

Spiritual Backsliding Comes Through Neglect

by Santosh Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of revival in two key areas: a sharper understanding of the Word of God and a greater thirst for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It challenges listeners to be vigilant against distractions, to discern between the soulish and the spiritual, and to be equipped with the living and active Word of God. The message highlights the need to prioritize God's Word over soulish influences, be vigilant against distractions, and be equipped with the living and active Word of God.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12, 1 John 4:17, Matthew 13:25, 2 Timothy 2:4, Proverbs 24:30

Topics: "Revival", "Prioritizing God's Word"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like us to turn to Hebrews chapter 1, Hebrews chapter 1. As we've been thinking in our church meetings recently, brothers and sisters, we've experienced a real time of revival in our midst over the last few months. It's changed my life in many ways and shown me so much in my life that the Lord's convicted me of, challenged me with, encouraged me by, and drawn me closer to himself. As I think I mentioned on Sunday, I see it as a revival in two special areas in my life.

And I think many of us, if not all of us in the church, can testify of that as well. And those two areas are, first of all, the sharpness of the Word of God. There are many ways in which God's Word has become sharper to me over the last few months.

Being, and like it says in Hebrews, for able to divide between soul and spirit. And the second area for me has been a greater thirst for the fullness of his Holy Spirit. And if you thought you were thirsty yesterday to be filled with the Holy Spirit, we ought to be even more thirsty today to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

So if the second aspect of fullness of the Holy Spirit and a thirst for it, a constant thirst to be filled with the Holy Spirit, I find, and this is my honest testimony, I'm not saying this to impress you or any reason except to challenge you also to make this your prayer. I find, dear brothers and sisters, that throughout the day,

my prayer is, Lord, I want more of your Holy Spirit than you've given me even an hour ago. I want to be on this steady, steep incline.

It's not me trying to climb uphill, but me thirsting for more and God meeting me according to my thirst. And he's doing that. I find that any free moment I have, even if I'm just driving in the car or running an errand or in between something at work, the cry from within my heart is, Lord, I want more of you.

I'm not satisfied. I thank you with all my heart for what you've given me, but I know there's so much more you want me to have of you. So I want to encourage you all in that area as well.

I also talked on Sunday about the day of our visitation, that verse in Luke 19, verse 44, where Jesus said that their ruin would come upon the Jews because they did not recognize the day of their visitation. And I believe spiritually the same can happen in our lives. And I'll tell you, I can testify that that's happened in my life.

There were times when I experienced days of visitation, but I neglected it. I didn't pursue with it. I didn't persist with it.

That's the word I was looking for. And that day of visitation passed me by. And I determined that when the Lord meets with me and there's a specific purpose and a specific meaning he wants to have with me, a unique experience, I don't want it to pass me by.

And that's been the burden of my heart. And when we see in Hebrews chapter one, verse one, you know, Hebrews is a wonderful book. We're shown the new covenant, we're shown Jesus in not only the fullness of his Godhead, but also the fullness of his humanity.

And in that, an example for us. But it starts, this book starts by saying that God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways. So he's saying that God had spoken for thousands of years through his prophets.

In these last days, has spoken not just through a prophet now, he's spoken to us in his son. It's a wonderful phrase. Now, what stands out to me, first of all, it doesn't say by his son.

Yes, Jesus Christ is speaking to us, it's his voice through the Holy Spirit that ministers to us. But he's speaking to us in his son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom also he made the world. So when he says he's speaking to us in his son, that means that every word that I hear, the only way that it can really be meaningful for me is if I see it manifest in Jesus Christ.

If I hear some word in a message, and it just becomes a theory, or some, oh, I never saw that verse before, or some other doctrine maybe that we can repeat. If I have not heard God speaking in Jesus, that means that word, I see how that is describing some portion of Christ's nature. Everything we hear, dear brothers and sisters, everything we hear through the Holy Spirit in the new covenant is a description of some part of Jesus.

You know how if you're trying to describe a statue, let's say, or trying to describe a building, let's say the Taj Mahal, for example, you couldn't just describe it by looking from one side. You'd have to go through around the whole thing to describe it in its entirety. And in a sense, that's what the Holy Spirit wants to do to us.

That's why we listen to messages. That's why we still read His Word, because there's more of God speaking in Jesus that I haven't yet fully realized. I haven't seen Jesus fully.

And remember this, every message we hear, every single message we hear must be God speaking to us in Jesus. That means I've seen a little bit more of what Jesus is like, and I can partake of that. But then he goes on to say in chapter 2, verse 1, since, you know, he begins by saying for this reason.

That means since it used to be prophets, and they would describe God, and they would explain Him, but now you've seen Him in Jesus. You've heard Jesus speaking, but you're also seeing Jesus. You're seeing God in a relatable way.

For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, so when God spoke to an angel, you better not disobey.

Judgment was severe, because God sent His angel to speak. I mean, if you heard a word of God from an angel, and you disobeyed it, you knew you were going to get punished under the Old Testament. But what he's saying is now that he's spoken in not just an angel, it's in Jesus himself, how will we escape who claim to hear from Jesus, and about whom the things spoken are in Jesus? How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard.

But this phrase, how shall we escape? How will we escape what? The penalty in verse 2. Every transgression and disobedience received an appropriate penalty, he says in verse 2. And then the writer of Hebrews is saying, oh, you call yourself new covenant? How will you escape if you neglect the salvation that is available to you in the new covenant? That's a very serious word, dear brothers and sisters. We hear the word, the phrase new covenant often in our church, in our churches, but I fear that it could be something that we take for granted. Jesus used the word new covenant only one time, and that was when he talked about his blood.

It cost him his blood to sign that new agreement. That's what the new covenant is. And the warning for me here is not that I would forsake it.

Notice what he says. How will we escape? Not if we forsake it, simply if we neglect it, if we neglect it. And I'd like to speak today about the sin of neglect.

The Lord's been convicting me about it recently in different areas in which we can neglect it. Now, we may think, well, I haven't turned against the message of salvation. I haven't turned against the gospel.

I haven't turned against the good news, but I may be neglecting it. There's things that I should be doing to nurture and to build up the life of Christ in me, this new covenant life in me that I'm neglecting. That means I'm not turning against it.

I'm not speaking against it. I might still talk about it, but I've neglected it. Let's examine our hearts, dear brothers and sisters, this evening.

If the Holy Spirit speaks to you this evening, maybe not even through things I might share, but just as you meditate on whether you may be neglecting this great salvation in the new covenant in some area and the

ruin that can come through that. Turn with me, if you could, please, to Proverbs chapter 24. There's a little story that's recounted here in Proverbs 24.

Proverbs 24 verse 30, I passed by the field of the sluggard. Proverbs 24 verse 30, I passed by the field of the sluggard and the vineyard of the man lacking sense, or the literal word there is actually heart, and that means desire. Let me read that again that way.

I passed by the field of a lazy person, somebody who neglected the field that he had been given. I passed by the field of a lazy person and by the vineyard of the man lacking passion, lacking heart, that's the literal word there, the lacking heart. This is how the Lord's been convicting me about this with regard to the truths that we hear, with regard to the word that's been preached in our midst for the last three months.

Are you lacking heart in it, Santosh? The Holy Spirit's spoken very clearly to me. Yeah, you accept it in your mind, but are you lacking a passion behind it where you want to lay a hold of it, you want to grab it, and you want the Holy Spirit to grab a hold of you? That's a very serious exhortation. And behold, because this man lacked heart and he was a lazy person, it was completely overgrown with thistles, verse 31.

Its surface was covered with nettles, which is another type of weed or thorn, and its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, verse 32, I reflected upon it, I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and then your poverty will come as a robber and your want like an armed man.

That last verse describes a destruction that will happen, not because we will turn against the gospel, not because we will reject the good news that we have been taught, but because we will neglect it. We'll say, you know what? I don't think we really have to take it that seriously. Or can I just take a break for a little while? This constant pursuing after Jesus, this constant radical attitude is a little much.

Let me just sit back for a little bit. It's exactly what the devil wants us to hear. Now, this isn't a tiresome way.

It's not a frantic running around like a chicken with its head chopped off, as they say. But this is a zealous pursuit of God in my thoughts, a passionate desire for God to consume more of me, a passionate desire for God to kind of take over my whole being. And I want it, and I want Him to give me more opportunities to die to myself and to deny myself, to take up my cross.

I want to take up my cross in more areas than I've seen yet, because I realize that if I'm trying to find a way around the cross, a lazy option where I don't have to deny myself, I don't have to try to invest in that relationship. If I have to try to love that person who's hard to love, it's going to be a lot of work. And so I sit back.

Or in a relationship, in our marriage, there could be a conflict, and all it would take is me as the husband or you as the wife, just humbling ourselves and saying, I don't need to be right. I just want to love you and to come back and for us to be united again. And it may be just swallowing your pride and not trying to justify yourself and just saying, all of that doesn't matter.

I want to love. I want God's heart of love to flow through me. The lazy option would be to just give her the silent treatment or to shut myself in the office for a little while or go read a book or something like that and avoid that difficult circumstances.

And that's the attitude of the lazy person. Pretty soon, that's how marriages start to grow weeds and thistles. That we're not, there's a saying that marriage is like a garden.

You have to tend it. You have to take care of it. And as you do so, it'll start to bear fruit.

But it's the same with our children. What if you sensed as one of our children, let's say one of my children was growing older and a little bit of a distance is coming between me and that child. What should I do? Should I just say, well, he's an adult now.

He should choose for himself. Or is there a zealous heart attitude in me that says, no, Lord, I have to win that child of mine. I have to win my wife.

I have to win my brother. You know, this must be the basis for forgiveness. Let me show you this verse in Matthew chapter 18, where Jesus talked about forgiveness.

Matthew chapter 18, we read in verse 15, Matthew 18, verse 15. If your brother sins, and the margin says, if your brother sins against you, some translations say, go and show him his fault in private. If your brother sins against you, he's done some harm to you.

He's done some sin. Not just, you know, was unthoughtful, but it was clearly sin. If he sins against you, go and show him his fault in private.

Privately go to him. Now, this, the much easier option is just to kind of put up a brick wall. And just say, fine, I'm just not going to talk to you.

Or I'm going to walk away from this relationship. That's what people who choose divorce as an option says. Maybe it started with sin, but the response of every Christian, the response of every Christian where God has placed us in a relationship.

And that's why he says, if your brother, he's not talking about other people. And it says, as long as it lies with you, live at peace with all men. But if your brother, I mean, somebody that God has placed in your circle, a brother in the church, a sister in the church, and certainly the family, a husband, a wife, or children.

If somebody in that circle of care that God has placed in your circle of care sins against you, go and show him his fault in private. If he listens to you, why do you want to go and show him his fault in private? It's not because you're this superior person that knows all these faults in others. In fact, Jesus got done earlier in chapter seven saying, take the log out of your eye before you try to take a speck out of somebody else's eye.

So before you go and correct somebody else, make sure you don't have a judgmental attitude. But the purpose of going to my brother, Matthew 18 verse 15, is ultimately the last phrase there. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Meditate on that phrase sometime, dear brothers and sisters. This is our objective. This is our goal in life.

I want to win somebody for Christ. Not just give them a tract and tell them about Jesus Christ dying for their sins. But I want to, and we're talking especially here about those relationships where God has placed us in the same circle, beginning in our marriages and with our children and brothers and sisters in the church.

I have a responsibility to win you. And if a gap, a distance comes between you and I, and I can't sit there and say, well, he started it. She started it.

No, that's the attitude of children, right? If you go to a children, if you go to children, you see them fighting. It's usually the first answer is he started it. She started it.

That's childishness. Let's put that childishness away. It doesn't matter who started it.

If it's a brother or sister that God has placed you or even your wife or children, husband, placed you in relationship with, we have a responsibility to be active, to be proactive in winning our brothers, in winning our sisters. And as I think again about this proverb that we just read, the story in Proverbs 24, this is the thought that has come to my mind. If I do nothing with what's given to me, something will still happen, but it won't be good.

If I do nothing with what's given to me, something will still happen and it won't be good. Let me explain what I mean by that. You don't have to do any work for weeds to grow in your garden.

It'll just happen. If you want good fruit to come out of your garden, you'll have to put work into it. If you want apples, a good apple tree to grow, you want a good orange tree to grow, you want peppers, zucchini, well, zucchini seems to grow on its own too, but okay, but the nice fruit, okay.

But you know what? You don't have to put any effort to grow is weeds. In fact, you have to be proactive to take out the weeds and the thistles and the nettles. You have to be proactive to remove that.

So think about this when thinking about our Christian life. If I do nothing, let's say I sit and listen to a sermon that was living and active and I read God's word even, and it was God's word is living and active. Every time you open God's word, something of life is being implanted into you.

But if you do nothing with it, something will still happen and it won't be good. What happens automatically is never good. What good that must come out of our life will take some work on our part, some yielding to the Holy Spirit.

That's where it begins. And the Holy Spirit giving us his power and his grace so that we can care for this garden, for our lives, for our hearts. If you do nothing with your thoughts, there's a phrase in the world, the idle mind, the empty mind is the devil's workshop.

If you leave your mind empty, and it's actually not original to the world. Jesus said that, that you remember what he said, how a demon possessed person was filled with evil and then the demon is cast out. But that person did nothing with the good that was given him.

He left his house empty, untended. He didn't lock the door. He didn't watch over his walls.

And as a result, that demon came back with seven more demons. And the condition of that man was worse. Have you thought that it's possible to have a demon cast out of you? And at the end of it, you're in a worse situation through neglect.

This is how serious neglect is. That if I'm not vigilant, and maybe, you know, demon possession is an extreme example. I don't think any of us is demon possessed.

But what about the word of God? When we receive the word of God, when we listen to more and more messages, when we even read God's word, if we're reading it, I love that we're still doing a Bible reading plan. I hope we're all keeping up on it, especially children. But as you're reading it, recognize that God is giving you a garden as a result of it.

And if you do nothing with it, something bad will happen, like happened to this sluggard in Proverbs 24. What was the fault of the sluggard? Did he put the weeds there? Did he break down his own wall? You know, there are some other Proverbs that talk about destruction that comes by one's own bad works, like Proverbs 14. I think a few weeks ago, I talked about that verse that a foolish woman tears down her own house brick by brick.

That is a woman that's, or a person that's acting against herself, against himself, through sinful habits, or through active things that they're doing. But this is a different type of ruin that this proverb is talking about. This is a ruin that comes by doing nothing.

And you may say, well, what did I do wrong? I didn't do anything. And that's exactly what was done wrong. Sins of omission, where God wanted me to do something.

You know, in any situation, if there's a situation of conflict between a husband and wife, I try to take this seriously. I'm not preaching something I don't seek to put into practice. If there's a situation between my wife and I, and in a sense, she feels that I've hurt her, or I've done something hurtful to her, or even if I think she's taken it the wrong way, I have a responsibility to win my wife.

I have a responsibility to be the bridge builder. There's a hymn we sing, we know that fear builds walls instead of bridges. I've been forgiven so much that I'll risk loving too.

I'll forgive. I've been forgiven so much. I've been loved so much that I'll risk loving too.

Fear builds walls instead of bridges. And as we see these walls building between relationships, whether it's in the marriage or in the church and otherwise, be vigilant, dear brothers and sisters. Let's be vigilant over these relationships.

If there's a brother or sister in the church that you just don't enjoy talking to them, let's say, but God has placed them with you in the local church, I believe we have a responsibility to try to build those bridges as much as we can, as much as it lies with us to invest in that, to make sure there's no weeds, that there's no thistles that are coming in. Now, there's two things here that I see in this proverb back in Proverbs 24. One was the thorns, the thistles that came up, and the other is this broken down wall.

And I just like to talk about those two briefly. Overgrown with thistles, you know that Jesus said when he was speaking about the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, he said that the thorns, let's look at that maybe so you see it. Matthew chapter 13, Matthew 13, verse 22, when Jesus is explaining the parable of the sower, he says in verse 22, the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.

There's two things that Jesus mentioned there. I think we've heard a lot about the deceitfulness of riches. I think all of us can say that we are aware that riches will choke out the spiritual life in you if you love it.

If you hold on to your possessions, if you hold on to your wealth, if your mind is constantly thinking about how you can add more wealth and more money and improve your standard of life and buy this thing and buy that other thing. If that's what's preoccupying your mind, it's going to choke out the word of God. It's no wonder that there won't be life.

You'll find yourself not zealous and wholehearted for the things of God for investing in his kingdom because of the deceitfulness of riches. We've heard a lot on that. I don't need to dwell on it much more, but I want to talk about the cares or the worry of the world.

Have you thought, have you realized, have we realized, dear brothers and sisters, that when I see what's going on in the world around me and as a result of that, I allow worry to come into my life. I allow fear to trap me. I allow the unhealthy anticipation of something bad that's going to happen as a result of what I see and hear and the news and rumors and all these things and conspiracies and all those things.

If I allow it to become worry in my life, that's going to choke out the word. And maybe we're vigilant over the love of money and we're careful that we don't allow the love of money to ensnare us. You know, like Paul told Timothy, 2 Timothy 2 verse 4, no soldier of the Lord allows himself to get entangled in the affairs of this world.

Keep a finger on Matthew 13. We'll come back to that. 2 Timothy 2, if you're in active duty, it's what Paul is saying here, if you're in active duty, and that's a good question to ask ourselves this evening, are you in active duty in the army or are you on call, you know, in retirement mode or backup? No, are you in active duty? We must all be in active duty.

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. So that means not getting entangled in the affairs of everyday life. And sure, that could mean, you know, business prospects and making a lot of money.

But I think perhaps the greater danger for us is allowing the affairs of this world to bring worry and care and fear. And Jesus said, no, God told us in Isaiah 8, if you fear me, you need fear nothing else. That's a living Bible paraphrase of Isaiah 8 verse 13.

If you fear God, you need fear nothing else. And so, dear brothers and sisters, let's be vigilant over fear coming in. I find that many Christians are operating out of fear, fear of the pandemic and fear of the vaccine and fear of masks and fear of the government and fear of other Christians and fear of the liberals and fear of the conservatives, whichever side, it's fear, fear, fear, fear, fear.

And whether, you know, whether any of that is true or not, it's really not as important as this, that even if it is true, the one thing that I'm not entitled to is fear. Maybe there is, maybe it's not a conspiracy after all. Maybe there is some truth to what they're saying.

But regardless, I'm a soldier in the kingdom of heaven and I don't want to be entangled in the fear and the worry and the anxiety that pervades the world as I see it, especially in the last two, three years, it seems like it's a fear. The devil's, God, you know, the spirit of the devil, the spirit of the antichrist, if you want to know it, it's very clear. The Holy Spirit says through Paul, God has not given to us, so the not spirit of Christ, if I could use that term, the spirit of the antichrist, God has not given to us a spirit of fear.

So the spirit of antichrist, which is the not Christ spirit, is the spirit of fear. And to the extent that I allow even a little bit of fear, a little bit of anxiety, a little bit of worry in my life, I am allowing the spirit of the

antichrist to find a place in my heart. And it's no wonder that those messages that I hear and the word of God that I read doesn't actually come to fruition because the thorns are pressing in and choking out because I'm lazy, I neglect, I'm not vigilant over casting aside fear.

I tell you, dear brothers and sisters, we must attack the spirit of fear. We must attack the spirit of unbelief. We must attack the spirit of worry and the spirit of anxiety.

I know as Christians, we tend to take it just like, oh, I was a little anxious and shrug our shoulders at it. That's a neglecting attitude towards this evil spirit of fear and worry. And it's no wonder that the devil has wreaked havoc in so many people's lives through the fear that has come in and choked out the word of God and choked out the life of the Holy Spirit.

If you were filled with the Holy Spirit and the anointing of God was in you and the presence of God was there in your life and you knew it, and now you find that there's a dryness in your life, check and see if there are thorns in your life. Unbelief, mistrust of God, that God is really who He is and who He said He is, that He has a purpose for my life, that He saved me. He sent His Son Jesus to save me and He began that work in me and He's going to finish it.

That's the spirit of faith. And the opposite of that is the spirit of unbelief, where the devil would discourage us and hold us in bondage and say, oh, it's not going to work for you. You're not going to get it.

Don't look at others, dear brothers and sisters. Don't look at, because many, many people are pretending to be more spiritual than they really are. Look to God and say, Lord, I want to partake of your spirit of faith.

I want to be vigilant against these weeds, against these thorns that will come and choke out. If you do nothing about fear, if you read, when you read the news, let's say, or you read it online or you hear some news, you must be vigilant at that time. Recognize this is the world that's presenting the news to you.

Every single news source is going to be biased in some way or the other because the world is biased. It's part of just the way the world is. So recognize that and be on guard.

Let there be a filter in your mind as you read that news item, as you process that news that you hear or that conversation that somebody tells you. Oh, did you hear this or this new mandate or some other thing that's coming up and all these things. As you listen to it, filter it.

If you don't put that filter, it's going to become a thorn and it's going to lead to worry and fear. And when we filter it through the spirit of faith, through the spirit of power, through the spirit of love, through the spirit of discipline and a sound mind, that's the opposite in those verses. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and discipline, a disciplined mind.

That means I say I'm going to refuse to allow those thoughts into my life. You must be vigilant. We must be vigilant, dear brothers and sisters.

You know, a few chapters earlier, Matthew chapter 11, I've been challenged recently by these verses that we know well. Matthew 11, we know these verses quite well. 28, Matthew 11, 28 through 30 or Matthew 28 and 29, Matthew 11, 28 and 29.

Come to me, Jesus says, come to me. You who are weary and heavy laden with what? With fears, with anxieties, with worries, with uncertainties about the future, with doubts about God even. Maybe you doubt,

is there a God? Doubt whether, is God really the way the Bible says he is? Have I understood him correctly? Come to me if you're weary, if those thoughts are burdening you and preventing you and choking out the life of joy and peace and love and rest.

That's ultimately what I was going to get to, rest. If there's unrest in your life in any area, Jesus says, come to me. You've been burdened.

You've been weary and heavy laden. I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

That means there's Jesus under his yoke. He says, come stand next to me. Let's plow this field together.

Take the same yoke that I'm under and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart. And he says it again, you will find rest for your souls. And I've come to see, dear brothers and sisters, that the one thing I covet more than anything else that people ought to be able to say about me, if they're able to recognize it, is this.

He's being with Jesus. He's walking with Jesus. He's been with Jesus.

You know how they testified about the apostles in Acts 4? The Pharisees, who were the experts on the law, they studied the Bible in and out. But then they saw these unlearned fishermen, uneducated people speaking with authority, speaking with boldness, speaking with power. And they said, they've been with Jesus.

That's a testimony I've coveted. I want, if someday I'm called up in front of some court to testify that I'm a child of Jesus Christ and to be prepared to die for it, as I believe is coming to this country, I'm not afraid of that. But I pray at that point, they'll say, they won't be, oh, he's a learned man, or, oh, he's got a degree in this or anything like that.

There's a man who's been with Jesus. That's where he gets his power from. When I talk about maybe victories that God brings into my life, allows me to experience, gives me victory in an area, I want it to be this way.

Santos has been with Jesus. That's why he's become more kind. That's why he's more joyful.

That's why he's more full of love. He's been with Jesus. Not that he's become a better self.

He's been with Jesus. And the mark that somebody has been with Jesus, for me, in these verses that we read in Matthew 11, 28 and 29 is, I get rest. No matter what happens in the world around me, I'm at rest.

That's the mark that you've been with Jesus. And so I encourage you, dear brothers and sisters, spend time with Jesus. And what do I mean by that? Doesn't mean just praying for five minutes on your knees or reading your Bible for 15 minutes, a quiet time in the morning.

Let your entire day be a quiet time with Jesus, no matter what you're doing. If you're driving in the car, if you're working at the computer or you're teaching the children or you're doing dishes or changing diapers, let everything that you're doing be quiet time with Jesus. You're taking his yoke upon you and you're walking with him and you're learning from him and you will get rest.

That's the promise of Jesus. And I want that. And I've seen so often that I found myself in situations where I didn't have rest, a little bit of unrest.

Something came up suddenly and caught me off guard and I was at unrest. By God's grace, they're becoming fewer and fewer. Now, when things suddenly come up and something wants to rattle me, there's still a little bit of shaking, but God's able to quickly, I immediately say, Lord Jesus, let me run under this yoke of yours.

Let me join you under this yoke because you said there I would find rest. And I take on the mind of Christ. I fix my eyes on Jesus and say, Lord, in this situation, I want to find rest.

You promised me rest. Jesus is not a liar. When he said I would have rest, he meant it, dear brothers and sisters.

And all it means is taking him at his word and going to him and saying, Lord, I look back on the last week, what is today, Wednesday, maybe the last three, four days of this week have been characterized by unrest. Maybe for moms, for you, it's so hard because the children are pulling you through this way and that way. And then there's homeschool and there's dishes and it just seems to just drown you.

Run under the yoke of Jesus. He has rest that he wants to give you and let this be a mark. Think about, you know, nowadays husbands don't go to work so much anymore.

They're still working from home. But let's say your husband's been in a meeting for a couple of hours and then he comes out of his den where he's been locked in and he sees chaos in the home, but he sees a wife at rest. Do you believe it's possible? Humanly, it's impossible.

But if I fight, if I'm vigilant and say, Lord Jesus, I'm going to run to you, I'm going to hold you to this verse, Matthew 11, 28 and 29 and say, give me rest, Lord. And likewise for us husbands, when we could go through a stressful day, perhaps the boss yelled at you or something else happened and things didn't go well and you still don't know where the answer is going to come from. But you're at rest, you know, fixing your eyes on Jesus.

This is the mark that you've been with Jesus. Complete rest. I also talked about fear.

You know, this verse in 1 John chapter 4, 1 John 4, verse 17, the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Like I said, God has given us, not given us a spirit of fear, but the opposite of that. And one of the marks of this, the Holy Spirit is described as the spirit of love.

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Romans chapter 5, verse 5. And so he says, by this love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because here's how you and I will have confidence in the day of judgment, not, oh Lord, I said the prayer, my sins are unforgiven. No, as Jesus is, so also are we in this world. Now, when is John writing this? Is it when Jesus was still here on this earth or after Jesus had ascended to heaven? John was writing this around 90 AD.

Jesus has been at the right hand of the Father, ascended in the heavenlies for about 50 or 60 years by then. And what John is saying is, the Holy Spirit is saying to John is, as Jesus is full of rest right now, so also are we in this world. As Jesus is, so also are we in this world.

That means, yes, I'm looking to Jesus in his example here on this earth. And I'm saying, Lord, you faced a situation like this when you were here on this earth and you overcame, give me rest. But who is the Jesus I'm praying to and where is he? He's at the right hand of the Father where all is rest.

Perfect peace in heaven. It's described like a glass sea. You know what a glass sea is? We know what a normal sea looks like, turbulent, up and down, up and down.

That's the seas of this earth. Heaven is described as a glass sea. It's still a sea, but it's still.

There's no ripple, not even a little bit of ripple. Oh, that's the life I covet. I find in my life, the ripples are getting fewer, but there are still a few.

It's not yet the glass sea. And that's what I'm aiming for and say, Lord, I will not let go of you until you give me this glass sea in my heart, this glass sea of peace and rest. And no matter how long it takes, Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I receive this life.

As he is, so also are we in this world. And then he goes on to say, it's in that context that he says there is no fear in love. That means if you're filled with the love of the Holy Spirit, if you're filled with the Holy Spirit, there's no room for fear.

If you found that there was one minute of fear in your day, that was the one minute in your day that you weren't, certainly weren't filled with the Holy Spirit. And in order to cause us to fall on our face and say, Lord, I'm sorry, I allowed fear for one minute. I've allowed anxiety for one minute.

I allowed worry for one minute. I don't want any of that because I recognize this is a thistle that will choke out your life. And to do that, your brothers and sisters, let me give a practical word of encouragement here.

I find that so many people want to talk about, you know, the mandates and the vaccines and is it the mark of the beast? And is it safe? And has the government got some agenda and all these things? Now, I'm not here to tell you whether you should take it or not. Each one must be convinced in their own mind. But it must never be said, at least at RLCF, that we're going around asking people, have you taken the vaccine or this or that, that that's becoming the object of our conversation.

Because you recognize that those are the kinds of things that will bring fear and anxiety and worry. And if you don't want to take it, don't take it. And if you are OK with taking it, take it, pray about it, whatever you do, and let the God guide you and live carefully, live in a healthy way that takes care of your body.

But in the midst of all of that, don't let the don't get drawn into the conversations of this world about those types of things, because that's entangling yourself in the affairs of this world. And when you when somebody wants to come to you, well, first of all, if somebody comes to you and asks you a question that's that's private, you just simply say four words, none of your business and leave it at that. It's really not none of anybody else's business, what you do with your private life.

Us elders will never ask you. Nobody, no brother or sister should ever ask you. You may choose to share it if you want, but it should never be said that in our church people are asking others about this.

It's really none of anybody else's business. But more than that, I just mentioned that in passing, don't get taken up with the conversations and all the different things that the news and the media, whether it's the left side or the right side or the upside or the downside, don't have anything to do with that. Refuse to be entangled.

See it for what it is. No soldier in active service. Now, if you say, well, I'm not really calling to a life of active service in God's kingdom, then sure, go ahead and get entangled.

And I don't know what the eternal destiny is of such people, but I know what I want. I'm an active servant. I'm an active service.

I'm only one thing that I'm interested in. That's the kingdom of God. I'm an active warfare.

I mean, you think that for the person in a firefight battle in a foxhole somewhere in a back of the warfield cares about whether the Broncos are winning or not? Now, maybe he might have a fleeting thought about it, but the enemy's bullets are coming at him and he's trying to fight back. He's in the midst of that battle. And the only thing on his mind is I got to make it out of this alive.

I can't get hit. I got to protect my brothers. I got to win this battle for my country.

And Paul is evoking that mentality when he says, brothers and sisters, you're in a firefight, the firefight of your life. This is not just for some earthly kingdom. This is life and death for eternity that we're talking about.

Now, do I have time to get taken up with all these things? Jesus said, don't fear those who can kill the body. Do you think for one moment that if that, you know, Jesus even said they can take poison that won't hurt them. Now, it doesn't mean that we are reckless with it.

However, if it was that easy, you know, if people think that it's the mark of the beast and it's just just a lack of knowing God really is what it is. But if it was really that easy to not take the mark of the beast, heaven would be full of self-centered, proud people who simply just didn't take the vaccine. It's not the case.

It's much easier to avoid the vaccine and still love yourself and not deny yourself. That's the easy route. The difficult route is to deny yourself, to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

This is the only way that leads to life. And so don't be fooled. You know, I even again, I don't want to make this about the vaccines, but I tell you, there's something that I'll tell you my personal testimony.

I told the Lord months ago or I think about a year ago when there was this talk about this vaccine. I said, Lord, back then before it was even available, I said, Lord, I don't know whether I should take this or not, but I believe you'll guide me. And I said, Lord, the bottom line, because I recognize that there are vaccines could cause some problems and there's medical side effects and I don't necessarily trust the government and everything.

But I said, Lord Jesus, if you want me to take this vaccines to further your kingdom so that I could, because I'm only here to do your will. I'm only here to further your kingdom. That's the only reason I'm here.

I'm not even here to preserve my own life. I'm here to live my life and expend it for your kingdom. And if your purpose for my life, if I can do that, if I can further that in order to further that, if I must take the vaccine, then I'll take it.

Sign me up for it. And you know how I got that challenge? Because I tell you this, Jesus took a vaccine. Think about that for a moment.

When Jesus, it says that he came in the likeness of sinful flesh. Pause for a moment and think about that. Jesus chose to come to this earth in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Do you think there's any vaccine, even if it is really, really bad that comes even close to what the likeness of sinful flesh must've been like for God himself and all his holiness and purity? And think about it for a moment. The risk that Jesus took by putting himself in the likeness of sinful flesh, the risk that he took by coming to this earth in the likeness of sinful flesh, allowing himself to be tempted in all points as we are tempted for what purpose? Just so that I would have a way of salvation and that I could become a partaker of his divine nature. That's the vaccine that Jesus took.

It's far worse than any other vaccine that you might have to take in this world. And Jesus did it willingly. He counted the cost.

He said, it's going to cost me something. It's going to result in me having to break fellowship with my father on the cross when he put Santosh's sins on me. When I become sin who knew no sin, that Santosh, put your name there, might become the righteousness of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5, read that. And so I see that Jesus was saying, Lord, I'm not here to avoid the vaccine or take the vaccine. I'm not here to preserve my earthly life.

I'm here to do the will of him who sent me. I tell you, brothers and sisters, that has brought me such rest. I'm finding Jesus guiding me step by step.

And sure, let the health department say this mandate. Let the government say that other mandate. I'm at rest.

I really am at rest. And it's come through saying, Lord Jesus, I'm going to be vigilant over watching over these thorns that would choke out my life. You know, it was John Wesley who said, give me a hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God.

And they alone will shake the gates of hell more than any and set up the kingdom of God on earth. A hundred preachers who fear only sin. They don't fear the vaccine.

They don't fear the pandemic. They don't fear the government. They fear sin.

And they desire nothing but God. I want to be such a person. That's why John Wesley was so effective in his day.

And the generation that he led, that he raised up after him of godly preachers was also holy and wholehearted. And I've made that the prayer of my heart. Lord Jesus, I want to be one of those that John Wesley was looking for, because I know that's what you're looking for.

Whether we preach or not is not as important, but somebody who fears nothing but sin and desires nothing but God. Briefly, the second thing that that proverb talks about is a broken down wall. And for me, this represents a neglect of the word of God and of prayer.

When the wall is broken down, that happens through neglecting God's word. I find, dear brothers and sisters, I read something from God's word every single day. No doubt in my mind about it.

But I'll tell you my testimony almost every single time when I pick up my Bible to read, or if it's on the phone, I'm reading through the app. I'll tell you, no kidding, it's crazy how this is. Almost every single time, I find that there's some distracting thought that wants me not to pick up my Bible.

Like, hey, oh, oh, somebody just sent me a text message. I need to take a look at that first, or let me just check that email. I think I'm expecting an email.

It's like the devil will throw everything at you to get you to not pick up your Bible, to not pick up the word of God. And it's just like, it's like the devil, you know, imagine this sluggard in his garden. He's looking, taken up with this or taken up with that.

You know, it's in Ecclesiastes somewhere, maybe in chapter 9, which says, you know, people who watch the clouds will not be able to, will not bear, will not reap a harvest because they're watching the clouds. And I imagine that somebody who has an evil intent for this lazy man just gets him to be taken up the clouds. Hey, what's up, man? Yeah, he's staring at the clouds.

That's what's up. And then meanwhile, this enemy comes and tears down the wall. Be aware of the distractions from God's word that the devil will try to bring.

He'll get you to be taken up with this and that and read this news item and read that and something else. Take the reading and meditating on God's word seriously. You know, there's a, there's a really sad story that happened in 1 Samuel chapter 3. 1 Samuel chapter 3. No, 13, 1 Samuel chapter 13.

Yeah. Towards the end of that chapter, when Saul is king in Israel at the time, and it says in verse 19, now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel. For the Philistines said, otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears.

So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his matter, his ax and his hoe. The charge was two thirds of a shekel. So they charged them money for it.

So verse 22, it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who are with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and his son, Jonathan. So Saul and Jonathan had a sword.

And there's a good example that we can follow. But everybody else didn't have a sword. This is a sad picture of many churches today where the leaders of the church have the sword.

They know God's word. They're meditating on God's word, not because they're to preach it because they want to know God. But everybody else sitting in the church doesn't even bring a Bible to church.

They don't even turn to the verse when it's referenced in the meeting. It's just, I'll sit there and listen. I don't need to know it in God's word.

They don't have a sword of their own. They're not able to use it. And so in the battle, it's no wonder that the devil comes and just wreaks havoc.

And so, you know, I'm glad we are a church. And let's continue to do that. That brings our Bibles.

Parents, teach your children to do that. We tell our children, bring your Bible. And if you're old enough to read it, sit there and turn to those verses.

It's a good discipline. I can't tell you how much of the knowledge of God's word came to me simply by sitting in meetings where the preacher has turned to Scripture after Scripture after Scripture after Scripture. You know, not this just one verse and then tell you a bunch of stories and give you some

philosophy.

Scripture after Scripture after Scripture. And we had to turn to it. That's also why we don't show the text of the verses on the screen.

We want every brother and sister at RLCF to know it in their own Bible, to be able to find it in your Bible, to know there and to read it for yourself. That's so important. Otherwise, we'll be like it was in the case of the Israelites.

The Philistines were smart. They said, we'll find a way to take away the swords that when we attack them, they won't have a way to attack back. No wonder the Philistines could rule over the Israelites for so many years.

This is before Goliath even, because they had long before Goliath, they held them in bondage by taking away the sword. Don't let the devil do that to us. Have a sword, know it.

And then I talked about earlier, I began by talking about the sharpness of the word of God. In Hebrews 4, I want you to see something. The word of God has been very sharp for me in the last few weeks and months, I would say.

But I want you to see that what sharpness, what the sharpness of the word of God looks like. Hebrews 4, we read in verse 12, the word of God is living and active and sharper than any to which I want to talk about this word living and active. You know, if you, there's a difference between having a child in the home and having a doll in the home, right? A doll may look like a child and you could prop it up in a chair and, but it's going to sit there until you move it.

It's, it looks like it, but it's just a dead object. A child is going to pull down a teacup and break it and is going to probably, you know, maybe urinate on the floor or there's life in that child. And I use some negative examples, but there's, you expect something to happen because of this living thing that's in the home.

You could say, even with an animal, if you have a dog in the house, you expect that it's going to do things in the house. You expect some effect as a result of that living thing. You don't really expect that much effect out of dead objects.

You know, the book that's sitting there, it's just going to be there until I move it. But a living thing on its own has power to do something. And that's how I have seen the word of God, that when you read the word of God in your home, when you have a verse on the wall in your home, when you hear the word of God spoken or preached in the world, it's living, there's life in it.

It's going to do something in it. If you allow it to come in and go into your heart, it's living, it's active. So even the simple reading of God's word, you know, there were times when I would read God's word and I'd be like, I didn't get anything out of it.

You know, I didn't understand it. It's because I was trying to understand it with my mind. And then this word became real to me.

The word of God is just living. It's active. You just take it in.

It's like food. You don't have to understand how it all works. Even if you don't understand how your digestive system works, as long as it works, that's the most important thing.

You don't have to, you know, be a medical expert to know how all the intestines work, anything like that. Are you eating your food? And is your digestive system working? Then you're going to be healthy. And so the simple act of taking God's word and meditating on it and chewing on it and saying, Lord, give me the effect of this activeness and livingness of the word of God in me today by what I read.

And he will. It may be in ways that you don't even realize. And so let's get out of this expectation that I need to understand what I read in order for it to actually have an effect on me.

That's good, but that might be sixth grade and maybe I'm just in the first grade and I just read it and say, Lord, I didn't get all of that, but I believe you'll make it real. And I believe it will be a word of life that comes within me. But then he goes on to say that it's sharp to divide the soul and the spirit.

And this is how you know the word of God is really sharp. It's not just that we understand doctrine. The sharpness of the word of God is manifest when I start to discern between what's spiritual and what's soulish.

And I believe I am convinced more than ever before, dear brothers and sisters, that this is going to be the greatest need in the days to come. I find that Christendom is more and more taken up with what's soulish. Soulsh movements of the Holy Spirit, soulsh music, soulsh preaching, soulsh Christian work, soulsh, soulsh, soulsh, soulsh.

It feeds the soul. It's emotion. It's fervent meetings where they're praying loudly and they're singing loudly and all that.

And you know me, I like to pray loudly. I love to sing. But I know what the spirit really is and what it means to be led by the spirit.

And I see that more and more, these types of charismatic movements and churches are sprouting up that look very much like the spirit. And that's why we need the sharpness of the word of God, because without the sharpness of the word of God, the spirit and the soul are going to look like the same. They're going to look the same.

And then the word of God comes and divides and says, hold on, let me get like a surgeon's scalpel. Let me divide and peel off this layer and show you what soul and what spirit. And without knowing God's word, without allowing God's word to be sharp in my life, when I hear a word of correction from God or through a godly brother, I receive it now more willingly because I see that this is the word of God acting in my life.

And I want, oh, I want to be able to see. I want to discern what's truly spiritual from everything else. I think we can, most of us can discern spiritual from karma, fleshly.

If something's sinful, I think you and I won't fall for it. But it's the soulsh, that which looks very much like the spiritual, that's where I need the word of God to come in and sharpen. You know, it's also why we're careful about the kind of songs we sing at RLCF.

I, you know, I find, I occasionally listen to some songs here and there, or if I have the radio, the Christian stations on, I pay attention to the kind of music that's prominent in the world today. I'm not trying to make this a message against it. I'm not here to judge anyone.

But I find so much of that is really two or three lines that are repeated over and over and over again. And really, the emphasis is on the instruments, it's the music, the drums and the guitar and the finesse of the keyboard and all these little things. And I really believe, dear brothers and sisters, we must be alert to the danger of even Christian music.

Because, you know, I was reading an article recently about how, you know, when you want something to stick in your memory, a very useful tool is a song. That's why we teach our children A, B, C, D, E, F, G. It sticks in their mind. Much, much easier.

Now, that ought to be a warning for us about the kind of music we listen to. Because the moment there's music attached to it, it's going to stick into your mind, especially into your subliminal mind, the subconscious area where you're not as much on guard. And all of a sudden, that spirit, maybe they're not, you know, taking the name of some false God, but it could be the soul.

It could be soulish music that's now penetrating into your subconscious and is training you to think in a soulish way. And I believe that we have a generation of soulish Christians today that is largely as a result of soulish music over the last 50 or 60 years. And so we don't want something temporary, like a mood.

You know, I don't want, we don't want our singing times to be, to set a mood, to get people into a certain mood so that they feel that God is near. Oh, that has nothing to do with the nearness of God. But our music must, we must recognize that through the music where it's not the mood, but the memory.

Something's going to happen in the memory of the people listening to these songs. It's going to penetrate into their memory. And the children are going to be singing along those songs.

I'm impressed how I hear, you know, sometimes when I teach a new song that I know even my kids have not heard, that week they're singing that song, it's stuck in their head. But, you know, it's a lot easier. In fact, I wish we could turn our memory verses into songs.

Sometimes those are a good way to learn memory verses too, but you recognize that the moment you attach music to words, all of a sudden it gives it a power beyond what it has just in words and recognize that with music. That's why we're so vigilant. I'm more and more, you know, I'm not, maybe I am old school, I don't know, but it has nothing to do with old school and new school.

It has to do with recognizing that these olden days writers knew God and you look at their hymns and you read them and you could just, you could spend an hour meditating on those hymns and get such life out of it that will build you up instead of the sort of fluff that's passing in the name of Christian music today. The songs may move us, you know, songs should be that which moves us for a moment. Oh, I'm so moved by the praise time.

I'm wary of that as somebody who helps lead the singing at RLCF. I don't want people to be moved through that time of singing, but I recognize that even that praise must be prophetic. It must be equipping people to be faithful to God.

Do you believe that music can be a form of equipment? Like put on your sword, put on your shield, put on your breastplate, put on your helmet. And I love songs that challenge us to do that. I love songs of praise too.

Yes, praise is the shout with which we go out to battle, but let's not lose sight of those old hymns that have such depth of meaning in their words. And I'm not saying that we have to sing them in a dull and weary way. Let's sing them with life.

Let's sing them with passion. And that's why, as you know, I often read the verses of a hymn before we actually sing it. We must know what we're singing because we recognize that these words have power.

So I'll end there. You know, in another passage, in another parable, Jesus told a parable of a man who woke up one morning and his servant came and said, hey, there's tares, there's weeds growing up, growing here along with the wheat. Matthew 13, I think verse 25 or so.

And the words of the master, let's look at that and then we can close. Matthew 13, verse 24, Jesus presented another parable to them saying, Matthew 13, 24, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. He went and listened to a good message.

He attended, he was a part of a church where they preached the truth. But that's not enough. While his men were sleeping, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went away.

And it's while you're sleeping, while you're sleeping, that the devil will come while you're just sort of taking it easy. And it could be on a Sunday afternoon where you just maybe we had a wonderful meeting of time of fellowship and eating together. Then you went home and flipped on the TV and all of a sudden your guard is coming down.

This is while you're sleeping. You've got a belly full of food and you're a little bit lethargic. While you're sleeping, the enemy will come in and undo all the good that God was able to do in your life that day earlier in the day.

Or then Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, be on guard, your brothers and sisters. Let's never be caught sleeping because it's while I'm sleeping that the enemy will come and sow tares. I pray that we will take God's word to heart.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/l9CHtwZ56kM.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/santosh-poonen/spiritual-backsliding-comes-through-neglect/>

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