

You Are Dearly Loved by God

by Paul Washer

Paul Washer emphasizes the profound and unconditional love God has for His people, encouraging believers to retreat into communion with Him.

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Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not letting our hearts grow cold towards God. He warns against being attracted to worldly things like television, idle conversations, and distractions that can take away our focus from the beauty and worth of God. The preacher also highlights the need for genuine love and passion for God, rather than trying to appear cultured or professional in our witness to others. The sermon concludes with a reminder of God's love and affirmation of our beauty and worth in His eyes, as expressed in the Song of Solomon.

Transcript

It's always so hard for me to preach in places where I preach. Especially difficult for me to preach here because of the caliber of men and women who I know here and who have often spoke here. Sometimes it makes me a bit nervous.

I told someone the other day, I said, they said, I hear you're going to Missouri. I said, yes I am. I said, I could preach in front of Piper, MacArthur, Murray, and all of them and I wouldn't be as nervous as I get when I preach in Kirksville, Missouri.

Honestly, been there, done that, got the t-shirt. It is very, very difficult for me to preach here. But the Lord gave me a special verse while you were singing.

The first song, it says this, It is I who answer and look after you. I am like a luxuriant cypress. From me comes your fruit.

Isn't that beautiful? God saying, I'm your tree. From me comes your fruit. Be not afraid, Jacob, you worm.

For I am with you. Let's go to the Song of Solomon. Song of Solomon, chapter 4. Such a beautiful, beautiful song.

Song of Solomon, chapter 4, verse 7. You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you. This is the bridegroom speaking to the bride. This is God speaking to you.

This is Jesus Christ speaking to His church. Look at how He looks at you. I know so often that when we preach, particularly in the places where I have to preach, where the great majority of the churches that I preach in, the great majority of the people that are there, I would say more than 75% are unregenerated and do not know God.

Because of that, we're so quick and so often we're pointing out sin and trying to convince men of their need of Christ. But sometimes believers do not hear enough, something that is clear throughout all Scripture. And it's found in these verses right here.

You are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you, because the One who saved you has made you this way. He's declared you to be like this. He's shed His blood for you.

If you're a Christian here tonight, and you're struggling against sin, and you desire passionately to please Christ and be a blessing to Him, and you mourn so often when you look in the mirror and you see all the ways in which you come short, sometimes you need to hear this, that when He looks at you, He sees no blemish, because He Himself has put away your blemishes with His own scars, with His own wounds, with the wrath of God that He took on that cross in your place. Sometimes you need to rejoice. Sometimes you saints need to hear that He has done a good work on your behalf.

He's done a solid work, a strong work, a work that will not fade, that will not run, that will not dissolve with time. He has shed His blood on a tree for you, and by virtue and by power of what He has done for you, you are without blemish, and that He loves you. And look what He calls you.

He says, you are altogether beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you. He calls you darling. I remember hearing a man speak about Samuel Rutherford and speaking that how his letters seemed to be a bit too feminine for him.

But then he acknowledged the writer. He said, it's probably more my problem than it is Samuel Rutherford's. It's hard for us as men oftentimes to look at this passage, to be called darling, but look at it in the context of the church.

This dearness that God has for you. You struggle with this idea, this American idea of production and producing and doing something for God and climbing the scale. And that there's obviously men and women that have been used more of God than you have, and they're obviously more dear to God than you.

All that comes straight out of the pit of the hell. It's not found in the New Testament. That you are dearly loved.

You can't do anything to make Him love you less. You can't do anything to make Him love you more. You cannot be more darling to Him.

He doesn't simply love you. You are darling to Him and you will always be darling to Him. Always.

Because He has done a work so that it will always be so. To be His darling does not depend upon what you deserve or your own virtue or merit. To be His darling, He has made you His darling by His own work.

And His own work is solid and strong and permanent and eternal, immutable. It will not change. He's always there loving you.

He's always there looking to you, desiring you, loving you. It will never change. Never.

And He says in verse 8, Come with Me from Lebanon, My bride. May you come with Me from Lebanon. Journey down from the summit of Ammanah, from the summit of Sennir and Hebron, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.

He's wanting to retreat. He's wanting to retreat with the one He loves. We are so militant today in our Christianity.

Onward, Christian soldier. Marching as to war. I'm a missionary.

That has meaning to me. But that is not the essence of my Christian life. It is not marching onward into war with Christ so much.

It is retreating with Christ to solitary places. It is hiding with Christ under the shadow of His wing. It's communing with Christ.

So much busyness. So much doing. So many things.

So much noise. Even in our praying, you young Christians, your mouth is going before your knee even hits the floor in silence, in the quiet of the night, in listening, in retreating with Him and tarrying with Him. He says, come down.

Come down from all your busyness. Come down from all your... so many thoughts and so much thinking and so much striving and everything else. Come down from that.

Be like the psalmist said, who said that he didn't really preoccupy himself or get involved with so many great things, but that he walked by God and with God like a weaned child. Whatever happened to those verses that said you must be converted to be like a child? Just to play, to share, to experience, to be there with Him. You want to do so much and you're going to find, young minister, you're going to find that much of your doing has been promoted by flesh and a desire for honor and glory.

Real love for God is demonstrated not in advancing in power, but in retreating in communion. To be with Him. Just to be with Him and that is enough.

The man, the woman who will set their one goal to commune with God and to be with Him, everything else will fall in place. Absolutely everything else. He says also, he says, from the dens of lions and from the mountains of leopards, you put yourself in so many dangerous places.

You put your eyes on so many dangerous things. You open up your ears to so many things that can hurt you terribly. He's calling you away from that.

You've got to understand something. When God calls us away from sin, it's not like a prison guard or a taskmaster or a cold, vile school marm who wants to break us in half and make us disciplined to a rule. No, it's a father calling a child away from the edge of a cliff.

It's a lover calling his love away from lust that can destroy and rape and pillage and do harm that cannot be undone. It's a voice of love. It's broken.

It's cracking. It's saying, come. Stay away from that.

Get away from that. Please get away from that. Don't take another step.

Come back. There's so many things out there that want to destroy you and can destroy you. And He's calling you away from them.

He's given you His Word as a means of discerning that which is evil so that you would run from it like the plague and discerning that which is good so that you'd cleave to it like a lover. His Word has not been set upon you just to drive you in the ground or make you some type of slave that knows nothing of a personal relationship. His Word has been given to you to save you, to bring you joy and to bring you in communion with Him.

And it's so important that you discern that Word. Because I've got some young college people here, let me just tell you something. I'm going to probably run rabbits because I want to do so many things tonight that I probably shouldn't attempt to do.

I had a college student come to me the other day. Now, this wasn't just your run-of-the-mill, carnal Christian. This was a young man who I know passionately seeks after God.

He came into my office and he was broken. He says, Pastor, I just don't know what to do anymore. And I'm not his pastor.

He came all the way from a university an hour away just to talk to me. He says, I don't know what I'm going to do. I said, what's wrong? He says, my fiancé and I... I said, what? We just can't get this right.

I said, what is it that you need to get right? He says, well, I pray, I read the Word, I'm doing everything I can, but when we get together and we get alone, sometimes one thing leads to another and we haven't fallen into more immorality, but we've come close and then we just want to rip our own hearts out. We feel terrible. We don't know what to do.

And I said, your counselors, what do they tell you to do? Well, they tell me it's a problem among young people and I need to pray and I need to read the Word and I need to be strong. I said, your counselors are fools. I said, young man, do you think you're as spiritual as I am? And being a young man who really can't discern the human heart, he said, oh no, of course not, of course not.

I said, young man, you're putting yourself in a position I wouldn't dare put myself in. He's with lions. He's with leopards.

You know what Scripture would tell him? The Scripture would tell him never be unchaperoned. Never be unchaperoned with someone of the opposite sex unless you are married to them. Come down from that.

Come down from that. Come out of those dens. Come out of those mountains.

Come out of those places. Get away from there. You're going to be hurt.

You cannot fight it. They're trying to use biblical principles to save them even though they've already violated every biblical principle in Scripture. And we do that in every aspect of our life, whether it be television, radio, contacts with the world, so many different things.

Our mind preoccupied with so many different things, even good things that can turn into vile things. They can turn from lambs to leopards in a second and eat us to pieces. Jesus says, come away from that.

At the time, an old violinist, a master in Europe, just finished his concert. And a young violinist who was studying at the conservatory came up to him and said, Sir, I would give my life to play like that. The old man looked at the boy and said, I have given my life to play like this.

So many young men will see men who are preaching or see men whom God has His hand upon them and they say, I give my life to do that. I give my life. Yes, you'll have to.

And part of that of giving your life is realizing something. I've got to come down from those dangerous places. I've got to avoid them like the plague.

I have to be afraid with them. I'm not to fight against them. I'm to never come in contact with them.

I'm to have the hedge built around me with the Word of God. I'm to have the hedge built around me with men godlier and older than I. I have a group of men who watch me like a hawk. Come down from those places.

Some of you, come down from sitting in that lazy boy chair in front of that television set. Come down out of there. Some of you have hobbies that have got out of control.

If your right eye offends thee, pull it out. If your right hand offends thee, cut it off. Some of you, relationships, maybe in businesses, maybe in relationships with someone of the opposite sex or something, and it has caused not a great increase in your love for Christ, but a great decrease in your love for Christ, cut it off.

Get it away from you. Avoid it like the plague. Come down from there.

Come back to Him. Notice He's saying come down. He's not saying come up.

Our bridegroom is meek and he's lowly. His bride is to be meek and lowly. And her beauty is found in her quiet submission and her lowliness.

He said take my yoke upon you. To meet with Jesus, you come down. You come down.

You settle down. You come down. You quiet down.

Fall down. Look at verse 9. You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride. You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes.

Someone ask me, how would you be motivated to stay in communion? How would you be motivated to pray? And I tell them, I put my knees on the floor in the night. When I glance towards heaven, the heart of God beats faster. Why wouldn't you want to pray? Look what he says.

Look what he says. He says you have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride. You have made my heart beat faster in any Jewish Hebrew literature.

Repetition adds emphasis. That's the purpose of it. It's speaking in bold letters or with a loud voice whenever you see a repetition, a parallelism.

You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride. You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes. Oh, to be walking.

Just to be walking. The autumn. I love the autumn.

I just love the autumn. And to be walking and to just glance. Oh, the powerful love that exists between me and God.

Just a glance. At times, I'm walking with my wife. I can just give her a glance.

Her heart will beat faster because she's mine. Just a glance up at heaven and the very heart of God beats faster. Doesn't that make you want to pray? This does not work.

I was trying to tell a young student yesterday, just a wonderful young man. I don't know if he's here tonight. I said, son, you've got to realize something.

Bible study is done with your boots on. Intercessory prayer is done with your boots on. That is work.

That is ministry. Communion is another thing. Communion is another thing.

Being in that Word, not just to grab ahold of these great truths of theology that sometimes can wrestle your brain into a donut. No! Not just intercessory prayer where you're pleading out to God for someone and your flesh doesn't want to be there. That's not it.

There is also communion. Walking, breathing God, laughing joy with God. That glance.

That quick glance. My wife knows. She's been with me long enough to see that look.

He's got that look in his eye. He's going to the mountain. Oh, such a motivation to pray.

To the wind with getting answers. That's a very little thing. It's to know that with one glance, there is someone in heaven.

There is The One in heaven whose heart beats faster. When you bow your knee to pray and you look up to heaven, it's an amazing thing. It says in verse 10, Oh, let's keep going in verse 9. We don't want to miss this.

You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes, with a single strand of your necklace. Now, what on earth are we to do with that? Where does a bride get a necklace? She gets it from her lover. Where does your beauty, from where does it come? What makes you so attractive? What makes you so attractive before God Almighty is the very beauty and the very gifts that He has won for you and given you.

You say, how can I go before Him? Oh, because you're dressed. That's how. That's how you go before Him.

You go before Him because of all the gifts. Isaac's wife. She had no problem dressing for that day when she would meet him in a field.

No problem whatsoever because she had been adorned. Isaac himself had sent the gifts in the same way. You say, well, how can I? I look at myself in the mirror.

I see my faults. I see my problems. Oh, yes, I do too.

As a matter of fact, if you could see me like I see me, you would not be so happy with me. But I am adorned where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. How dare you think that your sin has more power than the blood of Jesus Christ? How dare you think that your puny disobedience is stronger than His obedience? You're dressed.

You're dressed proper. You could go to a wedding at this very moment in the very court of God because He dressed you. And you are attractive to Him because He made you attractive to Him by His own work.

And if He hadn't done it, you'd never got there. It's all about Him. I've always... Just a quick thought here.

I've always... There is a thing that is very important to understand. If God is, and He most certainly is, the most glorious, the most weighty, the one of greatest beauty and value and excellency and worth. There's the word.

If He is, then do you realize it's condescension for God to turn His eyes off of Himself and look at any other thing? It's like turning... It's like if I was looking at the water lilies by Monet and I was just sitting there looking at it and looking at it and looking at it and you drew a little stick man and tried to get my attention with it saying, turn your eyes off of that to look at my stick man. Why would I want to do something like that? Why? In the same way, why would God want to turn His eyes off of Himself? How could He? He can. Because He has conformed you to the image of His only begotten Son.

And so He can look at you. And His heart can even beat faster because of the work He's done in you. He sees Himself, His own reflection, His own conformity that He's worked in you to make you like Jesus.

There's so much. So much. Then He says, verse 10, How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride.

This is very hard. I find it very hard to sing about my love for God. I find it extremely hard.

As a matter of fact, most part you'll just hear me sort of silent. This puny thing I have. If you were to compare my love for God to the love that other men have had for God, I wouldn't even be... I'd be in the bottom percentile.

I'd be nowhere near the top. There have been men, the brainards and others, who have loved God and burned like a candle, like a flame, like a falling star. And here's Paul Washer's self-centered, egotistical, pitiful love, even compared to other men.

And then if I were to take my love and compare it to God's love for me, how could I even say, oh, how I love you? But look what he says, how beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride. Love truly does cover a multitude of sins. I'm going to say something that's going to sound a little bit heretical, but stick with me.

There is a sense, a real sense, in which it takes so very little to please God because God loves you so very much. Now, please understand me. Because he is talking about the love that is beautiful to Him, but we know it's not.

It's not even beautiful to us. His love is so great, it really does cover a multitude of sins. He goes on and he says, how beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride.

How much better is your love than wine and the fragrance of your oils than all kinds of spices. Isn't it amazing that we talk about the presence of God? How beautiful is the presence of God? The fragrance of God's presence. How much it has so much worth.

It is so wondrous. It is beyond words to describe. The presence of God is such a joy.

And here we have God speaking the same thing about our presence to Him. He is not a God who tolerates you. And I hear that preached over and over, not directly, but it's in there.

The God who tolerates you because He has to. The God who tolerates you because of the blood. No! The God who loves you.

The God who desires you. The God who yearns for you. You can come to a God like that very easy.

Oh, you can come to a God like that. It is so hard to come to people in this world because of sin. Do you realize that? We are so insecure.

My little boy one time just drove me to tears. I walked into the bedroom. And the moment he saw me, he went like this.

There wasn't a doubt in his mind that his father was going to receive him. That his father was going to love him. That his father was full of joy to see him.

But you know what's going to happen to my little boy if he lives long enough? He's going to be crushed. He's going to be beaten. He is going to have so many things happen to him that is going to introduce insecurity in his life to the point where before he ever extends his arms, there will be the question, shall I be received or will I be rejected? Well, you can forget about that now.

Just forget about that. You say, well, I don't know if I'm worthy to be received. You're not.

Get that in your head. It will take you a long way. You're not.

You never will be. But that is not the point. Your unworthiness is swallowed up by His love.

This is all about Him. You have finally walked through a door where all that stuff doesn't matter anymore. It's been taken care of.

It's over now. When it's finished like that song said, when it was finished like our Savior said, it was really finished. It was a done deal.

Love was opened up. Mercy was opened up. A fountain was opened up.

And not all the powers of hell could close it down. Not all the bad preaching in the world could ever close it down. There's a place for you now.

And it's not for you just part time. And it's not for you just when you get it right. And it's not for you just because you're really dedicated.

And it's not for you just because you're involved in missions. And it's not for you because you wear holy pants and eat beans. It is for you because Christ Jesus made it for you.

And it's always yours. And you can always go there. And you don't have to go far.

You never have to go far. Not when your lover is omnipresent. Not when he's everywhere all the time in his fullness.

You do not have to go far. It says your love is better than wine and the fragrance of your oils than all kinds of spices. Your lips, my bride, drip honey.

Honey and milk are under your tongue. And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. Words and presence.

Words and presence. You so want to talk about yourself. I understand that.

I do. But there's one thing I understand. You desire to speak about yourself.

You do. And you bore a lot of your friends. I have found that in witnessing to people, the only thing I need to do is listen.

And they will talk for hours. And when they have exhausted themselves, they will give me the opportunity to speak. Because people have so many things they feel.

So many things they desire to tell. So many experiences. And even when they've told them all, they don't feel satisfied because they couldn't tell them completely.

Well, there's someone who longs to hear your voice. And there's not many of them out there. But there is someone who longs to hear your voice.

Any kind of voice. Most importantly, an honest voice. Oh, an honest voice.

A young man asked me last night. He said, you're talking about a passion. You're talking about seeking God with a full heart.

What happens when you don't have a full heart and you don't have passion? I said, oh, that's very easy. I said, you go to God. And you say, I don't have passion.

I don't have a full heart. I don't know what to do. And I can't fix it.

You see, the answer to everything is to always go to God. Period. Do you know everything will be fixed by just one thing? Seek Me.

Seek Him. Just seek Him. I don't care what it is in your life.

I don't care where it is, what it is, what's happened. It doesn't matter to me. There is one solution.

Seek Him. Cry out to Him and keep crying out to Him. And seek Him.

And keep seeking Him. That's it. Almost everything people ask me nowadays.

How do you do this? What do you do this? How can you fix this? Seek Him. Seek Him. Call out to Him.

Wait. Wait. Did you know about prayer? Do you know how it works? It's mainly waiting.

Did you know that? It's mainly waiting. It's waiting. I can remember in my first journey into the things of God and prayer, of actually saying, coming to the point where I said, I'm not going to pray for anything, Lord, but You.

I want You to come. I want to know You. I want You to come.

And so, began to pray. I went into the closet. My roommates had left.

I went into the closet to pray. And I said, I'm not coming out of this closet until either you show up or I die. Fifteen minutes later, I fell asleep in the closet.

My roommates came home, found me in the closet and thought I lost my mind. I still have that problem today. I pray and I sleep.

One time I fell asleep at seminary praying and my roommate couldn't get in our bedroom because the door opened inside and I was blocking the door. So I took an alarm clock with me and set it for every fifteen minutes. I'd pray about ten minutes, fall asleep five minutes, alarm clock go off, set it again, start praying again.

You see, you're all too spiritual about this. That's one of your problems. And I got to the point where this is literally what I did for weeks and weeks and weeks.

Two and three hours a night. Lord, it's been three months, ten days, five hours. You still haven't come.

Lord, I just sat here for an hour and a half and you still haven't come. I'll be back tomorrow. You think I'm kidding? I'm not.

Waiting at a door. You see how childlike you have to become? Do you have a clue in all your big theologies and everything else? Just do what He said? Okay, Lord. Five months.

I'm not leaving. And He came. He came.

It's so simple, isn't it? So childlike and goofy. So unorthodox and ignoble. I'm going to pray.

I'm going to wait. I know my Redeemer lives. I have this mental picture just in my mind of a peasant just waiting at the back door of a king's home.

The dew is on the ground. He's been there all night. Not rude.

Not yelling. Not making noise. Just waiting.

Waiting. Because His promises are true. His promises are true.

And then it talks about fragrance, doesn't it? It says again, here we go. It says, your lips, my bride, drip honey and milk or under your tongue. And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of lemon.

There again, the presence of God. No! The presence of you to God. Do you know how I knew I was in love with my wife? One of the ways I knew I could be with her without saying a word.

That's it. Just like to be with her. Still, I don't like to go anywhere without my wife.

Just there she is, right here. Just right here. Wherever we're at, there she is.

Presence. Do you forget that God is a person? Have you forgotten that? In all the bigness and everything else that you've heard about God, have you forgotten that? He desires your fellowship. He desires your presence.

When was the last time you just sat down with God and didn't say anything? I'm building a screened-in porch right now. I've been building it for a year and a half because I've got the biggest mosquitoes on my farm on the face of the earth. And you don't go outside unless you're in that screened-in porch.

I'm building that thing because I desire to do one thing. I'm going to get me the biggest hammock that's ever been made in the entire world and I'm going to put it there and I'm going to lay there on my back and I'm going to have my wife laying on my chest and we're not going to say a word. We're just going to swing back and forth.

That's all. That's it. Period.

Good enough. Enough said. Enough done.

That's it. Can you do that with God? Do you do that with God? Is that the relationship you have? Oh, be careful. You're much closer to a works-oriented type of religion than you believe.

You're much closer to that than you actually believe. Can you just do that? Martha. Martha.

Martha. Oh, He doesn't need you. He doesn't need you.

Do you know why God does all this stuff with you in the first place? Because you make it more difficult and He gets more glory because He has to exert more power. Verse 12 A garden locked up is my sister, my bride. A rock garden locked.

A spring sealed up. If I had a daughter, and I hope and pray that one day I do, if I have a daughter, this will be my prayer for her. This is a woman right here.

This is the most beautiful woman on the face of the earth right here. And look what it says about her. Look what it says.

You are a garden locked. You are a spring sealed up. Young girls, listen to me.

I have no business seeing you because you are not mine and I am not yours. No one has any business seeing you except the one to whom you will belong one day. The most beautiful, the most precious of all women is the one who considers herself to be what? A garden sealed up.

A spring sealed up. Covered. Not only does no one touch, no one looks.

So many college students think they haven't committed immorality because they haven't had intercourse. But oh, you've committed so much immorality without ever doing that. Be aware, be aware, be aware.

My wife says something and it's so true. This goes for guys and girls. If your clothing is a frame for your face and the glory of God that shines from it, then so be it.

It's a blessing. If your clothing is a frame for your body, you're sensual and God hates what you do. Oh, beware, beware, beware, beware.

The beauty is not what the world tells you today. Don't follow the recipe book of Satan. Don't parade yourself whether you be male or female.

Find the beauty that is the beauty of God. And that is a fountain sealed up, a garden locked up. There will be a time to open, but it is not now.

But it's the same way with the church. Oh, the church. How many times throughout the Old Testament Scriptures and on into the book of Revelation do we hear about a harlot? Do we hear about one who is married and yet prostitutes herself? Church, we're to be sealed up.

We're to be locked up. We belong to one and only one. We're not to give ourselves to anything else.

My friend, let me tell you something. If you spend more time trying to make money out of greed and not to support your family, you prostitute yourself. Did you know that? You have become a prostitute because you belong to God, not to greed.

If you've involved yourself even with a good hobby, but too often, and it's taken away from your relationship with God, it's taken away from your relationship with those whom He has given you, your family that you are to love and cherish, you prostitute yourself. When you get involved in things in the world, when you allow your mind to be filled with things of the world, you are no longer a fountain sealed up. You are no longer a locked garden.

You have opened yourself to the trash and the defilement of this world. Don't do it! Don't do it! Oh, purity! I will never be as holy in this life as I could have been. You say, oh, God can fix everything.

Oh, be careful with those words. There are consequences to sin. And I lived the first 21 years of my life a mighty, as the Scottish say, a mighty sinner.

And because of that, there are things in my heart and in my mind that are hard to put away and may never be put away. Oh, if I'd only been a fountain, a spring, a garden locked up and sealed, awaiting only one, and all the church, church, Christian, if only you would lock yourself away from all these other silly, disgusting loves and give yourself to the one who is the only one who loves you. Verse 13, your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruit, henna with nard plants, nard and saffron, thalamus and cinnamon with all the trees of frankincense, mirth and aloes, along with all the finest spices.

You are a garden spring, a well of fresh water and streams flowing from Lebanon. Fruitful. Fruitful.

Fruitful does not mean busy. Fruitful does not mean prominent in the denomination or among Christians or the camp within you happen to run, within you happen to run. There are so many famous Christians who have not borne fruit.

They've been famous, made famous by men. There are so many big shots and superstars that are not fruitful in the kingdom of God because they were made big shots and superstars by their own talent and by men who do not understand the counsels of God. Fruitfulness is something that springs forth.

Why? Because the divine sap runs through you. That divine sap, that Holy Spirit runs through you and therefore you're fruitful. You are fruitful because He flows through you and it requires so little work.

You'd be amazed. You would be amazed in the fruitfulness. And there are men of God and women of God here who can testify to what I'm saying.

In times of greatest fruitfulness, I have exerted often less, much less, in seeking God, in being united with our head, in being united with the vine. Fruit just comes natural. You don't see apple trees out there doing calisthenics.

You don't see them grinding and moaning and forcing out fruit. You don't see it by nature, by what flows through them, by the root system they just produce. And here's something very important.

Be careful about desiring a ministry. Be careful. Be careful.

I'm not so sure Jesus had a ministry. I think Jesus just had a life. It's not very far away.

Once you say you have a ministry, it's not very far away that you will say, I have a profession. ...and tilling in your life. And the garden that you should be most concerned about is not the garden of your ministry cultivating great works, but the garden of your own soul.

The garden of your own Christ-likeness. The garden of your own conformity to His image. That's where the joy of God comes.

That's where God's eye is keenly pressed to so many men who do so many things, and I'm one of them. But cultivating the fruitful life, Christ-likeness, is very, very important. I have spoke in great churches.

If you call anything great, something that has more than a thousand members, or 2,000 or 3,000 members, and I have spoke to some of those pastors, and when they talk about church growth and everything else, their eyes light up like you cannot believe. You start talking about the glories of Jesus Christ, they're looking over your shoulder at the calendar and they don't have a clue as to what you're talking about. They've cultivated great ministries.

They know not the glory of Christ. It's not their passion. Get that stuff out of the way.

I've got more important things to do. You have nothing more important to do than cultivate a garden, and a garden of Christ-likeness. That's what brings pleasure to God.

Do you not realize that God uses mighty sinners? The greatest of sinners that have ever lived on the face of the earth, God in His providence has used them, and they found their way in hell when they closed their eyes. Being used of God doesn't mean a whole lot. Being Christ-like means a whole lot.

That's what matters. That's what matters. Now, I want you to look at something here.

She says, Awake, O north wind, and come, wind of the south. Make my garden breathe out fragrance. Let its spices be waked abroad.

May my beloved come into His garden and eat its choice fruits. Her one desire is that the fragrance of her life, the fragrance of her garden, the fragrance of her work, would somehow be carried by the wind to her lover, and that that would draw Him to her. Do you remember when you were like that? If you can't, then I would be worried about my salvation.

But do you remember when you were like that? Do you remember when television was a very, very little thing? Do you remember when your great desire was to read the Word? And your great desire was to pray? And your great desire was to be like Him? And your great desire was to just be before Him somehow that He would take notice of you, that He would come and carry with you for a while. The greatest desire you had as a young Christian maybe, was just to be in His presence, to know that He took notice. I remember the first time that I witnessed to somebody, it was almost like I was looking out the corner of my eye to see if He was looking.

I desired so much. Almost like the relationship with a father that I didn't have. It was almost like when you're playing basketball and you make that goal and the first thing you look at is, where's dad in the stands? Where's big brother in the stands? Did he see that? It's the same way.

Was there ever a point in time in your life, because there was in mine and so many of the saints that I talked to, and I know some of you can identify with what I'm saying, that there was a time in your life when the only thing you wanted was to be pleasing to Him and that that pleasure would draw Him to you and that you would have communion with Him. Oh, what a wonderful, wonderful life one has when that's the desire of their heart. Now, here's something very important.

This is a king. She's made a garden for a king. And this just isn't any king.

I mean, this king has thousands of people making gardens for him. Do you realize that? He's employed thousands upon thousands of people to prepare the gardens in his palace. What on earth does he need with a little puny garden from a little girl? As a matter of fact, can you imagine people walking by? What are you doing? I'm making a garden and I'm hoping that the king will come see my garden.

And they look at her. What? A few melons and a few vines? The king has 30,000 men working on a garden over here to the east. You actually think he's going to come by your garden? Take pleasure in this puny little thing you've done? And then there's you.

You're not a Spurgeon. You never will be. You're not David Brainerd.

You're not Mary Schleser of Calabar. You're not Jonathan Edwards. You're not one of the great ones.

You actually think God is going to come by and look at you? That He's actually going to take this little thing you've done with your life, this little preparation you've made, all these little trinkets and paper mache and everything else you've used to try to make something pleasing to a king when he's got the whole world and a garden and the greatest men and the greatest women that have ever served have served him? You think he's going to come to your house? Yes. He is. That's what's so wonderful.

Because look what he says. Look what he says here. He says in chapter 5, verse 1, I've come into my garden, my sister, my bride.

Not only does he come to her garden, he receives it from her. I'll take that. You know, one of the greatest honors you can give in many of the places where I travel throughout the world, there's always a tension point, like when I'm in the jungle, for example, with the Aguaduna tribe, and they have prepared something, whether it be a monkey or a small chicken or a boiled snail.

And there's a tension. When I walk in the door, I can feel it. You know what that tension is? They know this is the best they've got, and they want to give it.

Will I receive it? Will I receive it? And when I say, oh, thank you so much. And don't laugh. Don't laugh.

Sometimes we can laugh about that, but not this moment. You need to realize something. When a child of God offers you the best they have and even pull it from the mouth of their own children, even though it might be a grubber, it is to be received as though it was the greatest plate on the greatest king's table.

But they're saying, will he receive it? And when I say, oh, thank you so much, and then take it, and then say, do you have any more? You mean you like that? Yes! Do you have any more? Oh, God help me. Do you have any more? We can go and get some more. One of the greatest honors you can ever give a person is to receive what they give you.

God honors you. It doesn't matter. He loves you so much.

He'll receive it. Those times when you go out there, I just want to read my Bible because I just desire to be pleasing to Him. Or I'm just going to turn away from that.

I know it's a little thing, but I'm going to turn away from it because I just want to be pleasing to Him. He receives it. I take it.

I take that gift. I receive that. Oh, I've got this little ministry now.

Lately, the Lord's laid it on my heart that, well, I write out little verses and I pray over them, and then when I go to church on Sunday, I just ask God to lead me and I give them to people. And it's just been such a blessing in my life and Satan and his henchmen look at that and go, you've got to be... And Jesus Christ says, Heaven, be silent. Let's gaze for a moment at this precious garden that my daughter has given me.

Oh, He's so different. And if He wasn't different, I'd be dead. If He wasn't different, I'd be miserable.

If He wasn't different than everybody, there'd be no hope. But oh, praise God for a thousand tongues that are saying He's different. He's different than you ever believed.

He's different than all the preaching you've ever heard. He's different than the most godly person and the most loving person you have ever seen. There's just as much difference, as a wise man told me, there's just as much difference between an archangel and God as there is between a worm and God, because God is just completely different from everything.

Completely unique. His love is so high. My ways are not your ways.

My thoughts are not your thoughts. Oh, praise God! What a love! What a love! You're free! You're free! You're really loved! It goes on. He says, I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride.

I have gathered my mirth along with my balsam. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey. I have drunk my wine and my milk.

Oh, He's not just receiving it. He's not just like me there in the Agwaduna tribe trying to swallow this thing down. Oh, He's not that way.

He is relishing it. Why? Because it's spectacular? No, because it came from you. The first time my son is able to give me a Father's Day card that he has drawn.

I can't wait. I want to frame that thing. It's just so wonderful.

I mean, a stick man like this. You see, it's not about his ability to draw. It's who he is.

My love has been set upon him. A love he has not earned. He won't even know anything about it until probably he has a child.

It's not a love he earned. So the greatness of my love is not a response to his greatness or the greatness of his love for me. I have set my seal of love upon that boy.

And therefore, the gift he gives is greater than any gift any artist could ever give. And Jesus said, and if you being evil can love that way, then what's the Father like who is not evil? And he goes on. Verse 2. I was asleep, but my heart was awake.

A voice, my beloved, was knocking. Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is drenched with dew. My locks with the damp of the night.

Oh, here he comes. Here he comes. Oh, he's always coming.

Always coming. Always seeking. That love of his is relentless.

Oh, you want him to pass by and you can't hear he's thundering and pounding at the door every day. In everything he's knocking. He's coming.

He's looking. Everything. Everything is yours.

Do you not realize that? Everything is yours. Sunsets are yours. You own them.

Every leaf on a tree is yours. Every speck of beauty on the face of the earth has been given to you and is calling out for you to seek him. Gift sent because he's coming and he's preparing you for that.

And I'm not talking about the second coming. I'm talking about the constant coming of his presence with you. Always desiring to manifest himself to you.

Always being there. He comes and he makes great effort. This is at night.

I mean, the dew. He's been all night traveling through. He's come to see with great passion.

And she says, verse 3, I've taken off my dress. How can I put it on again? I've washed my feet. How can I dirty them again? There was a time when this little girl walked around the marketplace 400 times a day just hoping she would bump into him.

She stood on street corners where he would pass by and waited there in the heat of the sun just hoping to catch one glimpse of him. What's happened? What's happened? Now he comes a-pounding on the door. She's too tired to get out of bed.

There were times when you would have given everything, throwing life itself and breath, thrown away your ministry and your hopes of all things just for him to pass by and have communion with you. And now you come in tired. You sit down.

Turn on a television set. Do this. Do that.

Something prods you in your heart and says, Arise, my love. Tarry with me a while. Let's commune together.

Oh Lord, don't you understand? I'm tired. I've been to school. I've been to work.

I have so much ministry to do. I've preached. And I'm tired.

And virtue has gone out of me. And just let me sit for a while. A heart breaks to the degree a heart loves.

Did you know that? You will know that one day. You don't know that now. To be denied by an unbeliever, to be turned away by an unbeliever doesn't hurt me.

To be torn apart or turned away or shunned by a believer breaks my heart. But that doesn't hurt me as much as if my wife were to do such a thing. The greater the love, the more exposed to suffering that love can become.

I know there are some theologians who will tell you that God is just an impersonal machine totally protected from absolutely everything, unfeeling and callous and so powerful that He can't even love. That's not true. I'm sorry.

I don't see it in Scripture. It fits nicely in the systems, but I don't see it in Scripture. This is a God who loves and a God who calls and a God whose heart can be wounded when a return is this.

I'm tired. I'm tired. How many times have we done that? How many times have we done that? Not you.

How many times have I done it? Will I do it tonight? Will I go to my hotel room and think, well, I'll just sit back here for a moment. I don't want anybody to bother me. I'm very tired.

Since when did love become a bother, Paul? Since when did love become hard? Since when did love take your time? When love becomes commonplace, it becomes a very, very cold place. I remember the first time I went across the Andes Mountains with an old missionary, Homer Crane. Oh, what a blessed soul.

And the old man snored and sputtered and everything as we went across the Andes Mountains in that train, his mouth wide open, asleep, dead to the world, and I with my mouth wide open looking at all the glory of the Andes Mountains thinking, how can this old man be asleep? And then ten years later, I took a group across the Andes Mountains and I slept and snored. There's a danger in being around something so much that it becomes commonplace. That's why I'm so afraid for some of the children and young people here.

Oh, be afraid. When beauty becomes common, it's not beauty that has changed, it's your heart that's become cold. Yes, hardened.

Is he not beautiful anymore to you? Is a television program or loose conversation with a group of friends or sitting in a hall at 1 o'clock in the morning talking about silly things, has that become more attractive than the king of kings and lord of lords who shed his own blood for your soul? We are a fickle group. That's why I said it's very hard for me to sing about my love for God. Now we go on.

It says, verse 4, My beloved extended his hand through the opening and my feelings were aroused for him. I rose to open to my beloved, my hands dripped with mirth and my fingers with liquid mirth on the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and had gone.

There's four or five months of preaching here. First of all, love requires a quick response. I don't understand all the ways of our Lord.

Some of them I can only mark out and know that that is what He does without understanding truly why. I notice that so many times when the Lord came up to disciples, whether they were rowing in a boat or walking down a road, it seems as though He was to walk past them. To walk past them until they cried out.

To say He was going to go on until they asked Him to tarry with them awhile. It seems to me that there is something about the Lord that desires to hear us say, stay with me. I know He doesn't need to hear those words.

I know He doesn't need my presence, but I do know it seems that He desires for me to say those things. He desires to hear, stay with me for awhile. Tarry with me.

Turn in here, Lord. Please. Please.

When He doesn't hear that, He's gone. Oh, spend many nights awake. Spend many days over that one verse that speaks about grieving the Holy Spirit.

Grieving the Holy Spirit. Grieving the Christ. Grieving God.

Oh, it wouldn't take adultery on my part to grieve my wife. It would only take a lack of interest. It would only take a lack of desire to turn in.

How my wife longs to hear me say, go with me. Come with me. Stay with me.

How the Lord longs to hear those words from you. From you. And when He doesn't hear them, He's gone.

Now look what happens. She jumps up. She goes.

Speaks about handles and such dripping with mirth and fragrance. There is, some believe, a tradition, there is a way in which when someone came to the door, particularly a caller or a bridegroom or someone engaged, would come to the door. If no one was home, they would leave their calling card.

It wasn't a printed card, but it was a certain fragrance, a mirth, a perfume that they would pour on the door, that they would put on the door handle to tell the one that they loved and the one they missed because they were not home. I have come and you were not here. It would be very easy to accept me going to my house and knocking on the door and the door not opening because my wife was not there.

It would be a tremendous difficulty for me to knock on the door and the door not open because my wife did not open the door. And this is the case. And he leaves his calling card, his fragrance.

Now, I have known many Christians and I have known this for myself. Now listen carefully. If you haven't gone through this and you desire to walk with the Lord, you will.

There was a time when a young Christian crying out to God, seeking His presence, when the presence of Almighty God became more real to me than the presence of any one of you here in this building. Or the whole bunch of you gathered together, the presence of God was more real than you are right now. Some of you know about seeking the Lord in your youth, in your Christianity, when it was young, and crying out to Him and knowing His presence and just reveling in that presence.

But then, it becomes commonplace. You become disinterested. You no longer seek.

You no longer heed His voice. You no longer, when He prompts your heart to come and tarry with Him, you no longer respond quickly. And that presence seems to go.

And then, your prayer life becomes one of clinging to a fragrance, but no presence of going down on your knees and crying out night after night, Oh God, I desire You. Where are You, God? Come, God. Please help me, God.

I miss You, God. I hear so many Christians praying, and when they pray, they are not reveling in the presence of God that is theirs, but they are seeking the presence because it seems to have gone. I remember when my wife and I were apart for 82 days because of work I had to do in the jungle.

Different things. I'll never do that again. It wasn't biblical when I did it the first time.

I was wrong. But I came out of the jungle, and I made it back to a little apartment we had. She was in the States.

And I was so lonely, I thought I was going to die. And I rummaged around the closet, and I found a sweater she used to wear. And I remember sitting there on that couch, on the bed, and I could smell her fragrance in that sweater.

I could hug that sweater. I could sense if I closed my eyes that she was there, but when I opened them, she wasn't. I was holding on to something that had been.

Holding on to a fragrance, but not the person. And that's the same thing that's going on here. She had the fragrance, but she didn't have the person.

He was gone. Love requires a quick response. Her love grew commonplace and lazy.

So it goes on. Verse 6, I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and had gone. Now, here's something that I want you to see.

Before you would think this lover to be cruel, before you would think that God would be cruel, I want you to understand something. Every action of God springs forth from the goodness of God. And if He is doing this in your life, it is for a good reason.

The fall of Adam and Eve and the curses that fell upon the world. You know about them. Death, misery, futility, judgments.

Yes, they are. No doubt about it. But a keener eye will see something laying behind those judgments that you need to see.

Every one of those judgments is an act of mercy. What if God had left the world in its perfect state? Left us without one reminder of our fallenness so that we played ourselves and pleased ourselves all the way into hell without one thing to remind us of our need of Him? My dear friend, I'm 40 and as preachers go, that's still very young. But I don't know so much if it's the years or the mileage that's making me tired.

But I've come to see something. My body is not as strong as it used to be, but every time I get up in the morning and my body hurts, it is a reminder of my fallenness and my deep need of grace and of salvation.

Every hair that turns gray and every one that falls from my head reminds me of my deep need of God.

Every bit of futility in the ministry. Oh, kiss that hand that strikes you. Because it's that very hand that sobers you and awakens you to the fact that you desperately need God and you desperately need grace.

You so desperately need it. And everything that God does in this world that seems to be judgment and discipline and can rightly be called that, with a keener eye, you can look farther behind that and you see a well of mercy. That everything is crying out to you to look at your weakness, to look at your fallenness, and to run to His plenty, to run to His salvation, to run to His power, to run to His mercy, to run to Him.

Everything. Every problem, every trial, every wind that blows is a good thing. In 20 years of preaching, I have learned to kiss the hand that strikes me much more than kiss the one that feeds me.

Because it's those wounds that have saved my soul. And this separation for a moment is not some self-centered separation of a love that has been rejected. He's not that way.

Oh, He's not that way. You and I are that way. But don't make Him like you.

One little thing I can do to you tonight. Do you realize that? I could say one little thing to you that would offend you and you would turn out of this church, you would not come back here tomorrow, and you would also tell everybody, I heard that Paul Washer preach and he was very offensive and I didn't think he knew what he was talking about in the first place. Because of what? You and I are not like God.

We respond to how others treat us. And we walk away sullen and selfish and self-centered, wounded. Most of our wounds are not wounds, they're just our selfishness.

He hurt me. I'm not going back there. She said this about me.

I'll not show her a kind face again. Or I'll love her, but at a distance. Oh, hypocrite.

Filthy, abominable hypocrisy. God does not leave her this way. He does not leave you that way because He is so wounded and offended and He'll show you.

That's the way preachers preach Him. They say, oh, you don't preach on the judgment of God? Oh, I preach on the judgment and wrath of God. But I suppose I'm talking to believers tonight and there was a son many years ago who drank down that wrath on your behalf.

God's not left her because He's cruel or selfish or self-centered or wounded in such a fashion as that He'd no longer love. He's not that way. He's walked away for her good.

Because sometimes you and I can never appreciate what we have until it's gone. You men, listen to me well. I told you I'd run rabbits.

I'll run one now. With regard to your wife, hold her in your arms frequently. And as her eyes are closed and she knows not what you're thinking, try to see her as 85 years old or 90, barely breathing, as frail and tiny as though the wind could pick her up and carry her away, about ready to face the shadow of death.

Look at her that way. And then ask yourselves, will there be regret? Did I not love her as I should have loved her? Did I miss the opportunity to give myself to this daughter of God? Look at it that way. Always love that way.

Always love with death in your face. That sounds very bad. Sounds very Shakespearean.

Let me tell you, it's true. I have seen too many people die. My father died in my arms.

My sister died. My brother died. I've stepped over more dead bodies and had more blood on my tennis shoes than I ever want to talk about.

This life is so frail, so tiny, so dangerously weaving about. You love with all your might while you've got the chance. To the wind with everything else.

If I could just love my wife, I would go to the grave a happy man. Forget the ministry. Forget everything else.

If I could just love as Jesus loved. If I could just love that boy as Jesus loved. Because one day they'll be gone from you.

And it'll hurt. So love now. Because you cannot fully appreciate everything you have until you have it no more.

And He withdraws from her so that she'll see that. And what does she do? She goes in verse 6, but my beloved had turned away and had gone. My heart went out to Him as He spoke.

I searched for Him, but did not find Him. I called Him, but He did not answer. Now, verse 7, the watchmen who made the rounds in the city found me.

They struck me and wounded me. The guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me. Oh, my goodness.

Do you know, even to this day in certain parts of the Middle East, if a woman walks outside unattended by a man without a covering on her head, and men rape her, it is not against the law. She's lost her protection. She's gone to the streets looking for the lover she lost.

She's unprotected, unattended. The world does with her what it wants. Is that not a description many times of us and of the true church of Jesus Christ? Yea, even the true church of Jesus Christ.

I'm not talking about some organization. I'm talking about the true church. Even the true church at times, we lose our way, we turn away from our lover, we do not respond to Him, and we find ourselves soiled and beaten by the world.

And then she comes and she finds these women and she says, I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, as to what you will tell Him, for I am lovesick. And they answer, What kind of Beloved is your Beloved, O most beautiful of women? What kind of Beloved is your Beloved that thus you adjure us? Now, I don't want to take too much license here, but let me just say this. Could it be that she cries out to these women, O find my Beloved! Find Him! Find Him! Look for Him! And they say to her, Why? I mean, after all, He came to your door and you wouldn't even open it.

Why are you telling me to look for someone you won't even receive when they walk through half the night just to get to your house? I mean, after all, this guy can't be much. When I look at your life and the passion that you have for Him, why should I go look for someone you don't even seem to care about? What about it, church? Could an unbelieving world say that to us? Oh, look for Jesus! Come to Jesus! Embrace Jesus!

Well, you think more about your Jeep Cherokee than you do things of God. I know you.

I work with you. You don't seem any more full of passion for Him than you are for the things that we have passion for. Why should I look for this Jesus? I mean, after all, He doesn't seem to be much to you.

Why should He be much to me? Then verse 10, comes the revival. She begins to think. She begins to repeat what she knew.

Do you wonder, does God care about piles of rocks, my friend? Why was He having Israel pile rocks up everywhere? Did you ever think about that? Go across the river, pile up rocks. Do this, pile up rocks. Do this, pile up rocks.

Why pile up so many rocks? What is this thing about rocks? It's not rocks, it's remember! Remember what I have done! Remember who I am! We forget so easily. And then a song, like the song tonight, just grabs you. This is my beloved.

And off she goes. She begins to remember, but they hear her remember. She says, my beloved is dazzling and rosy, outstanding among ten thousand.

His head is like gold, pure gold. His locks are like clusters of dates, and black as a raven. Now that doesn't make much sense.

Goes on. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk and reposed in their setting. His cheeks are like bed of balsam, banks of sweet-scented herbs.

His lips are lilies dripping with liquid mirth. His hands are rods of gold set with beryl. His abdomen is carved ivory and laid with sapphires.

His legs are pillars of alabaster, set on pillars of pure gold. His appearance is like leaven, and choice as the cedars. His mouth is full of sweetness, and he is wholly desirable.

This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. She is saying even terms here that are contradictory. She is saying some things that don't even seem to make much sense.

And do you know what? In biblical literature, we have a thing we call apocalyptic language. It is when a prophet begins to speak like a wheel within a wheel, and a burning fire that moves in this direction and that direction. Or we go to the book of Revelation and we see these symbols, these things that seem to contradict even one another.

Do you know what I believe that is? I believe apocalyptic literature is this. When the human mind, when God gives such a revelation to the human mind that the human mind has not the ability to even comprehend what it sees, and has no language, no language able to express the greatness of the revelation, they begin to almost talk like wild men. That's why prophets are somewhat of wild men.

They're raving. They've seen things they can't even begin to comprehend. They have to express something they have no words to express.

This is what is happening with her. Now, I wouldn't call this apocalyptic literature, but it's the same idea. She begins to look at the Christ and she becomes beside herself.

She almost goes wild. She's looking at every direction, every word she's ever thought of, every thought she's ever had. She is striving and desiring to find some way to describe the beauty and the grandeur and the glory and the worth of this One that she loves.

Oh, we're so careful to be cultured. I hate it. Love doesn't know anything about culture.

We witness to people and we want to make sure they don't think we're fanatics. So we write out a few little laws that we try to get them to subscribe to, and if they do, we pronounce them born again. We witness to them so cold and so careful and so professional and so clean.

Every seminary that ever says that their ministers are professionals ought to be burnt to the ground. Now, what we see here is someone talking about their beloved and they go wild. When was the last time you ever started trying to, instead of debating, instead of going through four spiritual laws, when was it ever that you just talked to a believer and tried to describe to them the glory and the beauty of Jesus? And your eyes fill up with tears and you really don't care anymore.

That's what's going on here. And look at the response. Chapter 6, verse 1. Where is your beloved gone, almost beautiful among women? Where is your beloved turned that we may seek Him with you? Man! If He's like that, I've never heard of anybody like that.

I've never seen anybody like that. I've never felt a love like that. I've never seen what I see in you right now when you talk about Him, how your eyes fill with fire and your heart with joy and your mind with peace.

Where is He at? We'll look for Him too. And then finally, and I mean it, verse 2. My beloved has gone down to His garden to the beds of balsam to pasture His flock in the gardens and gather lilies. Isn't this amazing? She's offended Him in the worst way a man could ever be offended.

She's been soiled by the world. Don't you think those watchmen and those guards are talking all around town? Just like Hosea, when he goes to buy back his bride. Those men, the way they looked at him when he walked up to that auction block.

Is he standing there pouting? What is he doing? He's gone back to the garden. Why? Oh, He's going to show her when she gets back. When she comes to her senses, He's going to tell her a thing or two.

No. He goes back, picks flowers and stands there at the door of a garden with a bouquet of flowers for the one He loves. You have no idea how much this God loves you.

How crazy and wild this love is. How powerful, stronger than fire is this love that God has for you. Can you offend Him? Yes.

Can you offend Him so much as to turn His love cold? Never. Can you grieve Him? Yes. Can you chase Him away? No.

And then she comes and says, I am my Beloved and my Beloved is mine. You need to find God? No. Just go back to where you left.

Just go back and there He'll be. Just go tonight and just go back. Just get down on your knees tonight in the dark.

Call out to Him. That's all. That's it.

Stay there. Wait. It's worth the wait.

It's worth the wait. Just sit there. Don't build strange fires.

Don't get all emotional. Don't get enthusiastic. Don't prompt yourself up and repeat a prayer over and over and over until it begins to take over your emotions and your mind and become strange fire at the altar of God.

Don't do that. Just sit there. Call upon Him.

Read a bit about Him. Probably if you're like me, before you even get close to fulfilling the prayers you hope to make, you'll fall asleep. But you'll fall asleep with His arms wrapped around you.

You'll fall asleep with His arms wrapped around you. Oh, what a place to be! I've been in the mouth of lions, but with those arms wrapped around you, nothing's going to happen to this boy. He's always there.

You know what's so pitiful about preaching? It's pitiful. That's what's pitiful about preaching. Because there are no words that can describe how much He loves you.

There's no words. I said something really foolish the other day. So foolish.

I was preaching and in the emotion of the moment, I had struggled to preach the cross And that's always a losing battle. And I said, my one desire is that when I'm transformed in the presence of God, in heaven, when I see Him as He is, and I'm transformed, that He would grant me one, one thing that He would let me do, that He'd let me preach one more time. But preach right that time.

To preach about that cross in a way that's worthy. And then I realized, it's like He looked down at me, just like He looked down at my little boy. He said, even then, Paul, oh Paul, you fool.

Even then, you will never, never, never. Paul, that's what your heaven and your eternity is all about. You will spend the rest of eternity chasing this thing down.

Let's pray. Oh God, oh God, thou knowest. Thou knowest, Lord.

Thou knowest. You know, you know, you know. Amen.

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