's talking about Jesus. He said, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

Hear ye him. Now, this is a word for all of us. He was saying, don't listen to Peter.

Listen to Jesus. This is my beloved son. I don't want you to listen to what this man is saying.

I want you to listen to what Jesus is saying. He was saying, in effect, don't listen to your own voice. Don't listen or don't even follow the inclination of your own heart.

Proverbs chapter three, verses five and six says it this way. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy path.

In John chapter 10, verse 27, Jesus said, My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. My sheep hear my voice, Jesus said, and they follow me. Now, following Christ means finding no sense of permanence here on this earth.

In anything that this world has to offer. There's something in the heart of natural man that wants to gravitate or grasp to a feeling or sense of permanence here in this world. It's in all of our hearts.

It's in every one of us. But the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 14, For here, that's in this world, we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. There is no place of continuance here.

They were not destined to live on that mountain. They were not going to live and relive that experience forever. The kingdom of God was about to move forward.

Moses and Elijah were going to go back into heaven. Jesus was going to look again like a natural man, even though he was the son of God. They were going to come down off of that mountain.

And the very first thing they were going to encounter was a man coming to them looking for help with a demon-possessed son. Whom the disciples could not cast the devil out of. We would like to live in certain experiences, wouldn't we? All of us, forever.

We have a tendency to find something that we like and hold tenaciously to it. And especially if it's holy. Especially if it's met a need in our life.

Especially if we really like it. We say, okay, I'm going to build a tent around myself and I'm not leaving here. I'm going to camp here until Jesus comes for me.

Hallelujah. It's so hard for the natural man to let go of the familiar. We see the illustration of Peter who's in a boat and he's in a storm with the rest of the disciples rowing across the lake.

Into the midst of that storm comes Jesus. He's walking on the water and they're all sitting in the boat. And if you can hear this, they're somewhat captivated by the familiar.

They know what a boat is. And they know that this boat will keep them from drowning, at least temporarily. They know that they can sit in it.

And in effect, it is some form of a vehicle to get them to the other side. And they're sitting and living in a place that they have learned to trust in. And there's a tendency to want to stay there for all of us.

I can see a lot of the disciples, perhaps the other 11 in the boat, Jesus was calling them to him. And many of the others, although they didn't speak with their lips and their hearts, they were saying, no, thanks. We'll row to the other side.

We'll meet you over there. But Jesus is calling them. And there was something in Peter's heart.

Yes, he spoke too often out of turn, but there was an impulsiveness in him. But there was something in his heart. He wanted Christ with all of his heart.

It's like Jesus would never leave him in a place where he would be comfortable or familiar, put his trust in familiar things. And so Jesus calls him to him and he says to him, If it be thou, bid me come. That cry, I believe, has got to be in the heart of everybody who's called by his name in this and every other generation.

That in spite of what we've become familiar with, there's always a voice that's calling us. He speaks to us on a continuous basis. Did you know the Holy Spirit never stops speaking to you? Never.

He's not confined just to speaking to you when you come to church on Sunday or Tuesday night, whenever that is. He speaks all day. He's always speaking.

He's always wooing. He's always calling. He's always wanting us to be able to more fully comprehend and appropriate the risen Christ within our lives.

He is wooing us. He is leading us until we come to the point where we're no longer holding to anything familiar in this world. The only thing that we want in our hearts is Jesus.

We want everything that he has bought for us on Calvary. We want everything that he won for us when he came out of the grave. Hallelujah.

Oh Lord, if it be thou, bid me come. It's so easy to get comfortable, isn't it? It's so easy to gravitate to the familiar. The story is told just by way of illustration of a pastor in the church.

And this is a type, I suppose, of churches all over the nation. It happens all the time. Once knew a glorious visitation of God, founded perhaps by a man or men or a woman with a great burden of the Lord.

Souls were saved. A testimony for Christ was established in a town. And then all of a sudden, what was a live relationship began to degrade into just formalism and tradition.

And folks, I'm not speaking a parable here today because if we look back in history, it's happened throughout many churches, many denominations all over the Western world. You go back into history and you find denominations like the Salvation Army and others. I'm not picking on the Salvation Army.

That's just the one that the Lord brings to mind. You remember the inception, the beginning of that church. They had a flag and on that flag, there was an insignia and the words blood and fire.

In other words, the redemption of Jesus Christ, the fire of the Holy Ghost, that's all we need. They had the power of God. They had the heart of God.

They went out and they reached out to the derelicts. So they reached out to the poor. They reached out to those who couldn't repay them just as the scripture says and brought them to their house.

And there was great joy and there was great victory. But all of a sudden, something creeps into the heart of man. People want to build a tabernacle around past experience.

And some even want to build it around what they're experiencing in the present and they're not willing to move on in God. They say, in effect, this is a vision for us. We have known here the power of God.

We've seen the presence of the Lord. So we're going to box this in and we're going to stay like this. And we're familiar with this and we're comfortable with this.

And so we don't want to move on. But my brother, my sister, the kingdom of God is always moving on. The kingdom of God never is stagnant or standing still.

And the story is told about this one pastor in that kind of a church who had, in effect, lost his zeal for God. The church was settling in and they're becoming comfortable in God. They would come to church and they could set their watch by everything that was done in the house of God.

They would come in and they would sing three hymns and then an offering would be taken, a scripture would be read. Everything just went along like clockwork. Everybody was familiar with it and everybody was happy with it.

They thought this is all we need. This is going to get us into heaven. They didn't realize that they were becoming prisoners of familiarity.

And every, this particular pastor, when it came time to preach the word, he'd have his prepared text, he'd have his notes. And then he would, to know how long to preach, he would reach into his pocket, he would take a candy out of his pocket. Same type of candy every week.

He would tuck it up inside his lip, beside his gum. And that candy would take roughly 20 to 21 minutes to melt in his mouth. And so he would preach as long as the candy lasted.

And so when the candy was done, in spite of where he was in his notes, he was done. He knew it was time to wrap it up. And everybody knew that.

So they could go home and they could put their turkeys and roast beefs and everything else in the oven. And they could set the timer because they knew that their pastor never preached beyond 20 to 21 minutes on Sunday morning. They could set their watch by it.

Everybody was happy with it. Then all of a sudden, one Sunday, he came into the pulpit. Do you realize God's not happy with this? God doesn't want us becoming entrenched in familiarity because what we think is good for us sometimes can in effect become our enemy.

Pastor stepped up to the pulpit. They had sung their three hymns. They had read their scripture.

They'd taken their offering. He got up to preach his 20 to 21 minute sermon. Reached in his pocket, took out his candy, stuck it under his lip next to his gum and began to preach.

And as he began to preach, he got through page one of his notes and then page two of his notes. He got to page three of his notes and he noticed the candy was not diminishing in size very much in his mouth. And he started to get worried.

And he thought, well, maybe somehow I just am speaking a little faster than I normally speak. I shouldn't be running out of notes this fast. And so he carried on preaching a little more.

And then finally he got to the last page of his notes. And so he finished preaching his notes and the candy was still there inside of his mouth. And he said, what am I going to do? I can't stop preaching.

You see, he was bound by familiarity. I can't stop because the candy is still there in my mouth. And he thought, maybe I've lost track of time.

Maybe I've only been 10 minutes and it's not the full 20 to 21 yet. And so in his panic, he began to panic. And in his desperation, he began to, in his heart, cry out to God.

God, I'm out of material. Lord, I don't know what to do anymore. Everything that I have prepared, everything I'm familiar with is gone.

And he began to cry out in his heart to the Lord. And as he cried out, the Holy Spirit began giving him revelation. And he began preaching from the heart of God.

And as he began preaching from the heart of God, the spirit of God moved like a fresh wind, like a fresh flame throughout the church. Once again, hearts of men and women began to be exposed. People began to see their sin.

And they got out of their seats and people began to cry out to the Lord. They hadn't been touched by God in so long. Came to the altar, repented and wept and cried out to God.

Everybody lost track of time. Nobody cared anymore about the things at home in the oven. God had come into the situation and moved in a powerful way.

When the service was over and everybody was wept out and cried out and repented out and lives had been changed, pastor went into the back room, reached up inside his mouth and realized he had stuck a button in his mouth instead of a candy. How hard it is for the natural man to let go of the familiar. Matthew chapter 16.

Matthew chapter 16. Jesus was speaking now of the moving forward of his father's plan for the saving of the lost beginning at chapter 21 or verse 21 rather. From that time forth, Jesus began.

Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go into Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised again the third day. So now he's revealing to them the plan. In other words, we're going to move forward now.

Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him saying, be it far from the Lord. This shall not be unto thee. But he turned and said unto Peter, get thee behind me, Satan.

Thou art an offense to me. For thou savest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Now, this is an incredible statement here.

He has just called Peter in the previous verses. Peter made a, finally got it right. And he said on this statement that you have made, I'm going to build my church.

The gates of hell will not prevail against it. Now, then he goes on to say, I'm going to go down to Jerusalem. I'm going to suffer many things.

I'm going to be rejected and killed and raised the third day. And Peter takes him and rebukes him. And Jesus says, get behind me, Satan.

In other words, he's saying to Peter, you're not speaking from the heart of God. You're speaking from the heart of the devil himself. It's the enemy who would not want me to go forward and fulfill the will of the father.

Now, let me, let me show you what had gotten ahold of Peter. A little later on, let me just read it to you in Matthew chapter 19, verse 27. Jesus had just finished the parable of, uh, not the parable.

He had just confronted the rich young ruler who had turned away because he was not willing to give up his, uh, his possessions. He had told the rich young ruler, if you'll forsake it all and give it to the poor and follow me, you'll have treasure in heaven. Peter again speaks up and he says, behold, we've forsaken all and followed thee.

What shall we have thereof? In other words, what's in it for us? We've forsaken it all. Help us to see why we're doing this. This is what Peter was saying.

I need a sense of permanence in my life. I need something that I can lay hold of. What Peter was saying is that we have left everything.

It has all been to follow you. We've left it all. We've left our nets.

We've left our boats. We've left our homes. We've left our future.

Everything we were familiar with. We left it behind because you called us and we knew somehow in our hearts that you were the son of God. So we left it all to follow you.

And now you talk about leaving. Now you're going to take away. Peter was speaking for every man when he was saying, hasn't there been enough change in my life already? And now you're talking about taking away all that is familiar to me.

Once again, and Peter comes to the Lord in verse 22. He says, no, be it far from the Lord. This shall not be unto thee.

But in effect, what Peter was really saying, what was really in his heart is that he was saying, this shall not be done unto me. Lord, I am comfortable now with you. I was, I was troubled when I first started to follow you.

It's hard to leave nets. It's hard to leave family. It's hard to leave income.

It's hard to leave future. But I've had you. And now I'm familiar with you.

And we have walked together. And I've, I know that with you that I'm going to be provided for. I've seen your miracles.

I know you have power. I know you are the son of God. And I've become very familiar with you and being in your presence.

And now you say you're going to go away. Now you say you're going to leave me. There's been enough change.

No, no, you can't do this to me. You can't take away what I've become familiar with. But then in verse 24, Jesus said to the disciples, right after rebuking Peter for this, he said, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Whosoever will save his life shall lose it. And whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. In other words, Jesus is saying, if you're going to follow me, it's going to involve self-denial and a life of continuous change.

You have no permanent home on this earth. And don't gravitate to the familiar. Because when you walk with me, what did Jesus say to Nicodemus? As the wind blows from one direction, it goes to another.

You don't know where it's coming from or where it's going. So is everyone who is born of the spirit. It's mine.

It's going to be my leading. It's going to be God's plan unfolding through your life. Sometimes you will understand it.

And sometimes you won't understand it. Don't gravitate to the familiar. In John 16, Jesus said to his disciples, he said, because I've said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

Change is always so hard. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away.

In other words, Jesus is saying, it's better for you that I go away. For if I go not away, the comforter will not come unto you. But if I depart, I will send him unto you.

You see, the desire for and holding on to the familiar will often rob God's people of his intended plan and purpose for their lives. They didn't understand. All they could see is the here and now.

But Jesus was talking about the future. He saw something that they couldn't yet see. Whole churches gravitating to the familiar have lost the presence and the power of God.

David says it this way. Listen to me carefully in Psalm 41 verse 9. He says, yea, my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread. In other words, he was in apparent agreement with the ways of my heart.

And anything that we gravitate to and begin to put our trust in, in reality becomes a familiar friend. It can be anything. It could be even good things that we begin to trust in apart from Christ.

He said, my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. In other words, while professing to be my friend, he has proven in reality to be my enemy. And folks, I want to tell you something.

Familiarity is an enemy to those who would want to serve God. Now that's a hard thing sometimes for people to swallow because it's so ingrained in us to build tabernacles where we have found the presence

of God. It's so ingrained in us not to want to go back, not to want to change, not to become familiar even with God to the point where we say, Lord, I don't want this change in my life.

I don't want you to do that. I want things to remain the same until you come for me. The desire for familiarity robs us of intimacy with and trust in Christ and makes us absolute slaves to our surroundings.

Now, familiarity is defined as a sense of permanence based on those things which we have become familiar with around us. In other words, our whole sense of permanence, our sense of trust, our sense of who we are, our sense of who God is, our sense of where we're going shifts from a relationship with Christ that we can't see with the natural eye to those things that we have begun to trust in and can't see with the natural eye all around us. When we place our trust in familiarity, it turns passionate callings of Christ into ministry jobs.

Folks, I've seen this over and over again through the church and it's been the prayer of my heart, God, don't ever let that happen to me. Don't ever let it happen. We're a passionate calling of Christ to preach the gospel and win the lost, to see the kingdom of God advance, turns into a ministry job.

Oh, folks, I know right away when a preacher gets up, if I even just hear it on a tape or anybody that ministers in any capacity, I know right away when a passionate calling has turned into a ministry job. Familiarity has come in and there's a comfort zone that's built around that calling and coming into that familiarity with it, it becomes our enemy and turns a passionate ministry calling into a simple ministry job. Familiarity causes a person not to be able to concentrate on worshipping God when he comes into God's house and something is different.

I want you to hear me clearly. He comes into God's house and something is different and he's not able to worship God because of it. You see, he doesn't realize or she doesn't realize that he has begun to put his trust in familiar things and he has shifted his trust from Christ.

So what will God do? He will come and take away the familiar things so that once again, we will have to get our eyes back on him. People come into the house of the Lord and there's one little change somewhere. How come he's not up there? How come he is up there? How come we're singing 15 minutes longer than we usually do? How come we're singing five minutes shorter than we usually do? How come Pastor Carter's preaching? Everybody knows that the guy that preaches at 10 preaches at three.

I came here to hear Pastor David and now I can't even enter into the word. I'm so troubled in my spirit How come his preaching is so long? How come it's so short? And you know when you're really in trouble is when you come into the house of God and you can't worship because somebody's sitting in your seat. Familiarity.

You have shifted your trust from Christ. The whole focus is shifting and you don't even know it. God knows when you've begun setting your affections and gaining security from people, from places or things.

And because he loves you, listen to me carefully, when you least expect it, he'll come along and slip a button in your mouth. Now Peter didn't realize that Jesus had to keep him from becoming ensnared by his love for the familiar. Peter could only see the now but Jesus could see the future.

Peter was saying, oh, this can't be. We've left it all and now you're talking about going away. You're going to change some things.

You see, there's a continuous change. God doesn't want us putting our focus on people. He doesn't want us putting our focus on places.

Our focus and trust is not to be on things. Folks, if that were the case, then let's say, for example, that some kind of a calamity hit New York City and your whole focus is Times Square Church. Now it's good.

We thank God we can come together. We thank God we can worship together. We thank God we can fellowship together in this house.

It's wonderful when brethren come together in unity. But let's say something happened and transportation was shut down and you couldn't get here anymore. Let's say something happened.

It became dangerous to go in the streets of New York to come. And for a season, perhaps even forever, we couldn't meet here anymore unless God somehow miraculously opened the door. If your trust is in people, where are you going to be? If your trust is in places, what's going to happen to you? Your trust has got to be in Christ.

That's why David could say in Psalm 46, though the waves come up and crash on the shore, though the mountains fall into the midst of the sea, I will not be afraid. David said, my heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah, Lamb of God. Hallelujah. Peter could just see the now.

And sometimes when change comes into our lives, we find it so hard to cope with that change. We feel almost like the writer of Psalm 22 when Jesus quoted and said, Oh God, God, why have you forsaken me? I so trusted in you. You can feel the gut crying.

Peter, you can't leave. We've left everything to follow you. And now you can't leave us.

You can't. But you see, the kingdom of God was moving on. The kingdom of God was advancing.

Peter could just see the fact that he had before him a visible, tangible Jesus. And he said, I've got what I've got. I like and I'm not willing to let it go.

I'm not willing that you should, you should remove your presence from me. But Jesus was saying to them, you don't understand. If I don't go, then the Holy Ghost won't come.

There's something greater coming for you, Peter. I'm not going to be just a savior that you can see with your natural eye. But in effect, he was saying this.

I'm going to be a savior that's going to come. And Peter, I'm going to live in you. I'm going to dwell with inside of you.

Something much greater than you ever could have comprehended how Peter would have been robbed had he gravitated to the familiar. Can you understand what the Holy Spirit is saying today? If he would have gravitated to what he could see, if he would have held to that and not been willing to let it go, how he would have been robbed of the presence of God. He could just see the now.

But Jesus could see Acts chapter 2 and verse 4 when they were all gathered together in that room and suddenly a rushing mighty wind came into that room. They were cloven tongues sat upon each of them.

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

Jesus could see Acts chapter 2 verse 14 that says, Peter standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice. He could see timid, fearful Peter afraid of change, filled with the Holy Ghost. The Comforter had come.

This is the end of side one. You may now turn the tape over to side two. He never learned everything he'd ever heard coming back, living water now coming out of his inward parts.

He could see Peter preaching under there. Peter preaching. They heard him speak in other tongues.

He could see him standing, speaking under the anointing of the Holy Ghost. Giving a marvelous convicting sermon. And he saw 3,000 souls added to the church of Jesus Christ that particular day.

So resistant to change sometimes, but the resistance to change is what kills the testimony of Jesus Christ in many believers lives. I'll go to John chapter 21, please with me. John chapter 21.

Yeah, I'm on my last page and there's a half an hour left. John chapter 21. Jesus has risen from the dead.

He's gone away into heaven. And even as of yet, Simon Peter still doesn't fully comprehend what's happening. I can feel in him.

There's a reeling inside. Having lost the familiar. God, where do I go from here? What do I do? He's lost.

He's a man that's operated in the realm of the familiar. But God, because he loves us, will take that away from us. I remember just for a moment.

I remember when I was. Just a young preacher. I remember the.

I was raised in a small town. I lived in the same house for the first 13 years of my life. And then for the next five or so, lived in another house, not too far away.

So I was not used to very much change in my life. And then I remember. When I when I got saved and the Lord began to call me into ministry, the deep resistance that was in me to change because I was the type of person that liked to be in the same place.

Liked to I liked an orderly day. I functioned well under the structure that was provided in a police environment. Really enjoyed my work.

I'd been there for about 12 years. And we had bought a farm. My wife and I, we lived in that house for 12 years.

And as far as I was concerned, I could live here and die here. There's no need to move. My neighbor used to say, if a gopher finds a good hole, why should he ever move from it? Why should he look for another? And that's that's sort of French Canadian farm wisdom.

And then I remember. When I left the police force and began to preach full time, we had a very, very nice house in the country. And that became my security.

I thought what was paid for. And I thought, well, if anything happens, this doesn't work out. I had a little bit of money in the bank.

I had a very nice house. And I thought, well, at least I have capital to start over again. And to do some things.

And then I remember just before going to Eastern Canada to preach the Holy Spirit. It's a long story. I won't get into it all.

But he put on my heart to give away the money we had in the bank. And it was so burdened me that I shared with my wife. And she said, if it's the Lord, then you have to do it.

And so I went and I gave it away. And then we went and preached in Eastern Canada. We traveled together and saw some marvelous services.

God really moved in a very powerful way. Then I came back from Eastern Canada to what I thought would be my house. There was nothing left.

It had burned down while we were gone right to the ground. As a matter of fact, some of the firemen said they'd never seen a fire like that in their whole life. There was virtually nothing salvageable, nothing.

Everything was gone. Absolutely everything was gone. We didn't salvage a thing out of it.

And I remember standing there looking at the ashes of what used to be my house and security and just a sense of who you are. And I looked at it. There was we lost everything, pictures, everything.

It was all gone, closed, nothing. We had nothing left. I remember looking at it and the Holy Spirit at one point speaking to my heart and saying, on this earth, you will never again have a permanent dwelling.

There's never going to be anything to look back to. It's all gone. Take a good look at it.

It's gone. It's gone. You're going to live for me and I'm going to lead you for the rest of your life.

Folks, familiarity can become our enemy. When we hold to things that we see as our security, sometimes that will rob us of what God wants to do in our lives. That can include family.

It can include employment, can include even a sense of self-worth. It can include a future ambition. It can be all types of things that we hold to.

And because we hold to them and because they're offering us security, we cannot grow in the things of God. We can only begin to grow when we're willing to let them all go. And if we're not willing to let them go, sometimes God and his love will come in and take them away.

And he takes them away because he loves us, not because he's angry with us. You get a man here today who's, maybe there's a man here today who said, I've been serving the Lord. I've been living for God.

I had a good job. I had a career. I had a business.

I had a corporation that was advancing. And all of a sudden it's gone. It's just taken away.

God, why is this happening to me? Sometimes it's just a failure to understand that, sir, that you were putting your trust, you'd become familiar with something. You'd, you'd, you'd gripped it to your heart. Now I'm not talking just inside the church, but things outside the church too as well that we gravitate to.

And God and his love, if we're, if we're holding to something with one hand and with the other one reaching out to God and saying, Lord, I want you. I want your heart. And we really are sincere.

God sees what we have in the other hand. He says, if you want me, I'm going to have to pry that thing out of your hand. They're going to have to take it away from you.

I'm going to have to change some things around you. We serve a God who will oftentimes remove from us familiar things so that we will begin to seek him with all of our hearts. And in John chapter 21, verse three, Simon Peter said to them, I go fishing.

Peter's going back now to what was familiar to him. Jesus is gone. I, I, as of yet, don't fully understand his plan for my life.

And so I'm going to go back to what I know. I'm going to go back to, to fishing. And so the other disciples said, we go also with thee.

They went forth and entered into a ship immediately. And all that night, they caught nothing. You know, folks, there is no life.

There's no abundance. There's no fulfillment. When we gravitate to the familiar, there is no life there.

And after fishing all night, it says, but when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then said Jesus unto them, children, have you any meat? In other words, have you found anything there? Have you found the abundance you're looking for? They answered him. No, he said unto them, cast the net on the right side of the ship and ye shall find.

What did God the father say when they were on the Mount of Transfiguration? This is my beloved son. Hear him. In other words, listen to his voice.

Jesus said, draw nigh to me and I'll draw nigh unto you. Draw nigh to me and you will find what you're looking for. Cast it out on the right side of the ship and you will find.

And I really believe at this point, there was something began to beat in the heart of John, the disciple. I don't think Peter at this point understood what was going on, but John, because he loved, he was there. Peter, James and John were on the mountain.

I think the words maybe came back. This is my beloved son. Hear him.

And John had such a love for Jesus. He describes himself as the disciple that Jesus loved. And all of a sudden, his heart is beating and he's thinking, could it be? Could it be? Could it be? They cast the net on the right side of the boat and there's so many fish come up in the net that there was such a multitude.

They couldn't even draw the net in. They fished all night. They caught nothing.

They knew there were no fish there. And finally, the revelation that came to John, he shouts it out. It's the Lord.

It's the Lord. Hallelujah. And Peter jumps into the lake.

He cast. He didn't have time to wait for the boat and cast himself into the sea and came onto land. And here was Jesus on the land.

And he said, bring up the fish that you've caught. Come and dine that under the disciples dared to ask him who art thou knowing that it was the Lord. And now in verse 15, it says, when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon, Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? And Jesus is now, I believe, pointing to all the familiar things that Peter has in times past placed his trust in.

He's pointing to the boats. He's pointing to the nets. He's pointing to the fish.

He's pointing to his friends. He says, Peter, do you love me more than these? And I believe with all my heart, that's a question that the Holy Spirit would ask everybody who's in this sanctuary to hear this word today. Do you love me more than these? Do you love me more than your circumstances, your surroundings? Do you love me more than your friends? Do you love me more than your occupation? Do you love me more than the service that you come to? Do you love me more than all the religious exterior trappings that are all around you? I want to know, do you love me? This is what Jesus is saying to the church.

Do you love me? Am I the single focus of your affection? Am I the single focus of your attention? Can I take away, Peter, the things? Can I take your boat away? Can I take your friends away? You see, the church was going to go in all different directions. And Peter was saying, he was saying to Peter, can I take your friends away? Can I take your nets away? Can I take your sense of security away? The things you become familiar with, can I take it all away, Peter, because I've got to work to do through your life and I can't do it unless you love me more than all of these things around you. If you don't, Peter, you're just going to be a man in a boat with a testimony about the past.

That's all you're going to be talking to anybody who'll listen about what it used to be like with Jesus. But if you're willing to forsake these things, if you're willing to let me take them away, if you will turn away from the familiar, Peter, then you're going to have a living relationship. You're going to have a living testimony, not just for a day, not just for a week or a month, but for the rest of your life, Peter, until I come for you.

You're going to have a living testimony. He goes on and he says to Peter, do you love me? And he says it again a second time. And then the third time he says, do you love me? He says, Lord, you know that I love you.

And then he goes on. He says, when you were young, you girded yourself and went where you wanted to go. In other words, Peter, you were a man who was governed by familiarity.

Every morning at the same time you got up, you did the same thing. You put on your clothes, you went down, you did your job, you work. Nobody would get in your way.

Nobody would try to stop you. You had your life totally in control. And perhaps he's one of those persons.

If the littlest thing went wrong, he would totally fly off the handle. And Peter says, now I'm going to change. Jesus said to Peter, Peter, things are going to change if you love me with all of your heart.

As you're growing older, when you shall be old, you're going to stretch forth your hands and somebody else is going to guide you. Somebody else is going to gird you and somebody else is going to carry you into a place where you would not go. Then he said to him these simple words.

He said, Peter, follow me. In other words, you're not going to be in control of your life anymore if you're going to follow me and love me. Things are going to change.

And Peter, they're going to change on a continuous basis. But Peter, I don't want you putting your focus on anything around you anymore. No more boats, no more nets, no more friends, no more circumstances, no more situations and surroundings.

I want you to focus on me, Peter. I want you to love me with all your heart, your mind, your soul and your strength. And my life will be in you and my life will flow through you.

And you'll be a living testimony unto me. Now turn with me very quickly to Revelation chapter two. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Revelation chapter two. Jesus speaks to a church called Ephesus.

I would have to call this a church that had been captivated by familiarity. In Revelation chapter two, verse two, he says, I know your works, your labor, your patience, how you cannot bear them which are evil and has tried them which say they are apostles and are not and you found them liars. So here's a working church, a laboring church, a patient church, a church that loves truth and hates evil.

The church is not deceived by the lies of false prophets and teachers. They have gravitated to the truth. In verse three, he says, you've born.

In other words, you have, you have, you have walked with me. You have patience and for my namesake, you have labored and you have not fainted. Here's a church that's going on.

They have, they have done the work of God. It has been in the, it's been in the name of Christ and they have not fainted in that work. He says, nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love.

Oh, folks, all of the churches throughout the years that substituted the building, the program, the people, the church for Jesus. In other words, he was saying, now, listen to this carefully. Here's a working church, a hardworking church doing all the right things.

But he said, you've left your first love. And then he goes on in verse five to show the consequences of that. He said, remember from where you've fallen and repent and do the first works.

He said, or else I'll come to thee quickly and I'll remove your candlestick out of his place. Except you repent. In other words, it will all be wrote, it will all be ministry by job, it will be out of obligation, not out of love.

There's a burning. Remember the men by Emmaus Way? Jesus approached them and walked with them and their eyes were opened when they sat at the table and said, Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked with us by the way? What begins to happen when there's a substitution of things for Christ and familiar things for Christ? As we come to the house of the Lord, there's no more burning when the word of God is preached. No more deep searching of the word of God, no more discernment, no more love for Jesus.

And what used to be a living, loving relationship becomes a whole bunch of people just in a boat, talking about what it used to be like to anybody who will listen to them. But as the apostle Paul says, I am persuaded of better things of you, beloved. God is speaking to us and calling us.

Paul says in second Corinthians chapter three, verse 18, we are changed into the same image. That's the image of Jesus from glory to glory. Even as by the spirit of the Lord, we are changed.

Not to ask a question today, are you reluctant to change? The first sign of spiritual death beginning to creep in is a reluctance to change. It's when the man or woman of God says, I have gone far enough. I'm on the mountain.

I have Jesus. I have a revelation of him. I understand the prophets, Moses and Elijah.

Their word is opened up to me. I understand revelation. I'm building my tent here and I'm staying here until God comes for me.

Have you been captivated by the familiar? Do you need to come back to your first love? Have you resented God or even others for changes that he has allowed in your life because he loves you? Now there are people here today that I believe this is hitting you like a revelation from heaven itself. You've come into this house and you have resented God and even blamed him for taking things out of your life. In some cases, there have been people taken out of your life.

In some cases, because you began to put somebody above him and he knew it. And he had to take that person out of your life. In other cases, there have been a career that you cherished and somehow you thought you could fit God into that career.

And you became familiar with God because of your pursuit of something else. And all of a sudden, it's gone. You walk in one day and they just tell you, you're fired.

You're dismissed. We've replaced you. And you've walked out blaming God.

When all along, it's been his hand of love that's been reaching out to you, taking away the familiar. And when the familiar is taken away, what does it do? It causes us to seek God. When Jesus was taken away from the people and after he rose from the dead, he appeared to them and then he left.

Where did they go? Into the upper room. And they began to seek God. And when they began to seek him, that's when the Holy Ghost came.

They went into that place and said, Lord, I don't fully understand what you're doing. But God, we somehow know you're doing it. And so we yield our lives as living vessels for you.

We invite you to come and fill us. God, there's here that he has taken away businesses. He has taken away.

And there's even some here today because there have been even changes in the church. Come in and say, I can't worship in a place where there's always change. Well, you're in big trouble, folks, if that's the case.

You are gravitating to the familiar. And Jesus is saying, I want you to get your eyes off of these things. And I want you to get your eyes on me.

That's the reason why we're here. Are you fearful of the future? There are many, many people here today. Some, not many, but there are some who are fearful of the future.

You're fearful that things familiar to you are going to change. And folks, let me tell you, unreservedly, they are going to change. All of society is going to change.

Folks, we could wake up Monday morning, the stock market would have collapsed, and everything is going to change. I'm not saying that's going to happen. Don't misunderstand me.

But it just takes one thing to change everything. Are you fearful of the future? And folks, as long as we're looking to things around us to make us feel secure, we're going to have that fear of the future. But if you will put your future in the hands of Jesus today, then you have no need to be fearful at all.

That songwriter said, I know who holds tomorrow. And many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand, but I know who holds tomorrow. And I know, praise God, I know who holds my hand.

Hallelujah. Would you stand with me please? Hallelujah, hallelujah. I'd like to open this altar this afternoon for those who would say, Pastor, the Holy Spirit has spoken in my heart today, and I am reluctant to change.

But I want to have that ability. I want to have that desire to give my all for Jesus. Everything that I have and am, I want to give it for Him and for His purposes that He could use my life.

I don't want to be governed by the familiar anymore. I don't want to be thrown when things around me begin to change. There are some others who would have to come to this altar today and say, Pastor, I have resented God because of changes that have come into my life.

The Holy Spirit spoke that to my heart to share with some that are here today. I've resented God. I've resented people for changes that have come and things that I don't like and don't agree with.

But these have been allowed into your life because He loves you. And would you come and acknowledge that today? Would you come and say, Lord, your ways are higher than my ways. Your thoughts are higher than my thoughts.

Lord, please forgive me for the foolishness of my heart today. God, I thank you that when I put my life into your hands, that you're going to keep me, you're going to take me home. I'd like those who are fearful of the future, would you come? And would you place your future in the hands of God? And if He changes things, would you accept those changes? And let Him do what He wants to do.

He doesn't do anything in our lives but for the better. I know my thoughts towards you, He said to the prophet, thoughts for good and not for evil. I think to bless you and not to curse you, to draw you and not to push you away.

This is the heart of God for His people. If He has spoken to your heart today, would you slip out wherever you are? We're going to pray together. And I believe we can shout together, those who come to this altar, because we would know today and have that assurance, that release, that God is in absolute control of our lives and we can trust Him.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

I'd like you to pray with me. Those who have responded today to this altar call, Lord Jesus, forgive me for my reluctance to change. For being captivated by the familiar and resenting even the changes that You have brought into my life.

Because I fear for the future, this is evidence that I am not perfected in Your love. I want to come back to my first love. I thank You for loving me and never letting me go.

Even when my heart began to be captivated, You saw it and because You loved me, You took away from me all things. And Lord, I invite You today to take away any other things that keep my heart from You. Thank You, Lord, that You will do this because You love me.

I love You, Jesus. I love You with all my heart. I want to live for You, to serve You.

I want whatever You have for me. I want Your best for me. Even if I don't understand it, I ask You to give me this for my life and make my life a living testimony for You.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. This is the conclusion of the tape.

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