

# Dead Flies and Litte Foxes

by Don Wilkerson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of addressing small, seemingly insignificant things in our character and personality that can lead to bigger problems if left unchecked.*

**Duration:** 54:58

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of setting our hope fully on the grace that will be given to us when Jesus Christ is revealed. The reason for removing the dead flies and overtaking the little foxes in our lives is so that we can run the race set before us with patience and endurance. The speaker urges listeners to set aside every weight and sin that easily entangles us, as we are entering the last hours and lap of the race. The sermon also references Isaiah's description of those who have encountered the Lord, who come with joyful shouting and everlasting joy upon their heads. The speaker concludes by highlighting the need for a sweet spirit and refers to the account of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24.

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## Transcript

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None of these messages are copyrighted, and you are welcome to make copies for free distribution to your friends. Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon, chapter 2. You may find the pages are held together, you know, because that's for many Christians that's not a frequently used book of the Bible, so you might find the pages sticking together.

Page 828 in my Bible, if that helps you any. The Song of Solomon, in chapter 2, there's a one verse here, then I want you to go to another verse. Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 15, it says, take us the foxes.

I believe in the new American standard, it says, catch the foxes. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vine, for our vines have tender grapes. Read it again.

Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes. Now turn left and go to Ecclesiastes, chapter 10, in verse 1. Chapter 10, in verse 1, it says, dead flies cause the ointment of

the apothecary, or perfume, to send forth a stinking savor or odor. So doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor.

I want to talk to you tonight, obviously you'll see from these verses where I choose my title, I want to talk to you about dead flies and little foxes. Dead flies and little foxes. I'm sure you will agree with me that many a man or woman of God have been hindered in their walk of righteousness and walk in holiness.

They have been hindered and they have been in hindrance to others because of dead flies and little foxes. You see, dead flies and little foxes are types of little things in our character and personality, really in our character, that may appear insignificant or even often go unnoticed by us, but they are detrimental to a godly testimony. Titus, the second chapter in the ninth verse, it says this, urge bond slaves, and spiritually speaking we are a bond slave to Jesus Christ, and he says urge bond slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, and we're to be subject to our master in everything.

Now the more we walk with the Lord and the closer we're drawn to him and to his holiness, the more he begins to point his finger at things or ways in which we are not being subject to the master. And yes, even the seemingly smaller or little things, which may be at one time, you know, there was so many other areas in your life that needed to be taken care of that those went unnoticed, but then God begins to get down to nitty-gritty. And these smaller things, which in comparison with larger sins that you may have already conquered, these little things often go unnoticed or neglected.

You see, we're trained in righteousness to watch for the more hideous sins and vices, and we get alarmed at the appearance of more deadly sins. And when our attention is given to dealing with lions and serpents and dragons, we're often blind to lesser weaknesses, which also, if they're not destroyed, can in themselves be harmful, or they can open the door to larger sins returning back into our life. Now the Scriptures that I used to illustrate this tonight, you'll see that it illustrates this often overlooked matter or truth.

And it says, as we read, as dead flies can spoil a very expensive ointment, or a little fox can ruin a goodly vine, so there are certain things in our lives that are destructive to our Christian character. Now, for example, there is the first of all, or the second Scripture I read to you, was the analogy of dead flies in the apothecary or perfume. Now, oil in Bible times, and when it talks about perfume, it's talking about an oil, and oil in Bible times was very, very valuable as it is today.

In fact, oil back then was one of the most important household commodities. And in addition to the house being lit by it, oil was used as a cosmetic to anoint the body, or it was used for medical purposes. Also kings were anointed when they went before their great festivals, they were anointed with oil.

Priests were anointed with oil in religious offerings. Olive oil was taken internally as a medicine for the relief of gastric pains, or in other words, oil was the roll aids of our day, or of its day. It was also used for burns and for cuts and abrasions.

And in fact, it was so valuable that it was used in trading and in bartering, and thus it was as good as money. And for a woman to discover a dead fly in her oil, and for whatever purpose she was going to use it, be it outwardly in the body or internally or for other purposes, for a woman to discover a dead fly in it, was something worse than if you would discover a dead fly in your soup. Now Solomon, in using this analogy, refers to a person who does something, or he says something stupid, or he's out of character.

In other words, normally this is a person who has a reputation for using their head, of having wisdom, and of honor. But occasionally they do something stupid, and he says a little folly is a great blemish to him that has a reputation for wisdom and honor. And he said it's like having a little dead fly in your perfume.

And then in the Songs of Solomon, the first scripture I read to you is a similar analogy, where it says take out the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes. Now the husbandmen of the vineyard regarded the little fox as his greatest enemy. Those little creatures, they would build little houses, they would actually dig holes and build their houses near the vines, and then they would watch from that vantage point and then sneak out and exercise their mischief, and they would live off of honey, they'd live off of fruits, and they'd live off of the grapes of the vine.

And the fox was so quick, so cunning, he was so tenacious, it was almost impossible to secure or build a defense against him, except to take him. The scripture says take him, or catch him as it were, and you either got to trap him or kill him, whatever the case might be. And here again is the same application of truth as with the dead flies.

We're talking about that there's these little things, these little things in our lives that can destroy us. But in the case of the little fox, it's a little bit different because here it's a challenge to us, that we need to mortify or die to our sinful appetites and passions, which can be like foxes, little foxes, and if you don't take care of it when it's small, it'll get bigger and a fox will grow up. And then you have a real problems on your hand.

And so tonight I want to address myself to three specific dead flies or little foxes that can give the perfume of our character a bad odor, a bad smell, or eat away the fruit of our branches, which grow out of the true vine, which is Jesus Christ. Now I want to also say this, that I realize that some of you may feel that you've already, you say, Brother Don, please have mercy on me. Brother Bob, Sunday morning and Pastor Dave, Sunday night, we were hit with two, you know, two strong messages.

And I realize that some of you may feel that you're not ready to deal with the dead flies or little foxes because you still have major sins that you're tackling or you're entangled with. But let me tell you something, our so-called little sins originate from the same corrupt heart as the so-called major league sins. And if you're wanting to clean up all of your life, why not clean the whole house? Now after all, if you invite guests to your house, they may not know that you've got some major league sins.

They may not know that you've got some skeletons in the closet. They may not know that you have a vase like Pastor Bob talked about Sunday morning. They may not know that.

But they'll soon notice if there's any dead flies laying around. Yeah, because you know, they'll smell and you'll smell and, you know, those little things that kind of turn us off or turn, you know, people turn away from us. And so the Lord wants to clean out any impurity or any and all sin which the Holy Spirit and the Word of God reveals to us.

And if you've dealt already with some major things, it's time maybe to get on to some other things. Or if you're still dealing with some major things, then take, even take care of some of the little things because then God will take you on from there and clean up everything else. So sometimes God will begin with a major and get down with a little and sometimes it starts with a little and he'll get to the major.

But he wants to get to it all. 1 John 1:9 says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just or righteous to forgive us our sins and what? To cleanse us from all, A-W-L, all unrighteousness. A-W-L, whatever, you

know what it is.

What did I say? It was just a little thing anyhow. I was just a little mistake. You know, you know the problem with preaching these messages is that, you know, the Holy Spirit makes us deal with our own lives as well.

And I've had to, you know, I may share with you a little bit later. Ezekiel 36 25 says, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.

Praise the Lord. Psalms 19 12 says, who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. And so tonight I want to talk about three of them.

And by the way, I must tell you, this is a very, very practical message tonight and it may not fit all of you, but it'll fit some of you. And I just, the Lord laid it on my heart to share it. One of the first dead flies I want to talk about is slothfulness.

According to the dictionary, slothful is defined as such. It is a disinclination. And if you don't know what that means, that means a dislike, a distaste to work or to exert oneself.

In biblical terms, it is somebody who is either spiritually or morally and or physically lazy. The Bible also terms, it calls that person a sluggard. Now 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 11, don't turn there, we're going to turn to it later, but there's an interesting verse here and we're going to go back and look at some of the other verses surrounding it a little bit later.

Paul says this, for we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, a disorderly life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now the worst slothfulness is spiritual laziness or an undisciplined spiritual life. You know, the Lord showed me something, that there is a danger for some of you in coming to the Times Square Church.

It's a danger of sleeping during the harvest. In Proverbs 10 5, it says this, he who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully. You see, there is a danger in so delighting and so depending on the blessings of anointed worship, or of his holy presence, or of the preaching and teaching of the pure Word.

There is a danger that we come to the place where we proudly proclaim, oh my, come to my church, God is blessing and you should hear the Word that's preached and God is moving in a marvelous way. The danger is that you become so dependent upon that, that you do not seek the Lord privately and have an undisciplined life in your personal devotions. It's possible to be publicly rich and privately poor.

Let me say that again, it's possible to be publicly rich. You say, well bless God, everything's all right, I'll run down to church because God will feed me there. Well, yes, praise God, but you can be publicly rich and privately poor and you can live off of the pastor's feeding and be undisciplined or lazy in your personal life and your relationship with the Lord.

It says, but he who sleeps in the harvest is a son who acts shamefully. Only a fool claps his hands when he sees the harvest, but doesn't dig in and pick it up and take it for himself and make personal application and take it home with him. You see, it takes work, it takes discipline, it takes determination, it takes dedication to enter into our spiritual inheritance.

Proverbs 20 and 13 says, do not love sleep or you will grow poor. Stay awake and you will have food to spare. Paul had to address in Hebrews chapter 6, he says, but beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you.

And when he said better things, he was referring earlier in the chapter to people, to some of the Christians who were not pressing on into maturity. He said, you're going back, you're repenting over and over again. It's almost as if he would say, you're going to the altar over and over again for the same things all the time.

You're still laying the first works of repentance. You've not gone on. And in fact, he says, some of you have fallen away.

But Paul says, but we're convinced of better things than that concerning you and things that accompany salvation. And we desire that each of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end. That you may not be sluggards, that you may not be sluggish or lazy, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise.

You see, if you want a victorious overcoming life in Christ, then sluggards and lazy people need not apply. Need not apply. It's not going to happen to you.

You see, everybody wants to harvest, but no one wants to plow. Now, let me take it a step further. Slothfulness and spiritual things is often reflected in the natural or the physical realm.

Now, there are some people who are hard workers with their hands. They're very disciplined when it comes to physical work. They, in fact, they're workaholics.

But they neglect their spiritual life. And if you're that type of a person, listen, the devil will find business for you. He'll find things for you to do all the time.

To keep you busy, to keep you away from the discipline of a prayer and devotions and reading God's Word. But that's not what I want to talk about. There are others who will use any excuse to get out of physical work in order to do spiritual work or church work that's not physical.

And I've seen too many Christians use the excuse that they're called to do God's work as a cop-out or excuse or cover-up for an unwillingness to do physical or secular work. I remember in our household, we were, we were the five of us in the family, and after the mealtime, it was our duty. We took turns doing the dishes and other household chores.

But one of the things we always had to do was do the dishes. And I remember when my mother would remind me, and she'd say, Don, it's your time to do dishes. I'd say, oh, Mom, Mom, I got to go pray.

Mom, I haven't read the Word yet. And my mother, bless her heart, she had her own interpretation of the Scriptures. She said, Go wash and pray.

Go mow the lawn and pray. Go dry the dishes and pray. Ecclesiastes 10 18 says, Through indolence, or again, slothfulness, the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks.

By the way, some of you wives can thank me for this. I know husbands who will use the Lord's work as an excuse for not taking care of neglected things around the house and thereby cause the wife a lot of hardship. Any wives want to say amen? I could go deeper there, but I'm just gonna, gotta move on.

But you know, there's another problem. As I said, I'm getting down to some practical things tonight. There's another problem that I've seen in the body of Christ, and that's people who want to live by faith in order not to do physical or secular work.

Now I want to say something that I think needs to be said, and I hope I'm not misunderstood, because some people are called to leave secular jobs and step out in faith. There is a genuine call of faith, of stepping out in faith, and I've seen those who have gone into the mission field, they've gone into the ministry, and they felt the Lord wanted them to move out and to trust Him for their finances, and I've seen God marvelously undertake. I've seen it.

I know that that is of God, that there is that kind of thing. But then there are those who step out presumptuously and freeload on the body of Christ. And I challenge you, if you're considering leaving your job, or you've left your job, or you're not looking for a job, I challenge you to examine your motive.

The Bible says try the spirits to see if they be of God, because some of those spirits can be lazy spirits that are telling you to do that. As I said, I do believe God calls some to leave everything to the thought of the Lord, but I believe that the Lord calls you to something before He calls you away from something. Abraham was called from while he was called, and at the same time he was called to something.

Genesis 12, verse 1 says, Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go forth from your own country and from your father's house. In other words, he had to leave his job and everything and go to the land that I will show you. He went from something in order to go to something.

And if you quit your job thinking that that will please the Lord or open His will to you, I suggest that you re-examine your motives. I question some people's wisdom. You may be running from something.

You may be presumptuous and taking a liberty that God has not granted you, but you've undertaken on your own will and enthusiasm. And Paul had to address himself to this in the early church. Listen to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. You don't need to turn to it.

Verses 10 to 12 it says, But we urge you to excel still more and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands just as we commended you or commanded you so that you may behave properly towards outsiders and not be in any need. You see, I don't mind giving to people who have a legitimate financial need. They run into unexpected emergencies.

I don't mind that. Neither does our church. But I do mind it if because of slothfulness someone has made themselves a burden to the body of Christ.

And Proverbs 19.9 says, He also who is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys. You see that what I'm talking about tonight may be a dead fly. Now if you think that I'm overstating the case, go with me if you will to 2 Thessalonians.

Go there and as you go I want to also tell you that I have nobody in particular in mind. I only have God's Word in mind tonight. But there was a similar problem in the early church.

You see, some of the believers thought that Jesus was going to come back immediately. He was coming soon. And they used that as an excuse not to work.

And they were running around living off of the generosity of other people. And so listen to what Paul talks about. He says, Now we therefore, this is a 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 beginning at verse 6. In fact, let me say that he goes on, we'll see this in a minute, but he said, don't even associate with such people.

But let's begin at verse 6. Now we command you brethren in the name, brethren, let me back up, we command you brethren, he's talking to the church, we command you brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know that ye ought to follow us, for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for not, but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you, not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any should not work, neither should he eat.

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread. But ye brethren be not weary and well done.

By the way, I'm not talking about if you're unemployed and you can't find a job because there's you know you just haven't been able to find it, there's not a job in your field or whatever, you know, it's not talking to you. I hope you understand who this is applying to tonight. But he said I exhort you, verse 13, but ye brethren be not weary in well-doing.

And what it's talking about there is that the Christians who had, out of their generosity, they had taken in some of these people. And Paul says I commend you for your generosity. But on the other hand, you that are taking advantage of their generosity, I'm speaking to you.

And he said that's a dead fly in the ointment. That ought not to be. Verse 14, if any man obey not our word by this official, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

But do not count him an enemy, but admonish him. Admonish him as a brother. And that's what I'm doing in this message tonight.

I'm admonishing you as a brother. If you are slowful, and if you have, if any of this area applies to you tonight, then that's a challenge to your heart. Let me go on.

Let me talk about another dead fly. I call this the dead fly of a sour spirit. A dead fly of a sour spirit.

Let me read Isaiah 35 and verse 10. It says, And the ransom to the Lord will return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. And they will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

You see, the ransomed are those who exhibit a happy, healthy, and cheerful countenance. You know, this is probably one of the most joyful congregations that I've ever had the privilege of being a part of it. What happy faces that I see service after service.

Especially, I remember some of you. I remember some of you when you didn't have the kind of countenance you have now. This is the end of side one.

You may now turn the tape over to side two. You knew that you had a forlorn, long-faced look because you were burdened down with your sins, or you were in air, or whatever other problems were in your life. But now your face has less wrinkles, and your speech has less complaints and self-pity in it.

And you're no longer like those spoken of in Ezekiel 27, 35, of whom it says, they are troubled in countenance. Now listen, in this church, we don't sing about joy to try to work it up, or bring it up, or pump it up. We sing of joy because we have joy.

We have genuine inner joy. Jesus is the center of our joy. He has given us laughter in our souls.

I like how one man put it. This is what he said, joy is a standard that flies on the battlements of the heart when the king is in residence. In other words, you know, it's like a flag that flies there.

However, there are some who have by nature, or because of past hurts, they have developed a sour, hard, and harsh manner about them. They're prone to rudeness and harshness that is rooted in a sour spirit or disposition. Now I don't believe that you can program or train yourself to have a kind and tender heart.

You know, a Dale Carnegie course, or personal improvement class, cannot change a bitter heart. Only the power of God through His Word and by the Holy Spirit can produce the fruits of righteousness and joy and goodness and kindness and peace and all the rest of the fruit of the Spirit. But nevertheless, some Christians who have been changed are unaware that there is still a sourness or a lack of sweetness in their personality.

And it can be a dead fly in the ointment. I've known people, Christians, who really do love the Lord, but they're the type of people that you have to think twice to come up to them and say, how are you? Because they won't give you the Reader's Digest version, they'll give you the Encyclopedia Britannica version, or they'll give you a page out of the medical journal, or the Guinness Book of Records of Complaints. Isaiah said, the ransomed the Lord, who have been to the house of the Lord, have been to the altar of the Lord, who have sacrificed, have been at the altar of sacrifice, who have encountered the Lord, they'll come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads and in their faces and their disposition.

God wants you to have a sweet spirit. Go with me to Luke chapter 24. Go to Luke 24.

There's an interesting account here of two disciples coming out of Jerusalem after the crucifixion. These are the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke chapter 24, beginning at verse 15, or verse 14, it says, and they talked together as of all the things which had happened.

And it came to pass that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near and went with them, or walked along with them. But their eyes were holden, that they could not know him. And he said unto them, what manner of communication are these, that ye have one to another as ye walk and are sad? As ye walk and are sad.

And in fact, that term there means that they stood with faces twisted with grief. The original language, the original words out of the Greek say, with faces twisted with grief. Now, you'll notice that Jesus did not reprimand them or rebuke them for being sad.

They had reason for having faces twisted with grief. They had just left a crucifixion. The Jews and the Romans had taken their teacher, their master, their Messiah, and their friend, and now they're on the road

to Emmaus.

Perhaps their home was there, or a relative's home was there, and they're going to go there and try to figure out what to do with the rest of their lives. You see, there's no sin in experiencing grief or sorrow or sadness when you go through a life-crushing blow. You see, some of you have come out of a teaching.

I know it because some of you told me. You came out of a teaching where you were even denied the opportunity, or you were even told it's not right for you ever to be sad, never to be down, never to be negative. It was almost as if you were trained to program yourself to deny any negative feelings in your life, that it was sinful to have sorrow or grief.

But that's not biblical, my friend. Isaiah 53 and 3 says that He, Jesus, was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. There is a time to laugh and there is a time to weep.

There's a time to dance and there's a time to mourn. So being sad or gloomy is not a sin, but what we do with it is important, and it can lead to a sour, cranky disposition. You see, whenever our sorrow shut out our vision of Jesus, then we're going to be in a state of gloom, and that displeases the Lord.

You see, these two disciples who were found on their way to Emmaus, they walked with Jesus, but they didn't know that He was with them. And so He asked them, why are you so sad? And then in the next verse they went through and they explained all the events that had transpired. He goes and He says, what things have happened? And then they go and they talk about a description of the crucifixion.

In verse 21, if you still have your Bible open, it says, but we trusted that it had been He which should redeem Israel. And besides all this, today is the third day since these things were done, and nothing has happened. He's gone.

Now everything these disciples said were true. They weren't covering up reality. It was a difficult time in their life, but the inference or conclusion that they drew from the facts was wrong.

And my friend, you may be going through a lot of difficulty. You may be going through a lot of trouble in your life. There's nothing wrong with that.

But it's what conclusions you draw from what you're going through that can be wrong. And anything that happens to us which leads to sadness or depression, which in turn leads us to be so overwhelmed by that, that we cannot see Jesus, that is not of God. You see, nobody can make you miserable to live with but yourself.

Not your circumstances, not your spouse, not your kids, not your parents, not your boss, not your job, not your friend, only yourself. You see, the disciples' gloom and doom disappeared when their eyes were opened, and they said, gee, I'm in the presence of Jesus. Verse 13 and 31, it says, and it came about that when He reclined at the table with them, He took bread and blessed it and break it and began giving it to them.

And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him. Tonight, my friend, if you're like those two, you feel just like those two, you're on the road to Emmaus, I pray God open your eyes tonight. God open your eyes and see that you can bring that dead fly, that little sin or that big sin or that circumstance, you can bring it to the cross.

You can bring it to the Lord that He understands and that you can see in your vision of Jesus that your spirit can be lifted, your gloom can be lifted from you tonight, hallelujah. And the Lord wants you to walk like that. I don't believe the Lord just wants us to be happy when we sing in His presence here.

He wants us to walk in it, hallelujah. You see, the reason for Christians having a cheerless countenance and a sour spirit is because they are always so concentrating on their problem that they can't see Jesus. And a person who is all wrapped up in himself makes for a very small package, as somebody said.

Despair is such a waste of time when there is joy. And a lack of faith is such a waste of time when there is God. You see, no, one man said this, he said, no sorrow can touch a believer until it has been filtered through the heart of God.

It's the same meaning is that there is no temptation or there is no trial taken that comes your way except God has permitted it. And we'll see you through and so lift your head, hallelujah. Let me give you one final dead fly, little fox.

Go to Hebrews chapter 12, very familiar portion of Scripture. And it's a sin that so easily besets. Hebrews 12, one says, therefore since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lie, lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles or besets us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

Now, Bible commentators disagree as to whether the writer of Hebrews had any particular sin in mind when he was talking about a besetting sin. Some say he's referring to covetousness. Others say he's talking about a lack of faith because the 11th chapter deals with the area of faith.

I believe in this instance the sin that so easily besets us is a dead fly or a little fox. You see, this is the sin or weakness to which we are often prone to commit or to have the most difficulty overcoming. You see, all of us have some area of our life that the enemy knows is our weakest point and which can so easily entangle us.

And you see, history bears out that certain peoples in certain times had sins which so easily beset them and by which they were characterized. For example, among the Hebrews they were known for their greed. Among the Greeks they were noted for their sensuality.

The Romans for their cruelty. And even today it's the same. Britain is known for its paganism.

America is known for its worldliness. Russia is known for its blatant atheism. And in fact, in certain periods of history there were people who were noted for certain achievements.

Certain cultures and peoples were noted for certain achievements, but they were also noted for certain sins. And the same is true of individuals. I read somewhere, a physician said this, and I don't know if it's true, but he said that note there are, it's not possible for two major diseases to coexist in the same person.

He said one can only be subject to one general disease at a time. Well, I don't know if that's so. But you see, morally speaking, we often come under one major passion or evil that so easily besets us.

And the Scripture here warns us that we must beware of such a clinging or entangling sin, or of a particular sin that keeps rising up again and again to impede our spiritual progress. Noah spoiled his testimony by drunkenness. Abraham lost his influence with Abimelech through deception.

Moses could not go into the promised land because of a hasty temper. Miriam became leprous as a result of her criticism. Achan met his untimely doom because of a covetous spirit.

Israel was kept out of the promised land forty years because of unbelief. Solomon's reign ended disastrously because of his love for foreign women and all the compromise that came along with it. And today we see similar cases.

Men and women of potential. Great, even great men and women of God who never reach their potential because of a sin that so easily besets them. Or a little fox that rises up and destroys the vine of Christ.

I've known leaders, I've known pastors who were gifted and used of God except, except for a dead fly in their character. I also know people in the body of Christ. We would call them, if I could use the word, could almost, we could, I could use the word almost saints.

Almost saints but for some hidden worm in the soul. Or some little drop of gall in an otherwise sweet cup. Or some crooked trait in an otherwise upright life.

You may have also said something like this. Oh, so-and-so would be such a woman of God if she didn't have such a sharp tongue. If she wasn't a gossip, if she wasn't a complainer, or if this or that.

Or we might talk about a brother and say, oh, how he has a passion for lost souls. But oh, how he has a quick temper and doesn't bring himself under self-control. I know of a case right now, a leader.

A leader, who if in order to save face or to make himself look good, will fabricate the most fantastic stories you've ever heard. In other words, he's a liar. I spoke to a mother one time.

I remember talking to a mother came up to me, and her little daughter was with her. And she came up, she had a big smile on her face, and she was, she appeared so tender, and she was talking to me with such warmth on her face. But as we were talking, her child would act up a little bit.

And she'd turn, and she'd speak real harshly to her child, and then she turned back to me and had a smile on her face. And I watched this scene before me. To me, the pastor, big smile.

One way it was this way. She was one person this way to her child, another way to me. And listen, mothers and fathers, some of you, your dead fly, or the sin that may so easily beset you, may even be the harshness of the way you talk to your children, or the way that you discipline your children, or the anger that you display.

And if that's the case, my friend, they're going to lose respect for you and for the house of God. Do you have a dead fly in the ointment tonight? Is there a little fox spoiling the good work that God is doing in your life? Well, we sometimes excuse these things because we attribute them to something other than flawed character. Or we may be blind to the sin that so easily besets us.

But listen, beware of little foxes in your yard, while you rejoice over lions that may have been turned back at your door. You see, if we constantly fail at one point, then such failure is a true index of our character. A spiritual person, however strong he may think he is, is no stronger than his or her weakest point.

And you see, as God begins to move in your life, He's going to move into areas that you never believed He could move before, and He's going to begin to put His finger even on little dead little flies, and He's going to say, that's got to go. Even before I prepared this message, and I guess it's maybe one of the

reasons that prompted me, around the end of the year, God spoke to me about a little dead fly in my life. And He said, it's got to change.

I want you to change that. And I'm working on it. And honey, don't ask me what it is.

Wait six months and I'll tell you. Don't ask me what it is. You'll know what it is somewhere along the line.

You know, my kids can verify in the area of being impatient. I may have shared with you, one time I was starting to prepare a book, a manuscript on, the working title of it is called, Gaining Weight. W-A-I-T, the power of positive patience.

And when my kids found out that I was writing a book on that, they all just laughed. They roared. I couldn't write it.

But my kids will say, now Dad, if there's any error you've improved on, we'll verify that the Lord helped you to develop patience. But you see, God put His finger on another little dead fly in my life, and I'm working on it. 1 Peter 1.13 says, Therefore prepare your minds for action.

Be self-controlled. Set your hope fully on the grace to be given to you when Jesus Christ is revealed. Now the reason, the reason that we're to do this, there's a good reason for removing the dead flies and overtaking the little foxes, and it's this, so that we may run with patience and endurance the race that is set before us.

My friend, we're entering into the last hours and the last lap of the race, and it's time to set aside every weight, every weight that does so easily beset us, every sin that so easily entangles. Why? Because we've got to win the race. Hallelujah.

Let me tell you about one more thing in closing. Let me tell you about a Bible character. David talked to Dad Peter Sunday night.

I want to talk about Mark, one of the disciples Mark. You remember how Mark was the one who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey. On one occasion, they were going to go on another one, but Paul refused to take Mark with him because while they had been on one journey, Mark cut out from them.

He left them. And so when they were embarking on this other journey, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark. He was related to him.

It was his cousin. He wanted to take him, but Paul says, no, I don't want him to go. They had such a sharp difference among them that the two of them divided.

And as I looked at that, I wondered, why was it that Paul... Who was right? Was Barnabas right or was Paul right? And what was it about John Mark that caused Paul not to take him with him? And you know, I'm not sure what it is, but I believe it was a dead fly. I believe it was probably irresponsibility. When he cut out on them, Paul saw something in this young man's life and said, this has got to be corrected if you're going to be a man of God.

This irresponsibility, this undependability. And you know, there are people like that. There are people like that when you really need them.

You can't depend on them. But you see, Barnabas also saw in him a potential. And he saw that there was going to come a time when God was going to work this out of his life.

And that's exactly what happened. Because later on, we read in the Scripture that Paul is writing and he says, bring John Mark because he's profitable to me now, to the ministry. And tonight, that's an encouragement to me.

That if you have a dead fly in your life, I want to tell you, it'll keep you, it'll keep you from the potential of what God wants to do in your life. But at the same time, if you bring it to the Lord, God can get rid of all those dead flies. He can pull them out of that perfume.

And He can change your life as He did John Mark. In fact, you know who John Mark was? John Mark was the one who gave us, he was the one who wrote the very first gospel. The gospel of Mark was the very first one written.

In addition to that, tradition tells us that he went to Egypt and he established a church. He was one of the founders of the church in the city of Alexandria that had a great influence in Christianity over that whole area. And my friend, if you're here tonight and you've got a dead fly, then God wants to clean it up.

Lay it aside. Yeah, and you know where it says here in Hebrews, the 12th, in fact, here's, I'm going to close my last closing and final for sure closing. I forgot this.

Hebrews 12, Hebrews 12.1. Here's the marvelous thing about this Scripture. It says, Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, comma, notice comma, looking unto Jesus, looking unto Jesus. You see Barnabas Saul in John Mark? Yes, he had a dead fly.

He had a flaw in his character, but he knew that he was committed to Jesus. He knew that he had his eyes on Jesus, and he just knew that if his eyes were on Jesus, eventually that was going to get worked out of his character, and one day he would be profitable, and that's exactly what happened, praise the Lord. God's got an army marching through the land, but it's an army that's got to lay away, lie aside, lay aside every weight, every dead fly, every little fox has got to be taken so that we can go on and possess the land that God wants us to possess.

Praise His name. Let's stand together. Thank you, Jesus.

Thank you, Lord. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Lord, thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for your faithfulness. Lord, God, tonight, put your finger on dead flies.

Put your finger, Lord. Whether it may not be slothfulness, Lord, it may not be a sour spirit, it may mean something else, but it may be a sin that easily besets us. It may be something that we're not always conscious of, but, oh, Lord, put the searchlight on tonight.

Put the searchlight on us tonight, Lord. And we want to look unto you. We're going to look to you tonight, Lord, to clean up areas of our life.

Lord, if it be a sharp tongue, if it be a temper, if it be some other area of our life, Lord, there are some people who are prone to tell lies. Some people have lived a pattern in their past, and now they've come to you, and they've lived that pattern so long that even it creeps up now in their new life with you. Lord, speak to that one tonight.

Speak to that one, Lord. Do a work at this altar, we pray, in Jesus' name. In Jesus' name.

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