

Under the Juniper Tree

by Vance Havner

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a closer walk with God, letting go of worldly concerns, and finding joy in God's presence, even in the midst of trouble.

Duration: 38:04

Scripture: Genesis 15:1, Psalm 84:10, Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Philippians 3:8, Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 12:6

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

The sermon transcript discusses the idea that God does not reveal all the details of what is to come in order to prevent us from being distracted or overwhelmed. The speaker uses the analogy of a child being tempted by a chocolate cake while eating spinach to illustrate this point. The transcript also touches on the importance of letting go of past troubles and focusing on the present. The speaker shares their personal experience with sleeplessness and how it taught them not to take things for granted. Additionally, the transcript mentions the concept of experiencing a foretaste of heaven in the present through faith in God.

Transcript

Dr. Habener knows that he's loved here. He has many friends, not only in this auditorium, but listening. And as you know, these days he's passed through this loss of losing his wife, and he asked if he could just talk to us today.

We're just thrilled he's here. Come and share with us. Now, Dr., you're going to get me in trouble here.

Thank you for that precious song. Amen. When I get under the juniper tree once in a while with old Elijah, when he said all the good folks are gone but me and I'm not feeling so well myself, I think about Moody Institute and then I cheer up.

You've done me a world of good already here. I tell you, I don't know of any place in this country where you can go and get your batteries recharged just by the sight of so many fine young people training for the work of the Lord and so many fine men and women to lead them. I thank God for these 50 years of memories and association with this place.

I'd like to thank that you pray for me, and I want to take this opportunity just to thank you and bless your heart from everywhere who sent me all those cards and letters in these weeks past. I couldn't possibly answer them. You know that.

I never had the secretary in my life who didn't know how to dictate a letter. When I started, I couldn't think of anything to say, writing them all myself. But from the bottom of my heart, I deeply thank you for the way you've shared so many dear people who wrote in and said, I've been through that valley, I lost a husband, I lost a wife.

I know you've been there, and you don't know that you have been there. I always tried to comfort people through these years past. It had such an experience that I just didn't know, couldn't help it.

Of course, you can't either if you haven't been that road, but you have to be there to appreciate it. And yet so many more wrote me about how they were praying for me, and it has meant so much to me. In Hebrews 11.6, we are told that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

In Genesis 15.1, he said to Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. At the beginning of last year, 1973, I was considerably exercised in my heart about a closer walk with the Lord. I wanted the last years to be the best, and in 60 years of preaching, and 34 of them on the road, I'd had very little trouble, no accidents, very little sickness, and I marveled at it.

Then I remembered the verse, whom the Lord loveth and chasteneth, and that without chastening we are bastards and not sons. I wondered why so little of this evidence of sonship had come my way, because I'd had it pretty good through those years. I wanted God to bring me to himself alone so that I could say, and not just sing, once earthly joy I craved sought peace and rest, now be alone I seek, give what is best.

You'd better mean it when you ask God to glorify himself in you at any cost. You'd better think before you pray that prayer, because he'll take you up on it, and you don't know what the price will be. You remember that on one occasion my Lord said, Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Many said, Father, glorify thy name.

If you ever get to the place, and you will if you haven't already, where your soul is troubled and you don't know what to say, here's what to say. Father, glorify thy name. And the way it was with me, it meant five months by a hospital bed of a dying wife, wasting away with a disease I had never heard of.

Her loveliness distorted and disfigured, and even personality changes. In the last two days, with her completely unconscious and only at that beat of the monitor registering her heart, I held onto her hand by the side of the bed and said, Lord, help me to remember her as she used to look and as she will look, thank God. I don't understand it.

There are a lot of things that I don't have any clever answers for, and when I meet some brother who has smug and forthright quick answers for some of these problems, I say, Brother, bless your heart. You're not for me. You know too much.

I don't understand some things that I can't go into this morning, but I accept it, and I agree with old Spurgeon when he said, When you cannot trace God's hand, we can always trust God's heart. I haven't lost her, of course, because I know where she is. You haven't lost anything, and you know where it is.

But I've come through the darkest days of my seventy-two years shipwrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence. I said that at Ben Lippin's conference, and Billy Graham, who was just a few miles away in his home, heard it over there and sent a note next morning and said, I heard that, shipwrecked on God, stranded on omnipotence. That's what I ought to be when God calls on me.

I've learned, for one thing, the difference between God the rewarder and God the reward. Somebody said the difference between Patrick Henry and the average American today is that Patrick Henry said, Give me liberty, give me death, and the average American today just says, Give me. We make a Santa Claus out of the Lord sometimes.

We want the gifts, we're not the giver. We want the blessing more than we want the blesser. We need to get over the guineas.

In Christian life, we ought to follow the pattern of the Lord's prayer. You know how it begins. His name, his kingdom, his will remain with us this day, our daily bread.

Think first of the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Our Lord emphasized that if we are to follow him, we must hate father and mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, and our own life. I know how we explain that.

We've all done it. We say it's relative that we ought to love the Lord so much that all these other affections are his hatred and comparison. Well, yes, but Dr. A. T. Robertson, the great Greek scholar, said it is a language of exaggerated contrast, but don't water it down until the point is gone.

Our Lord is making a terrific demand here, and there isn't much of a way to shelve it. We ought to mean it when we sing Jesus is all the world to me. That's a very easy song to sing and a hard song to live up to.

We're usually unconscious when we sing, anyhow. I've noticed that all over this country through these years. I think if we were perfectly honest, some of us would choke up on the first verse and never make it through the chorus.

God's purposes are not achieved, beloved, until our delight is in him. Dr. Torrey gave us a statement about the purpose of prayer, the best one I ever read. The chief purpose of prayer is that God may be glorified in answer.

The chief purpose of prayer is not to get what you want, but that God may be glorified whatever you get. Sometimes our dear ones are taken and sorrow comes and health fails to drive us to God himself. It was in the year that King Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the Lord.

But there's another little word that I left out. The death of Uzziah was a national calamity. He'd been a good king.

Although he went out under a cloud, he had done a lot of fine things for the country. Then he went out in darkness and tragedy. I'm sure a lot of people must have said, well, dear me, if Uzziah can go out like that, what will I ever do? Isaiah, that patrician prophet, was stunned by it.

But the difference between the rest of the folks and Isaiah was that while they were all bowled over by the tragedy, it was a terrific minus, but Isaiah had a plus. I saw also the Lord. Now, you're going to have a lot of minuses, but may God help you to find a plus there somewhere and see the Lord.

Sometimes it's a little hard to tell when trouble hits you real hard, whether it's divine chastisement or a devilish attack. It can be both. It was with Job.

God was trying out Job, and the devil was working on him, too. It was true with Paul. God was teaching Paul that his grace is sufficient, but that thorn in the flesh was a messenger of Satan.

You remember what my Lord said in Luke 22, 31-32, to Peter, Satan has desired to have you, but I, and look at the contrast, thank God for it, the devil wants you to since you're sweet, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. Double action there. When God calls us to seek him alone, that doesn't mean that we're not to have any other concerns, whatever.

Paul cleared that up. This I say, brethren, the time is short, it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none, and they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not, and they that use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away. He begins that statement and closes it with a time element, the time is short, the fashion of this world is passing away.

He doesn't say you're not to have wives, but be as though you had none. He doesn't say you're not to weep, but as though you wept not. You are to rejoice, but as though you rejoiced not.

You are to buy, but as though you possessed not. You are to use this world, but as not using it to the full. We must learn to live as though, and if you can learn to live as though in the light of this passage, it will help you over some rough spots.

Then you remember Paul said in that paradox of 2 Corinthians 6.10, having nothing, possessing all things. You just can't do anything with a man like that. The devil says, I'll give you this and I'll give you that, and the Christian says, you can't, I've got everything.

That makes the devil mad, and he says, I'll take this away and I'll take that away, and the Christian says, you can't, I haven't got anything. What are you going to do with a man like that? You can't head him off if you take off his head. What are you going to do with a man like that? My Lord was not trying to make a beggar out of the rich young ruler, he wasn't trying to make a pauper out of him.

He was simply trying to get him to give up everything so that he might have everything. I heard of a dear old lady who was quite feeble, and they said to her, well, the doctor says he's done all he can, you'll have to trust the Lord. She said, my soul has it come to that.

Now, a lot of people come to that in that sort of fashion. Well, beloved, it does come to that, it always comes to that. Why don't you start with that? Might as well.

It comes to that anyhow. When God is our portion, we have nothing, we have everything. And Job got through to more than he ever had.

He had the divine confrontation, and I don't know of any book in all the world that ends with a happier ending than the book of Job. It doesn't mean that when you shut up to God that you sit in lonely isolation and sanctified solitude. It doesn't mean that at all.

Peter said, Lord, we've left all and have followed thee. Peter never did quite get it right a lot of times, and no wonder the Bible says, and Peter said not knowing what he said. Somebody said he was the most American of all the disciples.

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or land for my sake, and the gospel that he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and land with persecution, and in the world to come, eternal life. I think that's a pretty good deal, myself, when you get

all that back. Oh, some folks say that's for the kingdom.

I don't care where you put it, eschatologically. It's there for you, friends. The principle holds, and you come out a winner.

You can't lose from winning. I want to say this morning that I have learned, beloved, in darkness what I never would have learned today. I introduced Dr. Paul Reese the other day to a meeting in North Carolina, and that matchless preacher quoted a poem.

He didn't know where he got it, and I said, I must have that, just two little verses of it. Many a rapturous minstrel among the sons of light will say of his sweetest music, I learned it in the night, and many a lowly anthem that fills the father's throne sobbed at its first rehearsal in the shroud of a darkened room. I don't know who wrote that.

The English of it is matchless, but the meaning of it is far beyond all that. There's a silly little song on TV I heard, it's kind of a hillbilly thing, if tears were pennies and heartaches were gold, I'd have all the money my pockets could hold. Well, I feel kind of like that in heaven the last month, and thank the Lord it didn't lose a sense of humor.

You Christians don't ever lose that as you go through darkness. God gave it to you. It has its proper place.

God is able to transmute the carnage of sorrow into the currency of joy. He changes trouble into treasure and gives beauty for ashes and the oil of joy for morning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. I've learned how to weep for them that weep.

Somebody sent to me that tape of Dr. Culbertson's last message, and I was going through Deepwater's End. I sat there and just bawled. I don't apologize for it.

There's a time I didn't just weep, I bawled as I listened to this good man say in the course of it, I want to criticize old David for saying, oh, that I had wings as a dove so that I might fly away and be at rest, because Dr. Culbertson was going through the valley and with terminal illness facing the road. Oh, I sat there and wept, because I felt a kingship. I've wept more in the past six months than I have in 72 years, but I thank God for a prospect.

My Bible tells me that God is not going to appoint angels to dry our eyes. He is going to give that his personal attention. It says, God shall wipe all tears from our eyes.

I think it would be right and nice to have an angel to do it, but God is going to take care of it. Oh, my friends, don't take your blessing for granted. There's an old saying, you never miss the water till the well goes dry.

I never took my beloved for granted. I have no regrets about that. But let me say this morning to you, husbands and wives, don't take your dear one for granted and assume that because you told her a long time ago that you loved her that she still remembers it.

Don't take her for granted. Tell her, tell him, because if you fail at it, or even if you do tell her, the day will still come, because rarely ever do both go at the same time. The day will come when you give everything you can to have one day just to hear you say, tell her! Of course, I'd do it a little cautiously, they're not used to it, and I'd have a heart attack.

I'll never forget it, the first Founders Week I ever attended. I heard the preacher tell a story that even made Dr. James. The crowd said the preacher's right, and tell Mr. Thomas, he prepared a masterpiece.

He had words that had never had been on land or sea. When he walked into the kitchen, she was busy with the housework, and he took off on this flight of fancy. Then he paused to take his breath.

She looked at him and said, well, this caps the climax. I broke one of my best plates this morning. I've had a splitting headache all day, and now you've come home drunk.

So watch it, watch it, but do it. Take a chance, tell her. I've learned in a new way, beloved, I've learned in a new way that God is a very pleasant help in trouble.

When I went into the first of this, I wondered whether I would be able to rest or not. I've always been a poor sleeper. I remember two years of my life when I was smitten with insomnia, and I've always pitied any poor mortal who has problems along that line.

I was preaching through the state of Iowa, went to bed one night, crouched in Iowa, didn't sleep a wink. Next night, didn't sleep a wink, and for two years I wrestled with that problem. One of those things you take for granted, you just go to bed and go to sleep, but when the time comes that you speak for it as men for hidden treasures, you learn not to take things for granted.

And I began to wonder, I said, oh dear me, I hope this doesn't come back on me in all of this. And the doctor gave me a bottle of red medicine and a bottle of pills, and he said, these are my, I'll take them, they have their place, don't misunderstand me. And I took a few, but one night I said, Lord, you give your beloved sleep, it says, and I'd rather depend on you.

And I want to say that from that night to this, I've been able to roll my burden. That I cannot account for any other way, except to say the Lord took it over. And I'm like that bishop who had trouble and got up at two in the morning, hadn't slept yet, and got his Bible out and he said, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

And he said, Lord, if you're sitting up, no use me sitting up, good night. I've learned another thing, beloved, that weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning. God doesn't want us to sit up with the dead.

They're gone, they're in his care. Moses, my servant, is dead. God said to Joshua, now what? Weep for months and months over Moses.

No, arise, learn whatever lesson God wants to teach you in your trouble, and then learn furthermore to close the door behind you. Dr. Sweden talked to you about that this morning, and we are on the same wavelength about it. Mr. Lloyd, George England's prime minister, was out playing cricket one day, and he and his friends went into a pasture and were supposed to close the gate behind them and didn't.

And they went a little distance, and Mr. Lloyd Georgian thought and came back and said, no, there's no cattle in here, why are you closing? He said, I've always learned to close all gates. I know what he meant. In my first little country pasture there was a dear man there whose wife had committed suicide.

It nearly killed him. I came to the field after he had gotten himself fairly well in hand. We sat one evening discussing trouble in general.

On top of the loss of her, his only child was drowned some months later. It looked like he had more than his portion. Then we got on the subject of sleeplessness, and he said, well, I've learned one thing.

When time comes to go to bed, I go in my room and I close the door. Now, he didn't mean the door to the room. He said, I know what he meant.

He closed the door on all that heartache and all that tragedy and all that suffering, forgetting the things that are behind it. You must learn to do that, dear heart, if you're listening to me and you have trouble. Some things are to be met one way and some another.

Some things we fly above, some things you have to fight through, and some things you circumvent. Some things waste a lot of time. Fighting battles don't be fought.

Gixie Smith, when he started out to preach, didn't have much education, you know, and he said these big words in the Bible bothered me. He said the way I handled it was, when I saw a big word coming, I'd read right up to it and talk a while, and then I'd start again on the other side of that big word. Well, that wasn't due for Bible study, but I recommend it in another connection, you understand.

Don't lay yourself out on issues that don't matter anyhow. Some fights are not worth it. A bulldog can lick a stunk anytime, but it's just not worth it.

Saying, if I had only, if only I had thought of this before my loved one went, if only I had done this, if only, if only, if only. Turn your back on that. You can drive yourself crazy in the world of if I had only.

I'm still walking through the valley, but thank God I'm walking through this. One little word bothered me so much, that little word gone. When Sarah went to heaven, I was almost numbed by it.

Gone the anticipation of returning home and being greeted at the airport. I'm not going home tomorrow, I'm going back. Gone those airmail letters, and I know it's no use.

Gone the clasp of that I hoped about all over America. Gone that looking for it. Smiling at those old jokes, they were smiling.

It takes a lot of religion to do. But one of these days, God's going to reshuffle the whole picture, beloved, and things that are present will be gone, and things that are gone are coming back. William Jennings Bryan said, Christ has made of death between the companionship of yesterday and the reunion of tomorrow.

Think of all that'll be gone one of these days. Sin, what happened to it? Gone. Sorrow, gone.

Death, gone. Pain, gone. Darkness, gone.

Whatever happened to the devil? Gone. As those we've loved and lost a while, if they're in the Lord, because Christians never meet for the last time. Death can hide but not divide, thou art but on Christ's other side.

Thou art with Christ. So I say to myself, well, what business do you have, you old septuagenarian, moaning around when you're as close to heaven as you are? Boot camp's about over. My internship's about ending, and I read that his servants are serving there.

I want to work when I get to heaven. I've always worked down here. I don't want to sit on a cloud strumming a harp through all these presents.

I want to work when I don't have to wait until I get to heaven to begin the enjoyment of what I have in Jesus. I had been living last summer, and they did my soul so much good in that trying time. Dear Robertson McQuilkin talked about the 23rd Psalm every morning at breakfast for devotion.

He said to us, Don't forget that you're the Lord's lamb, and don't become a billy goat. The Lord is my shepherd. And I've been butting around that very morning on top of a mountain up there saying, Lord, what's going to happen to me? Who's going to pay all these bills? Who's going to look after me when I get sick? Lord, what am I going to do? Yes, you're my shepherd, but.

So I told him, I said, You didn't know you had a prize-winning old goat sitting right beside you when you were talking at breakfast this morning. Some of you are engaged in that unworthy activity. I heard of a fellow walking near a precipice at night.

His foot slipped and he thought he was going over, and he grabbed the book and held on for dear life until his grip gave way, and he fell just about 15 inches to the ground below. It wasn't the precipice. And I meet so many cliffhangers all over the country, hanging on for dear life, and just turn loose for once.

Maybe you can discover the everlasting arm underneath. We're completing him. That's fulfillment.

We're hearing a lot about fulfillment today. Well, this is it. Don't underestimate your adversary.

Of course, we're up against the real enemy today. And we wrestle. Paul used the right word.

Wrestling is the most strenuous of all the sports. Every muscle, every nerve is tense, and your shoulders are only a few inches from the mat. We're wrestling against the powers of darkness.

Don't underestimate. Teddy Roosevelt had a little old dog that was always getting into a fight and always getting licked. Somebody said, Not much of a fighter, is you? Oh, yes, good fighter, he said.

Just a poor judge of dogs, he said. You ought to be a good judge of your adversary, but don't spend so much time on the adversary. I'm getting uneasy about all these books on the devil today.

I hope somebody comes out with one on Jesus Christ before long. I'm getting real hungry. I'm being demonized to death over the country.

Oh, rejoice in what you have in Jesus Christ, and when before the throne I stand, in him complete, and I don't have to wait till then to enjoy what I have in. When I was a boy out in the country, the book salesman used to come by, and they'd leave a prospectus. It was several pages and some of the pictures out of the book all bound together nicely.

A pretty book, but a most frustrating thing, because you'd read page eight and the next page would be page 34, and you just didn't get anywhere much with that sort of thing. And I have been reminded many times since that it sort of pitted your appetite for the real book, you know, the crumbs makes you want to cave. And our Lord has given us just enough down here, all we could understand, I think, to hurt our appetite for what he has for us over there.

And as the book says, we taste the powers of the age to come. Watchman Me has a wonderful chapter on that, and I've doted on that little statement for years and years, tasting the powers of the age to come. Have you done it? And you have at least a taste, and you ought to be more than a sipper and a taster of the goodness of God.

As we were in Texas in meetings, and the dear pastor who was with me on the program was preaching on Job, and I was preaching about four tastes of glory. One night we started to the room together in his car, and all of a sudden he started singing that verse, Father marching to Zion, that I had sung unconsciously and didn't realize what it said, the hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets. Before we reach the heavenly fields we'll walk the golden streets.

You don't have to wait till you get to heaven, you can taste some of it now. That's the earnest of our inheritance, that's what family caused him in. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.

You don't have to stand on Jordan's stormy banks and catch the wishful eye that came and stay in happy land where your possessions lie. I haven't got any business doing that any more. Now get over there, Reverend, take the country, it's over there for you.

I can enter into that rest now. It's not complete yet, but first installment, and if the sample pages in the prospectus are so wonderful, what will the complete volume be? Oh, if we could see what God has prepared for them that love him, and that does include the future, of course, much more. It would take the lines out of our faces, and the tears out of our eyes, and the fear out of our hearts, fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

This old world has never been less attractive to me than it is this morning, and the next has never been more inviting. There are a lot of questions the Bible doesn't answer about the hereafter. There are a lot of details I'm powerfully interested in, and so are you if you have gone through this matter.

We don't learn exactly whether children grow up. We don't understand exactly just how much they know about what's going on here, and all those things. But I think one reason perhaps is well illustrated by that fine minister who said it's like setting a boy down to a bowl of spinach with a chocolate cake right there on the end of the table.

He said he's going to have a rough time with spinach with his eyes on that chocolate cake. And if the Lord had explained to us what hours to come, I think we'd have a rough time with our spinach down there. So I think we'd better make out.

He's got it ready for us, and we'll trust him. Paul went to the third heaven, and he couldn't tell much about it after he got back, so we'll stay down here, and we'll know more when we get there. Oh, if we could see beyond the day as God can see, if all the clouds should roll away in the shadows flee, for present grace we would not pray, each sorrow we would soon forget, for many joys are waiting there for you and me.

I preached back in December in the First Baptist Church of Minneapolis, and dear Bev Shea gave a concert that afternoon, and the place was packed. And Bev knew of my sorrow, came in the side door, and saw me out here in the cloud, and blessed his heart, came way over, and I stood up close to greet him, and he put his arm around me and gave me a great big hug before all those people. And then he sang this, and I praised him.

Now I want to ask you in closing, and you've listened so well, are you dead certain this morning that God is your reward, not just your rewarder? I'm glad he is our rewarder, but blessed is the person who gets through to that place where God is no longer just a rewarder, but is all you need and all you want. Jesus is not only all I need, he's all that I want. And can you sing from your heart, once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord.

A businessman who had been wrestling with people who wanted this and wanted that all day was very tired, and almost time to go home as the little boy slipped in, crawled up on his daggered knee. His father said jokingly, well, what do you want now? And he said, I just wanted to be with you. His father said, well, thank the Lord for one person today who just wants to be with me.

Don't you think God would appreciate it if once in a while you would pray and not ask for anything? Just tell him all I want is you, now thee alone I see. Try it out sometime, you'll get over the gimmick of doing that. And this song that I praise here, More Love to Thee, O Christ, is a prayer, don't forget it.

Look at it, it's number 370 and it's number 380. It's a prayer. I'm glad that your book here has a verse that I didn't find in mine down south.

Verse 3, Are you right sure that you can definitely pray this prayer? Let solace do its work, sing grief and pain, sweet to thy messengers, sweet to every friend when they can sing with me, more love, O Christ, to thee. Are you sure you dare sing that this morning? I'm going to let you be the judge. We're going to sing, Brother Steve, you'll lead us in three verses and we're going to disarrange them, verse 1, verse 3, and then the end with verse 2. Because I want you to get good and ready for verse 2, that really sizes it all up.

Once earthly joy I crave, so peace and rest. Now thee alone I seek, give what is best. And between now and time to sing that, if you've not done it already, you could right there, right now, say, Lord, forgive me for the guineas.

What I want is thyself, and with thyself I have everything. Can you say, dear student here, dear older person, dear businessman, dear preacher, can you say honestly this morning, at any cost, come what may, dear Lord, bring me to that blessed place where I'm shipwrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence, where having nothing I have everything, whatever it takes, whatever it takes, that's what I want. You will be careful as you sing this, I'm sure, because you're a thoughtful people.

And don't sing that second verse which will be the last. You don't mean it, because it really isn't right to sing things you don't mean. But mean it.

Say, Lord, I can't feel like I ought to feel, but with my will right now, I place my will in this verse, I will keep thee alone, just give me whatever's best. Shall we sing prayer? One, three, two.

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