

The Discipline of Desolation - 14

by Jack Hibbs

Jack Hibbs explores the discipline of desolation, emphasizing the importance of God's unchanging nature and the need for community support during spiritual struggles.

Duration: 1:04:12

Scripture: Matthew 28:18

Topics: "Discipline"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that as fallen creatures, we are created in the image of God and not animals. He encourages believers to stand firm in their belief and not be swayed by worldly teachings. The sermon then focuses on the importance of making disciples of all nations, as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28. The preacher also highlights the discipline of desolation and how it applies to our lives, using a story about a bird to illustrate the concept.

Transcript

This word to our hearts, amazing topic tonight, powerful stuff, and I pray Lord God that we would, Lord, be faithful to deliver your word and at the same exact time, faithful, Lord, to put it into action. We ask you, Father, to bless now in Jesus' name and all God's people said, amen. Well, church, grab your Bibles tonight and as normal on Wednesday nights, we're gonna ask you to be very, very skilled in the Bible.

Turn to Matthew chapter 28, you know that, it's our theme verse through this entire series, Matthew chapter 28, and tonight, Psalm 102. Psalm 102, Matthew chapter 28. As we continue on in our series and the disciplines of life, tonight, we come to the discipline of desolation.

Desolation, what does that mean? You're gonna be finding that out in a moment. You might say, desolation, how does that apply to my life? It will absolutely apply to your life more than you might think, desolation. And so tonight, we're looking at part 12 of our 31-week series.

We're almost kind of sort of halfway through and here we come, Matthew chapter 28 is the theme verse. Jesus said to the disciples, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples.

That's what's happening here tonight. Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, that's going on tonight,

that I have commanded you and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Now, Psalm 102, this is an important Psalm for what we're talking about tonight, Psalm of David.

Psalm 102, look at verse 11 and 12. Psalm 102, verse 11. My days are like a shadow that lengthens and I wither away like grass, but you, O Lord, shall endure forever and the remembrance of your name to all generations.

Before we go any further, it's good that we understand this Psalm because we're gonna be going back to it during the course of the evening tonight. David, King David. By the way, there was a archeological discovery recently in the land of Israel regarding King David and it's quite amazing.

In fact, the stone or the tablet that was found is actually David's enemies who had written about David and his household and it was, I forget what tribe or what group of enemy forces, what nation state it was, but it was quite an archeological discovery. David was a man of war, he was a man of passion, he was a man of victory, he was a man of defeats. Let's be honest, it's easy to be a man of victory.

It's hard to be a man of defeat. Anybody can win, but it takes a champion to be able to manage losing. And this is a very powerful thing and David had all this amazing emotion that was wrapped up into one human being.

I have to tell you that if I had to pick to be or live or crawled into the skin of, I say this now because I'm 3000 years removed from him, but I want to believe that many times in my own life, I see myself in a relation with David. I've got a concept in my mind that at one moment I could pull out my sword and cut off a giant's head. I have no problem doing that.

It's just the way that I'm wired. I have no problem. I read our founding fathers and many of them Christians and they had no problem understanding the concept of war and fighting and defending freedom.

It's not until recent American history that we've gotten so wimpy. But David was a man of war and at the same time he was a man of worship and praise. How do you reconcile those things? Now David didn't go out and attack people just to attack people.

He defended his nation. But listen, it wasn't always victorious. David was a man that was often ostracized and cut away from normal life and living.

The man had been given the promises of God and yet he had spent over 10 years in the wilderness waiting for the promises to come to pass. From this man's life comes the most passionate, powerful and expressive language known to the human today. The book of Psalms.

Read the book of Psalms. There's nothing in this world in literature that compares to David's heart and all the aspects of his emotions from victory to defeat. In Psalm 102 though, in this Psalm, the Psalmist David cries out to God and in his distress, he finds the confidence of God and he finds his confidence in the Lord.

He finds this, that the sovereign purposes of God are there as he's crying out to the Lord. And he also finds out in this Psalm, Psalm 102, you can read it at length later, that we can have confidence because God is unchanging. He's immutable.

That is that the God of the Bible never changes. You can always know from his revealed word what he does in certain situations. What I mean by that is, remember Philip said, Jesus show us the father and

we'll be happy.

And Jesus said, what? Philip, have I been so long with you? And you still ask me to show you the father? He who has seen me has seen the father. He's talking about nature, the very nature of God. The Holy Spirit, the son, the father, and how you see Jesus act and what you see in the revealed word of God regarding the nature of God is what the Holy Spirit teaches you.

God never changes. Let me tell you something. I don't know if you've ever been in a cult.

Maybe you've been rescued out of a cult. Maybe you're in one right now. You know what's great about the God of the Bible? He's completely different than the God of the cults.

The God or gods of the cults constantly change. It's whimsical. It's capricious.

It's crazy. You don't know if this particular God is happy this day or not the other day, or what's gonna happen if I talk to this God? And you have the one true God, the God of heaven and earth, the God of the Bible, and he's never changing. In Psalm 102, David is crying out to God and he finds great strength because he knows his God never changes.

And his prayer in this Psalm is a prayer of affliction. And that comes to every one of us, especially at times when affliction comes, we're being attacked. Could be physically, could be all kinds of ways, whatever it is.

And we have a tendency to be overwhelmed. And we get overwhelmed. And we go through life in seasons where pressures of life come and they overwhelm us.

Maybe it's some emotional thing or relational thing. It doesn't matter. When it comes, the Lord is unchanging.

You can grab onto him like a pillar. And so in this Psalm, this great Psalm, he cries out to God and that's a powerful thing. The Bible says, by the way, that you and I have been created in the image of God.

David had that. Think about that. David had that knowledge like you do tonight.

He had the first five books of Moses to read. And in that, Genesis 1, 26 is, then God said, let us, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, make man in our image according to our likeness. What does that mean? That means every one of us tonight have the moral likeness of God.

I didn't say you're perfect, far from it. And I didn't say that God is imperfect, far from it. He's perfect, we're not.

When he says I've made you in my image, what does he mean? He doesn't mean that we are six feet tall, so God must be six feet tall. No, moral likeness. Let us make man in our image.

It is the moral likeness. What does that mean? Well, what's interesting is outside of angelic, created beings, you and I are something different. First of all, we are redeemable.

Angels are not redeemable. When Jesus died on the cross, he didn't die for angels. He died for humans, he died for us.

That's weird, isn't it? Think about that. Angels are unredeemable. Satan is a fallen angel, he cannot get saved.

Wouldn't it be nice if Satan got saved? Look, I wish he would get saved and leave me alone, but he's not going to. You are redeemable. And the amazing thing is this, that when God says I made you in my image, it means this.

You have the capacity to love and to hate, to write a song or to be angry or whatever. And you say, well, how is that in the image of God? Well, that's because you and I relate to that in the negative, because we're fallen creatures now. You see, God hates, did you know that? He hates.

His hatred is absolutely perfect. He hates sin. We don't have that holiness in us like that.

We're not holy like that. He has declared us holy, but we are in route to receiving that ultimate redemption the day that you and I die or get raptured up into his presence. Then all that sin nature will be gone from us.

Until then we struggle every day. But in a word, what we think and what we feel, what we desire in this life is all a result of good having gone bad. You and I are fallen creatures tonight, but we are creatures that have been created in the image of God.

You are not an animal. Somebody might try to convince you that in school, but they're wrong. And besides, the guy's trying to convince your kids that they're animals.

He must then himself believe that he's an animal. And your kid does not know or believe that they're an animal. They believe that they're created in the image of God.

That's a great verse to show the teacher. Teacher, excuse me, you can keep talking all you want. And I'm gonna give you all the answers you want.

You want 500 billion trillion years? I'm gonna write it down. I just don't believe in it. You need to write it down.

And the teacher is gonna get all bent out of shape. So what's your trip? You tell him, I believe I was created in the image of God. He's gonna say, we evolved.

Everything's an accident. Everything is evolutionary. And what's funny is that they wanna talk about absolutes, but everything's an accident according to them.

And why should I listen to you if you're evolving? You tell me that this is the right answer on Monday. It could be different on Friday because you're evolving. No, we were created in the image of God.

And that's important to where we're going this evening. The Bible says in Genesis 2, 17, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it. For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

Note this, note this next verse, verse 18. And the Lord God said, it is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper comparable or comparable to him.

Isn't it interesting? Genesis 2, 17 and 18. God says, don't eat of that tree. The day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

Spiritual death. The next verse says, man shall not live alone. I think those two things are connected in a very powerful way.

Because listen to this, desolation or delusion or fear or sorrow cannot be separated from one another. If you think about it, they travel in a pack to be disillusioned, fearful, sorrowful, desolation of the soul. I believe the first soul to experience spiritual desolation was in the garden of Eden and it was with Eve.

Have you read the Bible carefully? The Bible says Eve must have been alone by the way, according to Timothy, because Paul writes that Satan deceived the woman. Where was Adam? He's not even mentioned. Did you know that? It appears that Adam shows up later.

Was he gardening? Was he riding a horse? What was he doing goofing off? Was he sleeping under a tree? What happened? But Satan came and she did not have her as God had created her spiritual covering there, her man to protect her. I want to believe that if the story went different, Adam would have tied that Satan snake, his tail in a knot or something. And I mean, I don't know, but it's pretty amazing.

No, she's talking. God had told them, don't eat this. And they exercise their will and they partook of the fruits and they had sinned.

And God said, the day that you eat of it, you will die. Well, they lived 900 years on. They spiritually died in that moment.

And listen, you read the Bible later. And where were they? Remember in the cool of the day, God came to fellowship with them in the garden. And the Bible says that they were hiding.

It sounds so Victorian that they sowed to themselves, fig leaves. Do a little fig leaf. Like there's all this skin out there, but there's, you know, she's got three of them and he's got one of them.

And they're like, hey, God, what's up? Like what? He's not going to notice there's fig leaves on strategic parts of your body. They were covered like a bush. Have you ever seen the Jolly Green Giant on the label? They were covered with leaves.

They were hiding. They were together hiding, but were they together? No, they had experienced desolation of the soul, separation from God. That's why the field came upon them.

Oh my gosh, we've got to cover this up. Something happened. I love the ancient Hebrew scholars believe that Adam and Eve were actually clothed in light.

That when they sinned, their light just went out, just and they saw their nakedness. And the Bible says that they were ashamed. Think about the desolation of that.

Spiritual desolation is one of the worst situations for United experience because it attacks the very core of who we are and the root of our hope, which is faith. Spiritual desolation. You say, I need to know what this means.

This is what we're talking about. It's those long and lonely days in our spiritual walk with God, Christian, where we need to learn the discipline of desolation, meaning this. There are times in our walks, listen carefully, where there's a dryness of soul in our lives.

Listen, every time we have that experience, there's an answer for it. You must not write it off. Some of you need to hear me tonight more than ever, because you have become comfortable in a setting or in a place of being spiritually apathetic.

You fall in the sleep as it were in the light. And there's a sense of apathy and laziness and it's dangerous. And you don't even know it, but you're in a spiritual desolation.

And we're gonna talk about that tonight. The psalmist says, and that's Psalm 102, verses six and seven. Listen to what he says about his personal desolation.

He says, I'm like a pelican of the wilderness. I'm like an owl of the desert. He says, I lie awake and I'm like a sparrow alone on the housetop.

Listen to his writing. That's a soul crying out. He's saying, listen, I'm like a pelican.

Now, I gotta, on the West Coast, we don't get this. We don't understand this, because our pelicans are, yeah, I mean, no, we know what pelicans look like, but ours are near the water. But in the Middle East, if you've ever been to Wyoming or Colorado, you'll see pelicans.

They're white ones with black tip wings, with orange beaks. They're same pelican, same big thing, same bird. And you're in the wilderness.

You're in Yellowstone National Park. And you see pelicans go by. What in the world? And David says, I'm like a pelican in the wilderness.

What a strange bird. Think about it. He's crying out in this great Psalm.

A pelican can't sing. A pelican can't sit on a branch. A pelican is an awkward looking thing.

And a pelican often dwells alone. And David says, I'm like a pelican in the wilderness. And you might feel like that.

He goes on and he says, I'm like an owl in the desert. Have you ever seen owls hanging out together? You ever seen a telephone pole and owls all lined up? They don't do that. They're lonely birds in the night, haunting the night as it were.

And then he says this. He says, I'm awake. I'm up all night.

I'm like a sparrow alone on a housetop. All alone. So mark this down, Christian.

Are you struggling? Do you struggle? Do you have it? And I'm not talking about struggling with sin. I'm not talking about that in the text at this moment. I'm talking about, do you struggle with your walk moment by moment, day by day with God? Listen carefully in the dynamic of it.

Church, listen. This is incredibly important. Your walk with Jesus Christ is to be a reality that is more true than the clothes you're wearing right now.

I mean this. This is not hyperbole or, and I'm not goofing off right now. You can't be a Wednesday, Sunday Christian.

You who are Christians, you've come here tonight to get refueled. You've come here tonight to get recharged. Why? Because you're going back out there into the world and you take your shield of faith and you are out there living it day by day.

Jesus is ever before you. You are for real. You are alive.

And that person tonight who's listening to me right now is a person who also knows that there's a struggle because we live for God and our flesh wars against us and we have a tendency to be tired. We can get weary. We can look around at the world and if we're not careful, we can be experiencing despair.

You look around the world as a Christian and it looks like everybody's taking stupid pills and you see this stuff and you wonder, what in the world's going on? While the world looks at us and says, you guys are crazy. They're crazy. They have lost their minds.

You have the new mind given to you by God and you see things right and they see things wrong, but they got a bigger megaphone than we do. And that's normal. This is their world.

If you think about it, we're on our way home. This ain't it. You see, pastor, I just bought a brand new house, pastor.

Don't say that. It ain't your home. You're going home.

You're going to Jesus. We're just hanging out right here for now. We're just hanging out.

So check this out. This is important. If you're gonna live for Jesus, man, this psalmist, what he says is gonna mean everything to you and there's gonna be a time in your life.

Listen, in fact, let me be honest. I've been a Christian for over 33 years. There's gonna be many times in your life you're gonna say, oh God, I'm like a sparrow on a housetop.

I'm like a pelican in the wilderness. Where are you God? When you've been sick or when there's been a tragedy and you're crying out, listen, where is he? You ever had that feeling or that question? Where are you? You're a believer. You're a child of God and you're in the wilderness.

And this is the discipline of desolation. I thank my God continually that he's not a fair weather God. He's not a part-time God.

He's not a sometime God. He's not a Sunday God or a Wednesday night God. He's always God.

And he's, by the way, an on-time God. He's never early. He's never late.

He's always now. And in the midst of your dryness, you might say, well, pastor, I've been praying, but I haven't heard an answer. I've been reading my Bible, but I feel dead inside.

There's a reason for that. And you need to find out what it is. Number one, mark these things down.

Number one, it's this, check it out. Number one, the discipline of desolation. Will involve unhappiness.

Unhappiness, the state or situation of being unhappy actually comes from the outside and moves into our private lives. Why if tonight you are unhappy, why are you unhappy? Think about it. You might say I'm unhappy because I don't love my husband anymore.

My question to you is why? Don't say it now. I'm just saying you need to answer that. You've got to answer that.

Why are you unhappy? Well, it's a money issue. Why? Take your argument and find the answer in God's word because the cure is right here. I'm unhappy.

I had somebody tell me I'm leaving my husband. Why? Because I'm unhappy and I know God wants me to be happy. I said, where'd you read that in the Bible? That is not in the Bible.

God wants you holy. There won't be a bunch of happy people in heaven because they're happy. There will be only people in heaven who are holy.

And when you get there, if you want to be happy, you can be happy. But the cool thing is, think about it. God just wants me happy.

God wants you holy in this life. And we get this concept, you know, I'm gonna marry her, I'm gonna marry him because it'll make me happy. No, God invented marriage to make people holy, not happy.

Are you crazy? Think about it. You get married, I mean, you get married, you know, and then flu season comes and she barfs on the pillow. What are you doing? You've been married three months, she throws up in the pillow.

She's sick, she's got the flu. What is this? Remember? For sicker, for health, richer, for poorer. Since I married you, I don't have any money.

For richer, for poorer. Marriage is a ministry. And it's an amazing thing, unhappy.

What is this unhappy? But watch this. The reason why you might be unhappy tonight is because, listen, you have focused your affection or attention in an area that is outside what God wants for your life. Unhappiness comes from the outside and it attacks us on the inside.

We let it come in. Think about that for a minute. It invades you, it's like an attack.

Our happiness is determined by how we perceive the moment. And that's the key. You can choose to be happy now for the rest of your days.

And they lived happily ever after. It should say this. And they lived happily ever after because they kept Jesus Christ as the center of their life.

You wanna live happily ever after? Focus on Christ for your life. And everything works. If you lose that focus, you'll be unhappy.

Listen to this. You say, Jack, I know somewhere it says for me to be happy. Yeah, okay, I see where you're going.

Matthew 5, two says this. You know this. Matthew 5, two says, then Jesus opened his mouth and taught them saying, happy or blessed, same meaning, same word, happy, are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Are you listening, everyone? Happy are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.

Happy are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Happy are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Verse nine, happy are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God.

Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Verse 11, happy are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

So be happy. Isn't that amazing? That's God's definition of happiness. What is he saying? Beyond all circumstances, you can choose to be happy.

The discipline of desolation is choosing now to find your life in Christ and to decide, hey, my world's caving in, my cat left me, my, I mean, just go down the list and conclude this. You know what? God's word gives me the definition of who are the happy people. And it's those listed on the Sermon of the Mount of Matthew chapter five all the way there.

You read that. So I'm unhappy. Ask yourself, why are you unhappy? Now I'm laying this stuff on you pretty hard, but here's the true reality of it.

All of us struggle day to day, week to week, or month to month, or year to year with a sense of I'm unhappy. I'm just not happy. There's a reason for that.

As a believer, we need to get our eyes focused. Now mark this down. This is the positive side.

What do we do? We fight off unhappiness by grabbing his word and crying out. That's what the psalmist is doing. This is the answer.

This is the application part. Write it down. If you're unhappy, what do you do? You do this.

You fight off unhappiness by grabbing his word and crying out. Looks like this. Lord, your Bible says, Psalm 144, happy are those who are in such a state.

Happy are the people whose God is the Lord. You wanna be happy? Make sure the Lord is your God. Cry out to God using his word this way, Psalm 84, 11.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord will give grace and glory. No good thing will he withhold from those who walk upright.

What an awesome verse. Are you unhappy the way things are going at work or the way things are going in your home? How's your marriage? Take this verse. For the Lord God is a sun and a shield.

The Lord will give grace and glory and no good thing will he withhold from those who walk upright. Wow. See, we start focusing on happiness in the sense that it's the end all.

And you guys, many times we use that as excuse to try to get our way because we're pouting. And God says lovingly, grow up. Grow up and focus on me.

Get into my word. God, listen, he wants us, the Lord wants us to take the word of God and say, Lord, I'm not happy right now. And I know that it has nothing to do with you, it's me.

And so I'm calling out to you and I'm saying this, Romans 8, 28 is another verse. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purposes. We fight unhappiness.

Don't succumb to it. Anybody listening? It's so quiet in here. Are you there? Anybody there? We all fight with this.

And the amazing thing is, listen, we live in such a world where we are so driven that it affects us physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. We are very complex creatures, body, soul, and spirit. But when we talk about being unhappy, we're also, listen, we are also insulting God.

You know what we're saying? When we ride our emotions on the fact that we're unhappy, well, you don't make me happy anymore. Fathers say, you know, I'm not happy with the marriage, I'm not happy with the kids. I'm leaving.

Man, I tell you, I can't even begin to imagine the devastation on judgment day regarding a man or a woman who abandons the children. Jesus said, regarding children being offended, it would have been better for that person who offended them in the day of judgment than for them to have never been born. God said, in the day of judgment, for those who offended children, it will have been better for them to have never been born when I get done with them.

Man. Number two, mark it down, it's this. The discipline of desolation, what we deal with in our lives as Christian will involve loneliness, loneliness.

As Christians, when we're lonely, it's a pretty good indicator that we've often neglected our private life with the Lord. When I talk about loneliness, hear me out on this. Every Christian will go through a time of loneliness in this definition, that we feel, sense that we're far from God.

How does that happen? It is easy. Have you learned this yet? If not, listen carefully. Have you learned how much maintenance your Christianity requires? It is, listen, it is one thing, minuscule to pray three times a day or five times a day.

Anybody can do that. Do you understand? What is it? Is that supposed to be a lot? I'm dead serious. Well, I pray five times a day.

Are you, am I supposed to be impressed with that? The last time I read my Bible, the Christian lives in an attitude of prayer. You never stop praying as a Christian, but the world does that. That's how the flesh is.

I pray four times a day. Well, whoop-dee-doo. What is that supposed to be impressive? The real Christian walks with a constant attitude of prayer.

That's why the Bible says in Thessalonians, pray without. It's an attitude. But what about loneliness? Loneliness is different than being alone.

Loneliness, the Bible tells us in 1 John 1, verse six. Think about Adam and Eve now when I read this verse. 1 John 1, six.

If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanses us from all sin. Loneliness, listen, Christian.

If your soul right now tonight, if you're struggling with an overwhelming sense of loneliness that the heavens are empty and that your heart is empty and you're just going through the motions, you wanna stop and check the bases and check your pulse. God, have I sinned against you? Have I done something

to offend you, Holy Spirit? It is true that there's times when God, everything's right, but God takes us through a desert. We take a spiritual drive through the desert.

Sometimes God takes us on those drives. Didn't the Holy Spirit take Jesus on a drive into the wilderness for 40 days? He does that with us to make us grow. And maybe you're in a desert place right now spiritually and you're lonely.

You're in a room full of people, but you're lonely inside. If you're not careful to be still and know that he is God and focus on him, you will jump from the fire into the frying pan or frying pan into the fire. And you'll think someone's supposed to meet that loneliness.

Oh, I'm gonna go do this thing. I gotta take a break. Don't do that.

Sinful conduct doesn't have to be something overt. It can be something simply that you're neglecting your private walk with God. A neglect of God will cause loneliness, which drives us ever so slowly away from our intimacy with God.

Sinful conduct. I think sometimes you and I as Christians get tripped up more by the stuff that we don't even recognize as being sinful conduct. It's like this, you could be here.

Listen, legalist people think like this. I didn't do this and I didn't do this and I didn't do this today. Look at me.

And God comes back and says, okay, you didn't do those things, but you also, you didn't do this and you didn't do that. Meaning you didn't love me, you didn't talk with me, or you didn't do, sins of omission. That's why a legalistic person is a tragic hilarity.

I mean, it's just worth busting up laughing about, but it's sad that they can't see it in their own lives. We need him. We need his forgiveness.

We need his grace. And the person in this room tonight that's walking the closest with God needs his grace, needs his forgiveness. But there's a loneliness that we need to have the discipline to contend with and this desolation.

If we don't stay in the word, it's gonna consume us. It's gonna get us off track. Revelation two, verse four, Jesus said to the Ephesian church he says, nevertheless, I found this against you that you've left your first love.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen and repent and do the first works. Note this, first love, first works, first works, first love. Jesus says this to all of us tonight.

He's searching our hearts and he's saying, hey, go back to the first works of your relationship with me. Think for a moment. The moment you accepted Christ or when you were coming to faith in Christ and your first, I don't know, first few months of walking with Jesus, it was so pure, so simple, so beautifully easy going with whatever he says to do.

And then you get messed up listening to people or you read some knucklehead book that puts thoughts in your head or somebody comes along and says, well, that's really great, but you need to join our group and get all bummed out like we are. No. Jesus said, listen, every believer, maintain that air of your first love.

You seem to see people in love and that first love's condition, symptom, condition, you can't talk to them. It's impossible to get through to them. They're blinded by love.

See, isn't she beautiful? Well, not really, but you're in love with her. Look at that. Isn't he the greatest? Well, I think he's a bonehead, but you think so.

They're in love. He talks about that in the Song of Solomon. He talks about that in Jeremiah.

He says, what evil have you found in me, Israel? He says, when you, in the early days, went after me like a lover, you followed me into the mountains and you pursued me, God said, and now you've stopped. What evil have you found in me? He says, what nation of the world has forsaken their gods? No, they cling to their gods. He said, they've got ears, but they can't hear.

They've got eyes, but they cannot see. And they love those silly pagan gods. Me, he says, I'm real.

And I delivered you from Egypt and you leave me for carved images and idols? He says, what nation has done such a thing? Isn't that amazing? Well, you say, yeah, why does that happen? Because it's a real relationship. You guys, it's easy to have a relationship with a totem pole, a carved image. Hey, how you doing there, Mr. monkey face tree thing? It's not a dialogue, it's not a reality.

It's a monologue. You're the one talking to a piece of wood or a stone or a statue or an image. And God says, no, it's face to face.

The cure for loneliness, write it down, it's this. We fight off loneliness by grabbing his word and crying out, saying things like this. Lord, your Bible says, Psalm 139, verse five.

You have hedged me behind and before and laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain to it.

I can't get there. You're amazing, God, you're wonderful. Loneliness, do you have a sense of loneliness tonight? Then you stop and say, God, your Bible tells me that you've hedged me on all sides.

You know exactly where I'm at, you know exactly what I'm feeling. I have this overwhelming sense of loneliness. It's a desolation of my soul right now.

I can hardly take it. And yet your Bible tells me that you're all around me. God, you gotta help me put my head around that.

It's so high, I cannot attain to that thinking. But oh God, open my eyes to see. Have you ever been lonely? God says in John 15, excuse me, Jeremiah 15, 16.

He says, your word was found and I ate them. And your word was to me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart. For I'm called by your name, oh Lord God of hosts.

What is Jeremiah saying in chapter 15, verse 16? He's saying, I was wandering in the wilderness like a pelican, like an owl, like a little sparrow on a roof. I was lost and I found your word and I began to read it. And when I read it, I found out that I'm called by your name.

I found out, listen everybody, I found out that when I read your Bible, God, you love me. You can't wait to forgive me. You can't wait to have this relationship restored.

Has anyone ever in life pursued you? Sent you flowers? You know, all that flirtatious stuff? The wives are going, honey, remember that, remember that? God does that. The Holy Spirit does that in our lives. And he does it so gently.

He's often missed. The Bible says, I wanna love you. I wanna have a relationship with you.

And you say, well, Jack, I didn't know that. I already know that, I'm a Christian. I understand that, but are you going through loneliness? The reason why you're going through it is because there is some sort of blockade or some sort of obstruction between you and your God.

And you need to get that settled. And so you take the word of God and you say, Lord, I'm far from you now. I don't feel like you're near.

I feel lonely. I feel like I've got to preoccupy myself with stuff because there's an absence. Listen, God didn't leave.

You and I leave him. And I wanna say this loud and clear. Are you listening? This is big deal stuff.

I was talking to hundreds and hundreds of guys last night. I don't know how many, there was a lot of them. And I gave them a challenge.

And I told them with absolute confidence, and I'll say it to you tonight. If you feel lonely with God tonight, he has given you his word, the truth is out there. It's right here.

And he's like this. Now get this. He's not like this, okay? He's like this.

Come on, come on. And we need to take that step back toward him. We need to take that step home.

We need to take that first step. You say, why doesn't he come get me? Because he's saying, you're the one who moved. Get over here, come here.

Something pulled you away from me. Come on back. And you come back.

And this is crazy how he does this. In fact, I'm begging you, if you feel that desolation in your heart tonight, that it's just like a dust bowl in your heart. I know that if you pursue him, you know me, I'm bent on early morning stuff.

But if it's tonight, if you get home and you just throw yourself on your bed or on the floor and you say, oh God, I'm terrified of my lack of wanting you, though I know I should, my heart is dead. And yet I cry out to you, God, in my distress. There's the desolation of my soul.

And Lord, I'm asking you now, bring me back. You know what he'll do? I give you 24 hours. In 24 hours, listen, anybody here tonight that's messed up in a cult or listening, you're messed up with some foreign God.

Listen, I challenge you. Call upon my God. Call upon the God of my Bible.

And in 24 hours, you're gonna know it. He will speak to you. He'll show you something and you'll know it's him.

He's gonna say, that's from me. And Christian, you may have wandered and you're backslidden in soul and you're desolate. Listen, 24 hours.

I have so much confidence in him. In my own life, when I've strayed or wandered away, or in my case, I get so busy about Christian stuff, ministry stuff. Let me tell you something.

Ministry will kill your relationship with God. I'm serious. People pulling constantly, phone calls constantly, and invitations, this, that.

Hey, can you say something about this? Can you endorse this? Can you do the other thing? And can you do, can you what? And it's like, you know what? And if you're sitting out there and I say, well, Pastor, that sounds amazing. Let me tell you something. When I was on the other side, they went, well, you know, that would be amazing.

Boy, it's not amazing. Because you know what? You need to love God more than all that kind of stuff. Because that's urgent stuff for really good causes.

But it's urgent stuff. You know what the important stuff is? Either getting home tonight or getting up early tomorrow morning and having a love affair with your God. Nobody looking, nobody around, just you and your God.

Let me tell you something. You do that, your world will change. And if you're here tonight and you're an atheist, I challenge you, call out to him.

God, I'm an atheist, but I'm gonna take that lunatic up on the challenge. If you're real, talk to me, I'll give you 24 hours. Watch what he does.

Watch what he does. He will fill that void of loneliness in the life of the believer or the unbeliever. Number three, the discipline of desolation will involve isolation.

You say, wait a minute, you just talked about loneliness. No, isolation is different. Loneliness, you can be in this room, as I said earlier, and be lonely.

You can be in a room full of people and be lonely. Isolation's the next step down into destruction. Isolation, listen everybody.

Isolation is different from loneliness because isolation is the result of being lonely over a prolonged period of time. It's a slump that you sink down into and it's overwhelming and you begin to think, when you're isolated, there's no way out. Well, that's why God says in Hebrews 10, verse 25, not to forsake the assembling together.

Believers, Christians, we're to get together. Did you know that? We are to be doing what we're doing right now. Why? Because there is a danger of isolation.

I had a famous internationally known pastor tell me he had fallen immorally at the peak of his career. And he said, listen, the final step that led to my destruction was not identifying the isolation. I was whisked away into private jets.

I was taken around, speaking everywhere, speak, driven back to the airport, get on a plane, fly to some other country, some other city, get out, speak, get back in the jet, fly to some other place, and you become

isolated. Are you, in America today, it's easy to be isolated. There's millions of people who won't leave their home or won't leave their bedroom, as it were, they're isolated.

They go to the store, but they don't know anybody. And their world is inverted and certainly introverted. They talk to themselves, they think about themselves, they worry for themselves, they're dying.

Isolation, it's different. Loneliness leads us to isolation. It's a dangerous thing.

And I wanna encourage you tonight, listen, Satan wants you isolated, this world wants you isolated, and this'll flip you out. Sometimes you want yourself isolated. Stress, demands, pressure, issues.

You begin to think, I can't take this anymore. Have you ever been short with people? Moms contend with this with kids, it's hard. Mommy, mommy, mommy, listen, mommy, mommy, mommy.

That's why kids today go, mommy, mommy, hey, Betty. What is it? They call the mom's name. Constant pulling can lead to a sense of where, I can't take this anymore.

And you begin to have a meltdown. The stress implodes upon you so strong, and your mind says, I need to withdraw. Jesus withdrew when ministry was in prolonged intensity.

He withdrew. And every time he did, he withdrew alone and prayed to the Father, it says. We will withdraw and we'll rent a movie or do something that's spiritually unredeeming for our soul.

And we just slip further away. We draw the curtains, we shut down. And I'm not talking about taking a break.

I'm talking about this becoming a habit of life. It will kill the believer. I'm like a pelican, he said.

I'm like an owl. Isolation's dangerous. One of the most powerful pictures of isolation is what I mentioned earlier, I think, about Adam and Eve.

They were together, but they were covering themselves up. Isolation deceives you in thinking, I'll just cover myself up. Maybe something's gone on in your life and you're thinking, I can't face those people.

I hear this a lot. Pastor, today's my first day back at church. I've been gone for years.

And you know, just that comment, you know it. You know that there's a lot of baggage in that comment. Isolation.

Psalms 77, verse seven through nine says, will the Lord cast off forever? Will he be favorable no more? Has his mercy ceased forever? Has his promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Listen to that. God is altogether lovely, but isolation will cause you to think crazy thoughts. This is how we fight it.

We fight off isolation this way. By grabbing the word of God and crying out like this. Lord God, your Bible says, Romans 8:35, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword? The answer is no.

Psalms 139, seven says, where can I go from your spirit? David cried out, where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there. If I just make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. He says, behold, you're there, verse nine.

And if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, he goes on to say through that entire Psalm, you're there. He's there. In your isolation, he's there, cry out to him.

He's amazing. Point four, the discipline of desolation is this. It will involve grief, life, Christian ministry, living for Jesus.

Every human being will experience grief, but sometimes maybe believers have it even more sometimes. I don't know. Psalm 51, three, you know this Psalm.

Psalm 51, David wrote this Psalm after he got caught committing adultery. For I acknowledge my transgressions. My sin is always before me against you.

And you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight. He prays and cries out to God. Grief, your soul can be desolated by grief.

It can be brought on by sin. It can be brought on by difficulty, death, swallowed up with grief. Many times people grieve and they get angry at God.

I understand that. It's not right, but I understand it. We've all been there.

What's happening? We've got to discipline our lives that, listen, every one of us who are Christians will have to battle grief in life. Just know this. That's why I thank God for the Bible.

Let me tell you something. You go to a church that doesn't teach the Bible and then grief comes to your life and you're gonna be an absolute lost mess. But when grief comes to your life, you've got an anchor for your soul, man.

And this word, God is so good. You think, oh, the Bible's cool. It's cool.

No, it's not cool. It's beyond cool. And you won't know how awesome it is until you have some grief in your life.

That's the test. How do we fight off this grief? Look at this. Lord, your Bible says, 2 Corinthians 1, blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort those who are in trouble with the comfort with which you've comfort us.

Think of that. Think of that. Amazing.

Final point right here, number five. The desolation of soul that will visit us in life will also involve fear. Desolation will bring fear.

Fear is a very terrible debilitating thing. When we're fearful, it means that we're not trusting God to keep his word. That's what fear, that's what it, we're not trusting God to keep his word in our lives.

And so when that happens, we fear. See, what does fear look like? Many times, worry, anxious, worry, always worrying, wringing of the hands, worried, foreboding, dark clouds coming. There's people who worry when they don't have anything to worry about.

Things are going so good, something's gotta happen. Wow. Deuteronomy 31, six is be strong and of good courage and do not fear.

Don't be afraid. Who says that? God says that. Genesis 15, one, after these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, saying, do not be afraid, Abraham.

I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. You gotta take that verse and staple it onto your head. Right there, Genesis 15, one.

You're my shield. God, they're picking on me. Lisa, was it yesterday or the day before, whatever? She goes, you see what this lady said about you in the newspaper? I said, what is it? I don't read the newspaper.

I let all you people tell me what it says. I don't even get the newspaper. Well, this woman, she's saying this, and this woman, she said this, and she says about you and the school board, and you ought to be, and you, and then the woman shares her view, and I said, praise the Lord.

And she goes, what? I go, listen, listen how it ends. She's all upset with me. She's all upset with the school board.

And listen, at the end, she says, and you know what? And then she spills her beans. And I told Lisa, praise the Lord. She said, what are you talking about? And I go, man, that's a badge of honor, what I just read, what you just read me.

That's a good thing. Listen, when people say to you, oh, I see, company's laying everybody off. You'll probably get laid off next.

You're the Christian. What are you gonna do about it? I'm gonna pray. God will give me another job.

The Bible says that he'll never allow the righteous to be baking bread, so he'll give me a job. And when you have that peace, they're gonna go. They're gonna, they get all upset.

The boss announces, because the economy, no bonuses or raises this year. Everybody starts cussing and swearing and biting the doorknobs of the building and stuff. And you're like this, hey, thanks, boss.

Grateful to have a job. And they'll go, well, aren't you all happy? What's with you? God's on the throne. What's your alternative? Desolation of soul.

It's not worth it. Now I end with this. How do we fight fear? Grab the word of God and cry out to him and say, Lord, your Bible says, Matthew 10, verse 29.

Jesus said, and not two, listen, are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore, for you are more valuable than many sparrows.

Who said that? Jesus said that. About who? You. And by the way, if a sparrow could read, that's pretty comforting.

In fact, I'm gonna end, we're out of time. I'm gonna end with that. This is a true story.

Happened today at my house. This morning, I'm looking out the window. And I told you before, we have a gazillion birds in our backyard.

So they're out there eating and I'm watching. And they're all kind of flitting and jumping around. And then like something flies by or whatever.

And they always, they go to the trees. And then one comes back, three come back, 10 come back, 30 come back. Except there's this one sparrow.

He's sitting there. And then like the dog runs by, and they all go back in the tree. Except this one sparrow, he's just sitting there.

He's pecking, long eating. He's not moving for nothing. This is a true story.

And he catches my attention and I'm like this. Bird, hawk flies by or whatever it was, it was big. Scared him, don't go to the tree.

And he's just sitting there. Mink, mink, mink, mink, mink, mink, mink, mink. And every time, he'd never move.

He didn't budge. Birds of a feather flock together. He doesn't move.

So I walk out there and they all fly. And he's, mink, mink, mink, mink, mink, mink, mink. And then he flies over to where the water is at.

And he goes over there, kind of near it to get some water. And he's got his beak down on the concrete, where there's some, but he's not pecking on the water yet. He's not getting a drink.

He's moving, he's getting kind of closer to it. And then he finally gets over to the water, he's drinking. He's drinking water.

And then all of his friends come back. And then I move from under the umbrella. And they all go back and they all fly away again.

And he doesn't move. Then he turns and he goes over, flies again. This is like 30 feet.

Flies over back to where the food's at. And he kind of crashes and then gets back. He's pecking away and eating.

And I said, Lord, this is fantastically strange and amazing. Nothing scares him. He's a little awkward.

He's a little awkward. He kind of fumbles around. But he's eating and drinking and he's fine.

And he can fly. You know what? He was there again tonight, right before I came. They come in the morning, they come at night and they eat.

This bird has got to be deaf and blind. No, I'm serious. He has to be.

Because when everyone else is afraid, he's not afraid. When they all flinch and fly up because a hawk flew by, he's not eating. He's not aware.

He's eating and he's drinking and he's flying and he's fine. He's completely different than all the others. And tonight I thought, Lord, this message, I wanna thank you, God, for this.

Because that little guy, he might be deaf. He might be blind. But he chirps with all the rest of them.

It's in his DNA. He's fine. One thing's for sure.

He's not very nervous about stuff. And when your soul is desolate and you're fearful that you're far from God, you're afraid of everything. And Jesus says, hey, Jack, I'll give you a verse for tonight.

That little sparrow out there, my dad, my father's really keen on that little bird. And whatever happens to that little bird, it's not gonna happen without my father knowing about it. And you need to think about that.

There's no need for you any longer as of tonight to be desolate of soul. The Lord is waiting for you to come back home. And for those of you who are saying, Pastor Jack, I checked all the bases and I'm fine.

Then listen, just write it out, my friend. You're going through a time of growth. There's a desert time for the soul.

That's okay. You'll make it through. And when you come on the other side, oh man, the waters are sweet and the grass is green and it's beautiful.

And you will not be like an owl in the wilderness or the pelican in the wilderness or the owl in the desert. And you won't be one lone little sparrow lost on top of the house. You'll be down there all around people in this world.

They're freaking out, scared and flinching about everything. But God has blinded you. Thank God to the evils that will befall the world.

He has set your heart on the pilgrimage. And as a Christian, you're heading home. And you don't forget that.

Father, we pray tonight, Lord, in Jesus' name, that we would pursue you, seek after you, follow you. Somewhere, maybe in my own backyard in one of those trees, there's a little fat, chubby little sparrow just happy as a lark tonight. Probably dreaming about eating more seed in the morning.

Is he blind? I don't know. Is he deaf? I don't know. But if he's not, he's just the most Christian sparrow.

And what a witness. And tonight, Father, may we tonight decide here and now to give it up to you, to give our worry, care, concern, the fear, the economy, the issues, the marriage, the relationship, the engagement, the boss, the employees, the nation, this world. Father, now, may we give it up in Jesus' name.

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