(Biographies) William Cowper

by John Piper

John Piper explores the life and struggles of William Cowper, highlighting his poetic contributions and battles with depression.

Duration: 1:33:52
Scripture: John 11:43, Romans 3:25
Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of encountering the word of God and being transformed by it. He emphasizes the sufficiency of Jesus' atonement and the completeness of justification through faith. The speaker also reflects on the importance of periodically waking up from worldly preoccupations and examining our motives. He concludes by encouraging listeners to fortify themselves with hope and cultivate a deep distrust of despair.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.desiringgod.org I'm writing down a sixth point to conclude with here, because I just thought of it. Let me give you three reasons why I chose William Cooper to talk about this year.

Number one, I have found since I was 17 years old, probably before, but my memory is not well before that, that poetry has an unusual power in my life. And I don't so much mean reading it as trying to write it. And in reflecting on my own pilgrimage, I went back in my files, and I didn't know I had these, but I found Leaves of Thought, 1964, senior in high school.

The Codon, Wheaton College, 1965, I was a freshman. The Opinion, from Fuller Seminary, 1972. The Co-Evil, from Bethel when I was teaching there.

And I have poems written in all of those books. And it just was a visual reminder to me that ever since I was 17, trying to write poetry has had a very significant place in my life. And there's a reason for this.

I've reflected frequently on what happens when I spend the hours it takes to take a fairly simple thought and put it into a new way of speaking. And what I think it is, is this. I live, as probably you do too, with a perpetual breach between the intensity of my passions and the magnificence of the reality I see.

A chasm of inadequacy to say and feel what ought to be said and felt in view of that God, that heaven, that hell, that family, that world, that eternal life. The realities out there have always seemed so magnificent to me that what's in here has always felt inadequate. And poetry has been my lifelong effort to build a bridge across there.

To find a way of speaking and really a way of seeing and feeling that attempts to bring just a little closer together the passion within and the glory without. And therefore I have been taken up with those who have expressed their faith in that way. And William Cooper tried to close that breach with poetry and some of you have.

There are other ways of closing it, trying to close it. There is a relief that comes with that. Cooper got a picture of his mother, a portrait of his mother when he was 59 years old.

He had not seen her for 53 years, he was dead all that time. And he wrote, and while that face renews my filial grief, fancy shall weave a charm for my relief. And I think I know exactly what he meant.

Fancy will weave a charm for my relief. Meaning something was building so powerfully on the inside as he watched, as he looked at his mother's picture, that he had to have a relief. And it was fancy, a poem.

He wrote a poem on his mother's portrait. There is a deep release and relief that comes in finding new ways of seeing and new ways of saying magnificent truth, all of which is old. My second reason for picking Cooper is that I want to know the man who wrote God Moves in a Mysterious Way.

We just sang it. God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

That hymn, with all of its magnificent understanding of the sovereignty of a good God behind a frowning providence, is the rock bed of my theology. I live by the truth of that hymn, so much so that when I preached a sermon, a series of five messages on Job a few years ago, one of the young women in the church did a needle point of this whole hymn for me, and it hangs over my mantle now at home as kind of a way of saying, this is the theology of this household. God moves in a mysterious way.

And I want to know the man who wrote that song. In fact, standing there singing these songs just made my heart ache because they are so magnificent and his life was so utterly miserable. The third reason is because I want to understand, if I can, why he struggled with what we would today call depression, they would call melancholy, gloom, and despair.

Why he struggled all his life and died in despair. Why, in view of the kinds of hymns he was at one time able to write. So let's move into it and try to get his life before us and then we'll analyze at the end the roots of his depression.

He was born in 1731 and died in 1800, which made him the contemporary of John Wesley and George Whitefield and the other leaders of the evangelical revival in England. He embraced Whitefield's theology rather than Wesley's. In fact, he tells the story of how, as a little boy, he would wake up at four o'clock in the morning while it's still dark and see the people with their lanterns going to hear Whitefield preach at five o'clock in the morning.

He said, More fields was as full of the lanterns of the worshippers before daylight as the hay market was full of flambeau on opera night. So as a little boy, he had this image of people flocking to hear Whitefield

preach before dawn on the fields. And he came to embrace the theology of George Whitefield, which was a healthy, robust, warm Calvinism.

The most significant Calvinistic influence in Cooper's life was the healthiest man of the 18th century, namely John Newton, the old African blasphemer. And I'm going to dwell on the influence of Newton in Cooper's life because they are at emotional opposite ends of the pole with the same theology. One as healthy as you could get, I believe, and one as sick as you could get and still live.

He was 27 years old when Jonathan Edwards died, just to put him in the American scene. He lived through the American Revolution, the French Revolution. Benjamin Franklin read his poetry and commended it.

But he was not a man of affairs. He was a recluse all of his life, spending virtually all of his life in the English little countryside of Olney and then Weston. His life was not the kind of life you would give to a child to read about because it's boring.

There's nothing on the outside that makes it interesting in terms of adventure or politics or public engagement. But one of the differences between children and adults is that adults come to see that the main things in life happen on the inside and not on the outside. The big storms are not the ones that are on the sea that it's fun to write books about because you almost get washed overboard like John Newton did.

But the big storms in life are inside, nobody sees, and that's the kind of epic proportions we have in Cooper's experience. So those of us who have grown up and not altogether put away childish things in our love of adventure, but nevertheless come to appreciate other kinds of stories, find a man's story like this very engaging. He was born November 15, 1731 at Great Berkhamsted near London, a town of 1,500 people.

His father was the rector of the Church of England in that town. His father was not an evangelical believer and therefore he grew up without a saving faith in Jesus Christ. His mother died when he was six years old and his father sent him off to boarding school at the age of six, which I think we will judge to be a very profound mistake that his father made.

We'll come back to that later on. At ten he went to Westminster Private School and stayed there until he was 18 years old, studying French and Latin and Greek, all the classics, learning them so well that the way he kept himself sane in the last decade of his life was by translating Homer and Ovid and Madame Gouillon. In other words, he knew his languages and was a significant classics scholar in his own right.

In 1749, at the age of 18, he apprenticed to a solicitor. His father wanted him to be a lawyer. He didn't particularly care about being a lawyer.

He had no taste whatsoever for the public life of politics or law. And so for ten years in this apprenticeship, he basically bided his time and spent his leisure fooling around with his friends. And in 1752, age 21, he sank into his first paralyzing depression.

There were four of them, that is, paralyzing ones. There were more. It was a mental breakdown of tremendous proportions for a 21-year-old young man, and he began to struggle all his life with this.

Let me read you the way he described this. I was struck with a dejection of spirits as none but they who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror and rising up in despair.

I presently lost all relish for those studies to which before I had been closely attached. The classics no longer had any charms for me. I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had not one to direct me where to find it.

Now the way he pulled through this first depression was the poems of George Herbert. And if you're not familiar with the poems of Herbert and you like poetry, I would really encourage you to get them. Herbert died 150 years, or lived 150 years before Cooper, and he read those poems and saw enough beauty and enough hope in them that his spirits at least got to the point where he had the energy to not sit in front of the window staring day in and day out, but to go to Southampton by the sea and allow himself to be ministered to by God through nature.

And it was a mercy, and it was sad because, let me read what happened. It was wonderful and it was sad. The morning was calm and clear, the sun shone bright upon the sea, and the country on the borders of it was the most beautiful I have ever seen.

Here it was that on a sudden, as if another sun had been kindled, that instant in the heavens, on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit, I felt the weight of all my weariness taken off. My heart became light and joyful in a moment. I could have wept with transport had I been alone.

And he was delivered from this depression. That was the mercy. The sad thing was that he lamented later on that instead of giving God the credit whose hand in nature had ministered to him, as he did so often, by the way, to Spurgeon.

If you've never read Spurgeon's essay called The Minister's Fainting Fits, which means The Minister's Bouts with Depression, read it. And one of the things he says in there is that the next best thing to, what was it? The next best thing to what? Yes, the experience of grace through the scripture was a stiff breeze in the face by the sea for lifting your spirits. Now, Spurgeon gave God the credit when he was ministered to by trees, grass, sky, wind, oceans.

At this point, Cooper was not a believer, and what he learned was the way to fight depression is change your scenery. And he said he formed a horrible habit of fighting his depressions by simply trying to manipulate his surroundings from outside. During that time, 1749 to 1756, he was falling in love with Theodora, his cousin, the son of his uncle Ashley Cooper.

He would go during this time when he was wasting his time with the solicitor on weekends to visit her, and he fell deeply in love with her. And in 1756, his uncle Ashley cut it off and forbade them. They had just gotten engaged, they were planning to be married, and he forbade it.

And the reason he gave was consanguinity, that is, you ought not to marry your cousin. That's really puzzling because he had allowed this relationship to go on for six or seven years, he had allowed the engagement, they had come right up to the end, and it simply raises the question of whether or not Ashley Cooper saw in William Cooper something that would make a terrible husband for his daughter. And I think he was right about that, but it simply raises for us the question of what was it? What did he see? What was he concerned about that cut this off? It was a devastating thing to happen to him in 1756.

Theodora, the father did not get his wishes, namely a happy marriage for his daughter, because neither William Cooper nor Theodora ever married anybody else, and they kept in touch with each other, never saw each other again after 1756. She outlived him beyond 1800, and she supported him anonymously through her aunt. It was a tragic relationship.

He wrote about 19 poems for her under the pseudonym Delia, one of them written several years later, closed like this, but now soul partner in my Delia's heart, yet doomed far off in exile to complain, eternal absence cannot ease my smart, and hope subsists but to prolong my pain. Hope subsists but to prolong my pain. William Cooper's life, as I begin to see it, is just one long accumulation of pain.

His life was just an accumulation of pain. In 1759, when he was 28 years old, he was appointed by his father, or through his father, to the Commissioner of Bankrupts in London, a job that he held for a few years, and then he was promised, and on the brink of being given, a promotion to Clerk of Journals of the Parliament. But this struck utter terror into William Cooper's heart.

The idea of being a public person threw him into a second great despair, much worse than the first one in 1752. Here's what happened. His father had arranged for him to get this position.

He thought it would be a good promotion for his son. He didn't know his son. And the enemies of the father in the parliament did not want his son to have any promotion, and therefore they arranged for a very rigorous public examination, which ordinarily wouldn't have been required for this job.

And that was such a terrifying thing to William Cooper that it almost destroyed him. He attempted to commit suicide three times, but let me read what he wrote. All the horrors of my fears and perplexities now returned.

A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this interrogation. Those whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves on an occasion is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horror of my situation. Others can have none.

So more than half a year he awaited this, and he wrote that those were days when he went to work as a man who arrives at a place of execution. Then a dreadful memory returned. We get a glimpse here a little bit into his relationship to his father that we'll come back to more.

This 32-year-old clerk now, William Cooper, recalled reading a treatise on self-murder when he was 11 years old. Here's what he wrote. I recollect when I was about 11 years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder.

So here's a father. The boy's mother has been dead for three years. He's alone in boarding school, and he asked his son on holiday to read a defense of suicide and give him his opinion.

He's not smart. I well recollect when I was about 11 years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder and give him my sentiments on the question. I did so and argued against it.

My father heard my reasons and was silent, neither approving nor disapproving, from whence I inferred that he sided with the author against me. So that memory now, he's 32 years old, that was when he was 11, that memory comes back for the first time as he's facing this dreadful possibility of a public examination. So, in October of 1763, he buys the poison laudanum.

He ponders escaping to France. He begins to hallucinate and see slander of himself in the newspaper, which isn't there. He's losing touch with reality.

And the day before the examination, he hires a cab and drives to the Tower Wharf to throw himself over the bridge. And he looks and the water's too shallow. And besides, he says, there was a man, a porter, seated upon some goods, a message, a messenger to prevent him.

That's his subsequent interpretation. So he goes back home, gets the poison out, and he wrote, My fingers were so closely contracted and entirely useless that I could not take the poison. The next morning, he gets up and tries three times to hang himself with a garter from the rafter in his room.

The third time, he goes unconscious, and then it breaks, and he falls to the floor. When he comes to, he crawls into bed, and that's where the laundress finds him, calls his uncle, and the examination is over, his public life is over. And everything from that point on, he says, condemned him.

Conviction of sin took place, especially of that just committed. The meanness of it, as well as the atrocity, were exhibited to me in colors so inconceivably strong that I despised myself with a contempt not to be imagined or expressed. This sense of it secured me from the repetition of the crimes.

Isn't that interesting? His loathing of the crime saved him from doing it again, temporarily. This sense of it secured me from the repetition of the crime, which I could not now reflect on without abhorrence. A sense of God's wrath and a deep despair of escaping it instantly succeeded.

Everything he read now condemned him. Sleep would not come. When it came, he had terrifying dreams.

In the day, he reeled and staggered like a drunken man. And in December of 63, he was institutionalized by his family in the St. Alban's insane asylum. Now, this was a stroke of mercy, because in this asylum, and not all asylums in the 18th century were helpful, there was a man named Dr. Nathaniel Cotton, who was a poet and an evangelical believer.

And he loved William Cooper. And he ministered to William Cooper. He held out hope to him for six months as William Cooper insisted he was damned and reprobate and absolutely beyond any hope of God.

He would leave the Bible in places where Cooper might find it and pick it up. And so it happened. It happened in two stages.

Let me read them to you. This is from his memoir. Having found a Bible on the bench in the garden, I opened up the 11th chapter of St. John where Lazarus is raised from the dead.

And I saw so much benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy with miserable men in our Savior's conduct that I almost shed tears upon the relation. Little thinking that it was an exact type of the mercy which Jesus was on the point of extending towards me. I sighed and said, oh, that I had not rejected so good a Redeemer, that I had not forfeited all his favors, and thus was my heart softened, though not yet enlightened.

But increasingly the sense grew in his heart that he may not be utterly doomed. And one day a revelation, he said, by revelation it came to open the Bible. And when he opened the Bible it fell open to Romans 3, 25.

And this is what that verse says, as you know. Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed through the forbearance of God. And this is what he wrote about his conversion.

Immediately I received the strength to believe it. So now note this, we'll come back to this at the end when we talk about what do you do and say to a person like this. It was on an occasion, nobody constraining, reading a text he had probably read many times.

Immediately I was given the strength to believe it. And the full beams of the sun of righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement he had made, my pardon sealed in his blood, and all the fullness and completeness of justification.

In a moment I believed and received the gospel. Whatever my friend Madden, I didn't tell you that part of the story just to shorten it down. But just to encourage you that when you share with somebody who's depressed and they say I've heard all that before, no use talking to me.

It's still not necessarily useless because his friend Madden had come to him right between his suicide attempts and his institutionalization. Had shared the gospel with him, had poured out his heart and love to him, and he had shut him down. And now, he says, whatever my friend Madden had said to me long before revived in all its clearness with demonstration of the spirit and with power.

Unless the almighty arm had been under me I think I should have died with the gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears and my voice choked with transport. I could only look up to heaven in silent fear overwhelmed with love and wonder.

He had come to love Nathaniel Cotton very deeply as you can imagine. And so he stayed 12 months, longer than he needed to, in the asylum, enjoying the fellowship of this poet and evangelical director of a state asylum. June 1765, he leaves St. Almond's.

He goes to live with a family, no place to go, no job. Goes to live with a family named the Unwin family. And there's a husband, there's a wife, she's eight years older than he is, and there's a son younger than he is.

And the relationship that's formed here is strange and remarkable. He loves the family, they love him. Two years later Morley Unwin, the husband, is killed falling from his horse.

And that set in motion some relationships that were both the most important and the most unusual and uncertain in his life. Namely the emotion with John Newton and the emotion with Mary Unwin, the widow. He lived with her for 30 years, eight years older than he is.

And in Olney the tongues wagged. And it is an odd relationship that you live with a woman just eight years older, but all the outward evidence is she was a mother to him, not a lover to him. And yet people wagged their tongues and he had to deal with that whole issue for a long, long time.

John Newton, how did he come into the picture here? When Morley Unwin was killed, John Newton was not the parish minister here in Huntington. He was the parish minister in Olney, some miles away. But now given the kind of man John Newton was, he was told that there's a family in Huntington whose husband was just killed and whose father was just killed.

And evidently the person who shared that thought the minister in this parish wouldn't do anything about it. And so Newton came and ministered to the Unwin family, including William Cooper, and was so significant in their life that they moved, the whole family moved to Olney, where he was the pastor, to sit under and live under his ministry, which they did for the next 13 years. They lived in Olney for 20 years and lived under his ministry for 13 before he left and went to London and ministered there for 27 more years.

Now, Newton, you all know, is the author of Amazing Grace. The healthiest, the happiest of pastors that I can think of in the 18th century. He was not merely respected by his audience as so many churches respected their pastors in those days.

He was loved by his people in Olney. Just to give you a flavor of the kind of man he was, let me read you a typical kind of quote. He said, Two heaps of human happiness and misery.

Now, if I can take but the smallest bit from the heap of misery and add to the heap of happiness, I carry a point. If as I go home a child has dropped a half penny, and if by giving it another I can wipe away its tears, I feel I have done something. I should be glad to do greater things, but I will not neglect this.

When I hear a knock on my study door, I hear a message from God. It may be a lesson of instruction, perhaps a lesson in penitence, but since it is his message, it is bound to be interesting. To me, that just exudes health.

That a pastor cannot resent a little child, or resent the fact that there is misery, or resent a knock on the door, but just exude expectancy that God has got interesting things for my life today, even if it is penitence that I will have to perform when somebody confronts me, or whatever. So Newton came into this sick man's life, and praise God he came into William Cooper's life. And they moved to Olney to live with him for some months, but in his ministry for 13 years.

September 1767, Cooper is 34 years old, they move to Olney. He is still a nobody. He has never worked a day in his life on anything important.

He has written no significant poems up to this time. His life is adrift. Perhaps part of his problem is how much leisure he has.

He is a well-to-do family. He gets stipends sent from various relatives, and he is just coasting. The descriptions of his days are unbelievably boring.

Newton saw in William Cooper a bent towards melancholy and reclusiveness, and he drew him into the ministry of visitation. So he took him with him as he visited around, and whether that was good or not, God only knows. It looked freeing, it looked opening, but inside Cooper there was always a sense of withdrawal, and a sense of stress when having to meet people he didn't know.

And then Newton got a new idea. He is always dreaming, how can I help this man? How can I help this man get out of this gloom that he lives in? And he hit upon the Olney Hymnal. So he said, how about collaborating with me, and we will write hymns for our church.

I'll write some and you write some. And so Newton wrote, before they were done, 208 hymns, including Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds, Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken, Come My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare, and Cooper wrote 68. God Moves in a Mysterious Way, There is a Fountain Filled with Blood, O for a Closer Walk with Thee.

But before he could finish his part, he had what he called the fatal dream. January had come again. His depressions, all four major immobilizing, paralyzing depressions happened in January.

And they happened at ten year intervals, give or take a year. January had come again, and the dreadful 63 was found now almost to be repeated in what he called the more dreadful 73. The dream was this, he wrote later, not giving the exact content, but said a word was spoken to him in this dream to the effect, It is all over with you, you are lost.

That was written twelve years after the dream. I had a dream twelve years ago, before the recollection of which all consolation vanishes. And it seems to me must always vanish.

And he wrote another letter to Lady Hesketh. In one day, in one minute, I should rather have said, Nature became a universal blank to me. And though from a different cause, yet with an effect as difficult to remove as blindness itself.

Repeated attempts at suicide followed there in the dreadful 73. Newton stood by him all the way, rescuing him again and again. One time had to return, give up a vacation to be with William Cooper, just to keep him from killing himself.

In 1780, Newton leaves Olney for a new pastorate. And if you were Newton now, for 13 years having wrestled with a chronically melancholy person, having done everything in your power to help him, I wonder if you would say, glad to have that guy out of my life. I am off to London.

And he didn't do it. John Newton and William Cooper for 20 years carry on a lively correspondence of mutual exhortation, mainly going from Newton to Cooper. And many visits in which Newton tries to sustain him.

We'll see one of those at the end, how crucial it was, that ongoing shepherding that he had. But he never really considered anybody else. What's his name who wrote The Force of Truth? Scott.

He moved in to Olney after Newton left. And Cooper didn't like him. He did not benefit from his ministry.

So the only pastor he ever really knew was John Newton. Because he basically didn't go to church. He didn't pray for a long time after the depression of 73.

He would sit, in fact, with Lady Unwin and with William at the table while they had the blessing, with fork in hand, staring straight ahead. Not because he didn't believe in prayer. He just didn't believe it was for him.

He had been canceled out of the book. That was his deep, deep persuasion. Now, it was probably good that Newton left because that unleashed a poetic energy, for some reason, in this bleak, dark soul, for the next six years or so, 1780 to 1886, all of his major works came out.

And there were a lot of them. One, you don't know any of them, probably, because nobody reads them today. One's called The Task, 100 pages of blank verse that he wrote.

He thought of himself in those days, it's just the strangest and most heart-wrenching thing. He thought of himself as a reprobate, utterly damned, and a servant of the revival. And he would make his contribution to the revival.

He believed all the doctrines of Whitefield, all the doctrines of Jonathan Edwards. He was totally convinced that the revival was of God. God was real.

The atonement was real. He was out of it. He wrote, I who scribbled rhymed to catch the triflers of the time and tell them truths divine and clear which couched in prose they would not hear.

All of his poems, secular poems, were moral sermons for the 18th century on behalf of the revival. One author said he helped to spread the revival's ideas among the educated classes because of his formal alliance with the evangelical movement and the practical effects of his work. Cooper remains its poet laureate.

Perhaps the productivity of those years from 1880 on stemmed off the dreadful 1883. We had a 52, a 63, a 73, and now here comes 83. And it did.

It stayed it for about three years. And then in 1786, the fourth great immobilizing depression descended upon him again. Numerous attempts at suicide.

And spared every time by some quirk of providence. He moves to Weston with Lady Unwin. She declines in health.

He becomes like a passionately committed son to this woman. Stops doing everything, tends her every need until she dies. And then from 96 after her death to 1800 in his death, he sustains himself with some translation of Greek poetry and French works.

And the last poem he writes is in 1799, the year before he dies, and he calls it The Castaway. And it's totally despairing. Now let me step back from this life and reflect with you a few minutes on why or what is going on here.

The melancholy is disturbing. And we need to come to terms with it in terms of God's sovereignty and his grace and the doctrine of perseverance of the saints and what in the world is happening here. And a man who is surrendered to despair right up to the end as far as it looks.

First observation is this. There is an inconsistency in the report of his own mental condition. We must be aware of the inconsistencies in the reports of people's despair.

Loaded as my life is, he wrote in 1784 to Newton, he always bared his soul most to Newton. Loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comforts as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, were it once ended. You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, an endeavor to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it, but it will be lost labor.

In other words, that's the kind of thing you'll get typically from a person in utter despair. There's no point in talking to me. I know what you're going to say.

I've heard it all, so don't bother. Nature revives again, he says, but my soul, a soul once slain, lives no more. My friends, I know, expect that I shall see yet again.

They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning. In every case but my own.

And why not my own? I forestall the answer. God's ways are mysterious. He gives no account of his matters.

An answer that would serve my purpose well is theirs that use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained. Absolute despair of being elect and going to heaven.

Notice though that he is affirming the doctrines. This is why it's so frustrating. He knows everything you could tell him just about.

Now, here's the inconsistency. In that same year when he was writing that letter to John Newton, he was writing the task, book three. And in book three of the task, he tells the story of Christ's deliverance in his life in a way that I cannot believe that he would write it with such poignancy if it had no abiding effect on him.

Let me read you these lines from the task. I was a stricken deer that left the herd long since. In other words, I'm a loner.

I've always been a loner. With many an arrow deep in fixed, my panting side was charged when I withdrew to seek a tranquil death in distant shades. There was I found by one who had himself been hurt by the archers.

In his side he bore and in his hands and feet the cruel scars. With gentle force soliciting the darts, he drew them forth and healed and made me live. Since then with few associates in remote and silent woods, I wander far from those my former partners of the people seen with few associates and not wishing more.

I find it so hard to believe that whether it was morning or evening when he wrote those lines that he felt exactly the same way he did when he wrote that letter. There's something not quite consistent here in 1784. In the 1790s, you get the same thing.

There were expressions of hope in his letters from time to time. He said once, prayer had ended for him basically in 83, and he said in the early 90s, once more I have been permitted by God to approach him in prayer. He said that in one of his letters.

Once more I have been permitted to approach him in prayer. His earliest biographer said that in the last decade of his life there were frequent open passages like that, but at night the spiritual hounds haunted him. There was a horrible blackness for him most of the time.

Now Newton never gave up on him, and he visited him in 1792, and he said to Newton, I feel like I'm always scrambling in the dark upon rocks and precipices without a guide. Thus I have spent twenty years, but thus I shall not spend twenty more. Long ere that period arrives, the grand question concerning my everlasting will or woe will have been decided.

Now that is not a statement of ultimate despair. That statement has a window of hope in it, because that's the effect that Newton's presence genuinely had on him. He came to die, and a doctor visited him, and he said to Dr. Lubbock in April of 1800, I feel unofferable despair.

And on April 24th, the maid came in, Miss Perrone, and offered him something to eat, and he said, what can it be? It could have been more tragic. His father and mother married in 1728. By 1731, when William was born, three babies had been born and died.

After he was born and lived, his brother John, the only other living sibling, was born six years later. And in that period, two more children were born and died. So you have five dead children in this family, and two living.

And three days after John is born, his mother dies. And that year, his father sends him to a boarding school. It's a calamity-ridden origin that bodes ill for the future.

Now let's think about the death of his mother here. I wouldn't make much of this if he hadn't made much of it. There were no photographs in those days, but there was a portrait.

When he was 59, as I told you, 59 years old, 53 years his mother had been dead, he'd never seen her for 53 years, he is sent by his cousin a portrait, and he opens the mail, and the flood of emotion that comes over him is almost too much for him to bear. And the poem that he writes to give relief to himself carries with it the kind of observation that gives you maybe a little glimpse of what a six-year-old boy feels having lost two siblings at birth, and now lost his mother, and being about to be sent away totally alone. Oh, that those lips had language.

Life has passed with me but roughly since I heard thee last. My mother. When I heard that thou was dead, say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed? Hovered thy spirit, or thy sorrowing son, wretch? Even then, life's journey just begun.

I heard the bell tolled on thy burial day. I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away, and turning from my nursery window, drew a long, long sign, wept, alas, adieu. Thy maidens grieved themselves at my concern, oft gave me promise of thy quick return.

Ardently I wished, I believed, and disappointed still, was still deceived by expectation every day beguiled. Dupe of tomorrow, even from a child. That line is really moving to me.

Dupe of tomorrow, even from a child. Meaning, tomorrow always tricks me. That is, if there's any glimmer of hope in tomorrow, it never comes true.

Dupe of tomorrow, even from a child. I can't help but ask whether the strange relationships that William Cooper had with women were in part owing to this great, tragic loss. He never related normally to a woman after Theodora was gone.

And I don't know whether that was normal, in view of the way the father cut it off. There was Lady Hesketh, there was Lady Unwin, there was one other woman whose name I can't remember. And these women were utterly confused, except for Lady Unwin, who always lived with him as a mother.

Lady Hesketh, who was always, was a little bit older, was blown away. He had to twice tell her, my love poems don't mean I love you. He wrote these poems, and if you read them, you could understand why a woman would say, well, we're going to get married.

And then she would come to him and say, thank you, I love you too. And he would just back off as if totally flabbergasted that she was feeling that way. He was very, very unfit in his relationship with women to discern what was going on in his way of relating to them.

Now what about his father? This is the most tragic of all, I think. He virtually lost his father. Maybe he never had him, for all I know, when he was six.

His father sent him to boarding school, and listen to this description of the main thing he remembers between the ages of six and eight. My chief affliction consisted in my being singled out from all the other boys by a lad about fifteen years of age as a proper object upon which he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to forbear a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me.

It will be sufficient to say that he had, by his savage treatment of me, impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind that I well remember being afraid to lift up my eyes upon him higher than his knees, and that I knew him by his shoe buckles better than any other part of his dress. May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory." Another little glimmer of hope. What was that guy doing? You know, in the eighteenth century, nobody would ever, ever, ever write about sexual abuse, or pedophilia, or homosexuality.

And I have no way of knowing, but the peculiarity and the oddity of the way he related to women, and the oblique statements here about this man's, this fifteen-year-old's barbarity to this six-year-old boy, and a few other references to secrets in his life, just at least opened the possibility to hear it was a little boy who'd lost his mother, who'd been sent away by his father, and who for two years is barbarized by a fifteen-year-old, so much so that he can't even look him in the face. Whatever it was, it was devastating to him. But worse than that was the loss of his father.

We wouldn't really know how he felt, I don't think, had he not written a poem called Tyrosinium, a poem which nobody ever reads, probably. It's Latin for new recruit, or inexperience, or rawness. And the whole point of this poem, that he wrote many years later, was to persuade fathers not to send their children to public school, but to give them training in the home.

And when I read this, what I hear is a loud cry for his own father, who did not do that, and in fact, never, as far as I know, received any tribute from his son whatsoever. Listen to this. This is written now in general to fathers.

Would you, your son, be a sot, or a dunce, lascivious, headstrong, or all at once, that in good time the stripling's finished state for loose expense and fashionable waste should prove your ruin, and his own, at last, train him in public school, with a mob of boys, childish in mischief only, and in noise, else of a mannish growth, and five in ten, in infidelity and lewdness, men. There shall he learn, ere sixteen winters old, that authors are most useful, ponder, sold, and pedantry is all the school's impart, but taverns teach the knowledge of the heart. And seems it nothing in a father's eye, that unimproved those many moments fly? And is he well content his son should find no nourishment to feed his growing mind, but conjugated verbs and nouns declined, for such is all the mental food pervade, by public hackneys in the public schooling trade, who feed a pupil's intellect with store of syntax truly, but with little more, dismiss their cares when they dismiss their flock, machines themselves engoverned by a clock, perhaps a father blessed with any brains, would deem it no abuse or waste of pains to prove the diet, at no great expense, with savoury truth and wholesome common sense, to lead his son for prospects of delight to some not steep, though philosophic height thence, to exhibit to his wandering eyes, yon circling worlds, their distance and their size, to show him in an insect or a flower, some microscopic proofs of skill or power, as hid from ages past, God now displays to combat the atheists with in modern days.

Canst thou the tear thus trembling on thy lid, and while the dreadful risk foreseen, forbids free to and under no constraining forth, unless the sway of custom warp thy course, lay such a stake upon the losing

side, merely to gratify so blind a guide, canst thou not, thou canst not, nature pulling at thine heart, condemns the unfatherly, the imprudent part, thou wouldst not, deaf to nature's tenderest plea, turn him adrift upon a rolling sea, nor say, go thither, conscious, that there lay a brood of asps or quicksands in his way, then only governed by the selfsame rule of nature pity, oh, send him not to school, no, guard him better, is he not thine own, thyself in miniature, thy flesh, thy bone, and hopest thou not, as every father's hope, that since thy strength must with thy years elope, and thou wilt need some comfort to assuage health's last farewell, as staff of thine own age, that then, in recompense of all thy cares, thy child shall show respect to thy great hairs. He never, ever wrote a tribute to his father, not one poem, and I know of no letter. It's a powerful plea from a man to his father to have been different than he was, to have been there for him, and to educate him and take an interest.

Let me close with some lessons. What do we learn from this? What can we make of it? Number one, let's fortify ourselves while we have hope and health. Let's fortify ourselves by cultivating a deep distrust of the certainties of despair.

I'm talking about your own life now, first. Cultivate a deep distrust of the certainties of despair. Despair always speaks in certainties, but they are not sureties.

And I think while we have life and while we have health, one of the ways to guard ourselves from the blackest moments is to have bred into our lives a profound distrust of the certainties that will come and express themselves out of our own mouths in the moments of despair. The nevers and the alwayses of despair should be distrusted. But you will not distrust them if you begin the task of distrust in the minute of despair.

Despair only sees certainties of hopelessness. There may be, however, the possibility that if you form the habit of distrusting despair, that that would be like a little flower that in the midst of the bleak winter would show itself above the snow of the certainty of doom and say, The word that just came out of your mouth is not necessarily so. That's number one.

Number two, let us love our children and let us make them feel secure so that they would never ever write such a thing about us. John Newton's mother died when he was six years old also. In fact, that was the year that Cooper was born.

He was sent to boarding school until he was ten years old. But then you know what happened? His father took him on board the ship and for four years they sailed the seas together. It was a rotten relationship.

It was awful. I mean, the son was a he would he was disobedient. He was reckless.

He was gloomy. But I only mention this because, though I don't know for sure, I think quite apart from the structure of grace in a Christian home, there is a structure of nature built by God in parenthood and childhood that provides the structure of health if grace should ever come. And it did come to John Newton and he was the healthiest of men.

What he went through was horrible on the seas. He became the worst kind of lascivious, immoral person until he himself became a slave and God saved him. And yet, Cooper's father was never there.

Part of the issue, probably. Number three. Let us in our churches raise up, and if God enables us, let us be John Newtons for the William Coopers among us.

Let us acknowledge that the William Coopers are there and let us pray that there be many John Newtons who never give up on them. Most of us are so glad when the William Coopers move away or we leave the church in which we once served. I am so glad I do not have to worry with that person again.

John Newton, I don't understand this relationship, but he stayed faithful to this sick man who must have exhausted him trying to keep him alive and not commit suicide. Cooper wrote after a visit late in life to Newton, I found those comforts in your visit which have formally sweetened all our interviews and in part restored. I knew you, knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the chief shepherd feeds his flock.

I felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever, but one thing was still wanting, and that, the crown of all, I shall find it in God's time if it be not lost forever. I think he means assurance when he says that. That's a different discouragement than absolute despair.

That is not absolute despair. And it was born by a visit from a shepherd. The hope that glimmered in that last sentence was born by the visit from a persevering shepherd.

Number four, you know what was happening nearby in another village, don't you, in the 1780s and 1790s? There was another man named William Carey. And I say this by way of transition perhaps to 11 o'clock, Ralph. And I can't help but wonder, if you read the life of William Carey and what he's wrestling with, and you read the life of William Cooper, you kind of step back and say, how could those two men be functioning on the same planet? This man is so wrapped up in himself and such a recluse.

He doesn't even want to go to London, let alone India. And here's Carey with the maps on his wall and a sick wife and no doubt much sickness in his own driven heart, dreaming about India. And I think one of the lessons to learn is, William Cooper needed a dose of William Carey.

He needed the world. We were made for a bigger purpose than only and getting up in the morning, reading the classics, writing for an hour or two, and talking with Lady Unwin in the evening. It was an awful life that he led.

Just leisure, leisure, leisure. I don't know whether to criticize it because he was so sick that when he was presented with a challenge to take a test, he tried to kill himself. So what could he do? He was just preserving his own life.

And I praise God that I have the hymns. The thing that excites me about the sickness of this man is that God used him. He used him in his absolute despair.

Here's the fifth lesson. Now these next two are ones that I jotted down, one coming across the bridge this morning and one while I was sitting there. When I was writing this up at Shalom House a few weeks ago, or getting the notes down for it, I was immersed for two and a half days in Cooper, as those who were there know, just from morning till night I was Cooper, inside Cooper, reading biographies and poems.

Every now and then I would wake up to the fact that I was doing this and think about how I was feeling about it. And then I forgot about me and was doing it again. And I thought to myself, this is a parable, I think, of one of the sicknesses of the 20th century.

We are an incredibly self-conscious century. We are being taught to seek our happiness by checking out whether we're happy or not. Are you happy? How are you doing in there? And I sat there and I realized,

you know, for the last three hours, I have been totally outside myself.

In another man's life. And now I realize that and I'm checking out whether it's been enjoyable or not. And that particular moment is full of uncertainties.

That moment of introspection is, well, I'm not sure how I feel right now about spending all this time on this. But in the action, when you're being drawn out to another reality, there's an authenticity about it that is healthy. And so I just throw out to you whether or not this very conference is a symptom of a sickness.

The existence of what I felt drawn to put together here is a symptom of the 20th century sickness that we have. And we are so completely people of our age, we don't really have much choice. But somebody someday will write the intellectual and moral history of the 20th century, if we last, and they will say it was a century in which the folly of pursuing happiness by checking out whether you're happy or not and total consuming with self, that it was a dead end street.

There was no hope for the 20th century to really find fulfillment because they were always trying to figure out whether they had it or not by looking within. Now, I just say that as a question mark because there's a place for introspection. The Bible, I'm sure, has introspective sentences in it.

But that experience of sort of waking up in the middle of eight hours and then losing myself again just felt like a parable of the way life ought to be. That only periodically should we wake up from other preoccupation, from God preoccupation, from mission preoccupation. Only now and then should we wake up and make sure that our motives are okay and that we're not being deniers of anything horrible within and then throw yourself back into something bigger than you are and lose yourself.

And don't think so much about all this uncertainty and sickness that goes on in here when you're looking in the moral mirror. That's number five. And number six that I jotted down when I started was this.

One of the lessons to learn from this life is that the telling of it seems to be hope-giving. I gave a 30-minute version of this to my church a week and a half ago on Sunday evening. The effect was most remarkable in feedback that I got.

It gave hope. The sickest of all people, coming to the end of his life in absolute despair, a question mark over his own salvation gave hope. I throw it out for your consideration.

What's that mean to us as pastors and what we tell our people and how we give them hope. And the final lesson is rehearse for your people again and again and again the two things that saved William Cooper. Namely, the mercies of Jesus in his life and the sufficiency of his atonement.

Those were the two things that he chose to focus on. Remember he said in John 11, I saw so much benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy with miserable men in our Savior's conduct that I almost shed tears. And if you go back and look at those hymns we sang, two of them rehearse people's lives from the life of Jesus to whom Jesus gave hope.

And the other is the atonement. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement that he made, my pardon sealed in his blood, all the usefulness, all the fullness and completeness of his justification. You cannot persuade a person out of despair and out of depression.

But what you can do is in dogged John Newton kind of healthy love keep laying before them the grounds of hope in Jesus and in his shed blood. It will have to be the work of the Holy Spirit in the end to cause that person to say, it's for me. The spirit of adoption does not minister in a vacuum.

The spirit of adoption ministers where the truth that magnifies Jesus has been saturated. Because the spirit is given to glorify Jesus. If you withhold a lot of Jesus from people, the spirit of adoption will not have that to work with that he loves to glorify.

And so I think our strategy is to immerse people again and again, even when it seems hopeless, like Mr. Madden who visited him and was rebuffed, you just immerse them in the truth. And you take them and you say, look, you may not accept this now, someday the Lord is going to bless you with this truth. I believe in you.

I believe you will. So we have good reason, I believe, if we nourish the love of the John Newtons in our midst, that the sufficiency of the atonement and the mercy of Jesus will keep the William Coopers from being given over to the enemy in the end. I'm going to stop there and see in the last 15 minutes if you want to ask questions.

I don't know if I'll have any answers for you. The question is, do I know anything about his brother? I just know what I read, namely, that his brother John became a pastor, was a close confidant. It hurt William Cooper when he moved out of the home and took his own church.

But up to the point of William Cooper's death anyway, John was a faithful servant. And I'm trying to remember now, and I don't remember, whether his brother was an evangelical or not. But he was a friend and did not evidently struggle with the same things.

Oh, I assume he was, but I do not know. The biography and analysis of the 18th century that I used most completely was entitled William Cooper in the 18th century by Gilbert Thomas. And then my son, providentially brought home from England, the complete poetical works of William Cooper.

I don't know. I mean, they're not in print. And so you just have to go to a used bookstore to find the works of Cooper.

And I did not jot down the other three biographies that I consulted, so I do not have them here with me. You would be able to do just as well as I have. I could not find a biography written religiously.

This was written basically by a literature scholar. Southey's biographies, eight volumes, would be the one I would have liked. I couldn't get it.

I couldn't find it. So if you wanted to do the really thorough. And then he's most known after his poems for his letter writing.

He wrote thousands of letters, and they're collected in various places, and there you would be able to keep tabs on his ups and downs for the last 20 years of his life. If somebody comes to you, what do you say? How do you know they're wrong? If somebody comes and says, I'm convinced I'm a vessel for destruction, I'm reprobate, I'm not part of the elect, what do you say to them and how can you convince them they're wrong? Well, you don't know that they're wrong, and so you can't say, I know you're wrong, unless you've got some hotline to heaven, which I doubt that we will in those cases. My last point is my main one.

And I want to say to that person, and I've said this many times, sometimes I get angry. I'll even get to the point of saying it in anger, and I think now and then it's helped. I said, would you stop being so arrogant as to presume you know the mind and heart of God in this matter? You don't do this in other cases.

Why do you presume to do it? That's one thing I'll do, is I'll say, look, this certainty that you have about God's sovereign decrees is arrogant. You have no right, you have no grounds for knowing you are not elect. Now, they might be offended, they might be helped, they might be whatever, but that's true.

That's one strategy. You have to just be sensitive to the Holy Spirit whether that's going to drive the person out of your office or be awakening to them. The second is to just exult before them in the sufficiency of the atonement.

That it is gloriously able to save the worst of sinners. Though the thief, though I, though vile as he, I mean, Cooper is his best counselor in his hymns. You talk about the atonement, you rehearse Jesus.

You know, people say, people in despair and depression say, I know it in my head, it's just not in my heart. But you know what? If my own experiences with discouragement and depression are any indication, we don't actually mean that. That is, we mean it, but we don't know exactly what we're saying.

When you say, I know Jesus is merciful, you do not have at that moment in your head 10 or 15 beautiful stories of mercy fleshed out in words in front of you to look at. You just have this kind of abstract thing you remember from theology that, yeah, the pastor has taught mercy. And what gives life is specificity and reality so that I think rehearsing merciful acts of Jesus, telling stories.

The people that have gotten help most often from me will tell me in subsequent months of the stories I've told them that simply embody the truth that they said they knew and it wasn't here. So I think a second thing is whether they think it's important or not, rehearse for them stories of mercy. That's why I think the biggest battle in the pastoral life is being ravished by the mercy of God ourselves from our devotions early in the morning.

George Mueller said the number one task when you get up in the morning is to be happy in Jesus. And you better fight the battle on your knees until your heart is glad in God because you won't be of much use to anybody unless you can tell them about what Jesus is for you. So that what I do in the morning is I try to find something that I can hang on to and I know before this day is over, somebody's going to want me to show something to hang on to.

And I say, I'll tell you what I'm hanging on to right now. That's always better than a canned, oh, I've got four of those texts ready, you know. I got texts, depression, see this, four depression texts.

It's always better, I think, right off your heart. Here's what I'm hanging on to today. Here's the rope that's around me and hooked in heaven.

This morning, for example, I read Matthew 23. Now, Matthew 23 is bleak. Woe to you, Pharisees.

Woe to you, whited supplicants. Woe to you. It's awful.

I said, where is it? Lord, I want something to hold on to. I know that's the way I am. I hear it, you know.

You hear a lot of depression in the life of Jesus, Sam. I hear it. I get beat up by Jesus most every time I read the Gospels.

He is a severe and tough teacher. But, at the end of that chapter, it says, How long, O Jerusalem, how long, how often I would have gathered you as chicks. And I just dwelt on that and let myself feel the hen heart of Jesus.

And at the end of that paragraph, it says, You will not see me again until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Now, I think that's a reference to the second coming. So, I just said, he's coming again.

And when he comes, there are going to be people who say, Blessed is the name of the Lord in his coming. And I dwelt on the hen heart of Jesus, who is willing and eager to gather chicks. And I dwelt on the magnificence of the second coming.

And I dwelt on the fact that I am going to be one of those who says, Blessed is the Lord. And that's what's going to carry me through this day. And God put it in my heart so I could say it to you right now.

And he does that every day of my life. Unless I sin by failing to get happy in Jesus in the morning. So, I'm going way too far afield, Tom, from your question.

Be a John Newton. You won't solve the problem probably in that moment. But over time, periodic phone call, a note, just like we've heard from Sam.

Another question or two, seven more minutes. The question is, do I know whether John Newton had other kinds of relationships like Cooper's or was that extraordinary? And the answer is, I don't know. Do any of you? I would just get, go ahead.

We've heard a lot in this conference about self-esteem, and we've heard a lot about self-esteem. Is that true? Do you think that there may be people who are there, beyond possibly your imagination, like Cooper, like Straney, like Dieter, or Hexton, who said, we're a part of it. I'm a simple man.

I don't think that people always share what they came to say. I mean, I don't know. It's more than clear at that point.

How many people are struggling with that? I hear three things I want to respond to in what you said. Let me see if I can answer them without repeating the question so that it makes sense on the tape. Cooper's struggle was a little different than the typical struggle with self-esteem today because he knew the full-orb doctrine of justification by faith for the ungodly.

He knew that. He simply said, the reason I'm ruled out is beyond comprehension. It's not, I don't have an excessively bleak view of myself any more than any other sinner.

We're all totally depraved and unworthy of God and doomed for hell. They can be saved by the blood of Jesus. I can't be.

That's very different than I think. It has a lot of theological sophistication behind it. His despair does.

But if you ask me, is there a problem with self-esteem, I would say yes, in the sense that if a person does not know the reality of being a new creature in Christ, they need to be taught Ephesians 4 and 5 so that they can understand that they have a standing in grace, that they are children of God, that they are heirs of the kingdom, that Christ is their righteousness, that they are whole in Him. I think that's a legitimate thing to teach. I want to teach it.

Now you said something else right after that that triggered something I wanted to say and I can't remember what it was. Yes. See, now, I'm not sure I agree with you that that was of the devil.

The story, remember, was Jesus goes out with them in the boat and they say, cast the nets, and they said, we fished all night. There's no fish down there. And He said, but at your word we'll throw it down.

They throw it down and they pull up so much that the boats start to sink. Peter's response to the miracle of grace is to go on his face and say, depart from me, for I am an unclean man. Now I have taught here, I taught it on the night of prayer week just a few weeks ago, that that's a good response, an inevitable response to grace.

And the point I was making was this. Evangelical humiliation, as different from legalistic humiliation, is begotten more often by revelations of mercy than by wrath. Brainerd said he broke the heart of the Indians more frequently by displaying the unparalleled mercies of God than by describing hell.

And I said, why is that? Why is that that mercy can break your heart and make you feel so unworthy? In my life, the most frequent times, crossing that bridge on the way home after a glorious experience in this room with God's people, I feel what Peter feels all the time. Not all the time, a lot, frequently, where I'm walking across the bridge and I'll just say, I can't believe you were so good to me today. I just, I don't know why you do that.

And it's because of the goodness that I recognize my unworthiness. Now, the reason, I wanted a chance to say this on the panel, and I'm glad it came up because it's been one of the most exciting insights I've gotten in 1992. What this implies is that if you want to cultivate evangelical repentance, you have to create a love for holiness.

Because if people don't love holiness, the only thing they will be repenting of is the terror of the lack of it. And Jonathan Edwards has taught us once and for all, that's not evangelical repentance. Nobody goes to heaven for fear of hell.

It might scare you to become a lover of holiness, but the fear of hell gets nobody into the kingdom. So how do you then create a love of holiness so that when you see the lack of it in yourself, you feel bad about it? But the badness is not a feeling of fear at somebody who's about to smash you, merely. The bad feeling is, I can't believe the God whose holiness I love, and before whom I've fallen so short, has treated me with such mercy.

Does that make sense? That you have to love holiness before you can feel bad about not having it? Now, if that makes sense, the pathway to teaching our people true evangelical repentance is Christian hedonism. This is why I got excited. What I mean is, my job Sunday after Sunday is to display the holiness of God in such colors that people fall in love with it for itself, not for the consequences of not having it.

That's a subordinate motive. The consequences of not having holiness is hell. If you can shock people with that, you must.

Wherever the Bible does, we should. It wasn't the dominant way, however. The dominant way is by displaying holiness in such lavish and attractive colors that people fall in love with it, and you know what their first reaction is when they fall in love with it? It's to feel bad that they don't have it.

And then they're in a place to get right with God, because that's evangelical holiness. The love of holiness begets a feeling of brokenheartedness for not having the holiness, and the promise of God who is holy is to the brokenhearted and to the poor in spirit who are not just scared of hell, but who are so sad that they are not as holy as they ought to be and are as loving of the holiness of God as they ought to be. Maybe one or two more questions.

The question is, do I ever personally deal with depression? Now, depression is like a piece of blob of mercury on a table, as far as I can tell. You try to pick it up, it goes into three pieces. I don't know whether I deal with depression, but I'll sure tell you I deal with periodically immobilizing discouragement so that I can remember times, one or two times, sitting on the grass, palms up in my lap, staring at Lake Nokomis, not able to remember the names of my children on a Thursday afternoon.

And I wrote at the beginning of my book on Desiring God, there are times when you walk from your car to your house and you just want to sit down in the grass before you get there and say, nothing matters, and you just stare. There are times when emotions are so utterly incomprehensible that you don't know why you're crying. You bend over your Bible to get happy in Jesus, and you start reading, and there's this jerking inside that turns into sobs, and you kind of look around and say, where'd that come from? So, that's enough anyway, I don't know whether it's depression or not.

It doesn't really matter to me what name you put on it. And I've said pretty much most of what I do. God has never allowed me, in His providence, to become so low that I haven't been able to look at myself and say, distrust this.

I shall yet again praise Him. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you disquiet within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him. That's the statement of a man who cannot now praise the Lord, but knows God is coming back.

And I tremble at the day when I cannot do that. My daily prayer is, keep me in your grace. Keep me in the ministry.

Keep me in my marriage. Keep me in my faith. I feel very vulnerable.

I mean, my doctrine of eternal security is not such that I could go sleep with a woman and say, no problem, I received Jesus one time. That's not my doctrine of eternal security. I have a doctrine of the perseverance of the saints that could picture the possibility of Piper making shipwreck of faith and going to hell.

And therefore, I fight with tremendous seriousness against unbelief in my life. I fight the devil. I holler at the devil when nobody's home in my room.

I fight lust as though it could send me to hell. The kind of fight that you use a screwdriver to gouge out your eye with. I mean, Jesus used words that are not comforting for people.

Most of his words are tough. Some are tender. Most are tough.

I did an analysis of the Gospels going through writing T.O., Tough, T.E. in the margin by every saying of Jesus. It's overwhelmingly tough. Read it again.

Now, what that effect has on me is not to make me despair. It's to make me vigilant. And I don't think my vigilance is an unevangelical lack of gospel vigilance.

It's a vigilance that takes the deceitfulness of this heart very seriously. And when a sexual fantasy thought intrudes from some stupid, horrible advertisement between two Super Bowl plays, I do not have a television. That's how seriously I fight.

I don't look at certain pages in the newspaper. I do not read Variety. I do not get Time Magazine.

I mean, this sounds stupid and withdrawn and otherworldly. I know my weaknesses, and I am ruthless with my eyes. More than any man I've ever met.

And that may be true. I mean, I don't talk to everybody about this. But I am ruthless in the way I fight at that level.

I don't have a television. I don't have a television. Our mailing address is Desiring God, 2601 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406.

Desiring God exists to help you make God your treasure, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.