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Disappointment with God



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In his address on "Disappointment with God," Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of love and commitment in seeking and knowing God. He notes that unrealistic expectations, a self-centered approach to the gospel, and a lack of understanding of God's ways can lead to disappointment. However, he offers encouragement for individuals facing disappointment, reminding them that their faith can overcome doubts and lead to a deeper sense of trust in God's plan. Ultimately, Gregg argues that pursuing a relationship with God out of a deep passion and love can prevent disappointment and strengthen one's faith.

Transcript

I would like for you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 11. Matthew chapter 11 and verses 1 through 6. Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. And when John, that is John the Baptist, had heard in prison about the works of Christ, He sent two of His disciples and said to Him, Are you the coming one? Or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said to them, Go and tell John the things which you hear and see, the blind see and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

And blessed is He who is not offended because of me. The word offended can be translated as stumbled. Blessed is He who is not stumbled by me or because of me.

Today I'd like to talk to you on the subject of disappointment with God. Now there's a book by that name, I haven't read it. Some of you might have because it's by a best-selling author.

I believe Philip Yancey wrote a book called Disappointment with God, but I've never read any of his books. So I don't know what he said. I thought the title was good.

I get a lot of ideas for titles of sermons from titles of books I never read. But that's a good one. Disappointment with God.

And the reason for this sermon or talk, the thing that I guess brought it to my mind, it grew out of a conversation that I had with somebody a couple of days ago. And in answering that person, I realized that some of the things that we were discussing would be helpful to a larger audience, to the body of Christ in general, really, I think. And the conversation occurred because this person knew of a young woman who had become disillusioned with Christianity.

She felt that she had tried everything, really. That Christians are supposed to do and God had never showed up. That she had jumped through the hoops.

She believed the right things. She went to church. She associated with other Christians.

She was fairly convinced that God was real in the lives of other Christians. She was not doubtful about that. But she said that God never really came through for her.

God never showed up for her. And therefore, she decided she's not a Christian anymore. And I had a talk about that.

I wish I could have talked to the young woman herself, but she was not there. I was talking to somebody who was concerned about her and asked what might be said to somebody like that by way of counseling them or whatever, encouraging them. And so, I had quite a conversation with this young man.

And I realized that a lot of the things that we talked about would be good for Christians in general to be aware of. Because people do get disappointed with God. And when I talk about being disappointed with God, I mean something very specific.

Disappointment about anything is, in a sense, disappointment with God. Because God is sovereign. And because God is the one who is behind the circumstances of our lives.

If we're discontented about our job, or our standard of living, or the person we married, or the kind of kids we got, or the kind of family background we had, or the weather, or our golf handicap, or whatever. I mean, if we're disappointed about anything, there's a sense in which we're disappointed with God. We might not verbalize it as such, but God is the one who has really ordered things.

This is the day the Lord has made. If you don't like this day, you've got to complain with Him. He's the one who made it.

He's the one who put in all the characteristics of this day. He's the one who brought things to the point they're at right now. And so, all disappointment with anything is really, at least indirectly, a disappointment with God.

But I'm not talking about disappointment in general today. I'm interested in talking about being disappointed with God's... What shall I say? With our relationship with God. And

putting the onus on God Himself.

Basically, God, You disappointed me. I tried everything they said. They said, You come forward.

I came forward. They said, You say this prayer. Well, I said the prayer.

They say you're supposed to read the Bible every day and pray and witness and keep in fellowship. Well, I did that most of the time. I did that a lot.

But a lot of people said that I would have an experience with God. That I would have peace. That I'd have joy.

That I'd love people. That I would sense God's presence. That my problems would be solved by God.

Some people even go so far as to say that I would be healed and never experience sickness. A lot of promises have been made on God's behalf. I wish people would let Him make His own promises sometimes.

But the fact is, there are people who have tried what they were told to try. They've jumped through the hoops. And they did not experience what they anticipated.

And they have become disappointed. Some of these people tried for a long time. This young woman of which I was speaking thought she'd tried long enough.

Actually, she'd been in the church since her childhood. She was in a Christian family. And she was now well into her teens.

And this situation then seemed like she had tried long enough to contact God. Sort of like the space scientists are out there trying to contact intelligence from other planets. They haven't contacted any yet.

I guess it's just time to give up and devote our energies elsewhere. And in the conversation I was having, the young man asked me, What would you say to somebody like that? And there are several things that I would say to somebody like that. And I dare say that I'm not just speaking to that one case or even to just those people who through disillusionment with God have departed from the faith or made that decision.

But to anybody who feels that God has disappointed them. We read about John the Baptist in prison. Now, John had once been rather excited about Jesus.

He had high hopes for Jesus. John at one time was the sensation in southern Judea. Everyone in Jerusalem, everyone in Judea went out to hear him.

His name was a household word. He baptized apparently thousands of people. And when

Jesus showed up, John just threw everything in with Jesus.

He just said, That's the Lamb of God. I must decrease. He must increase.

And he sent his disciples that direction. They didn't all go there. Some of them stayed with John for some reason.

But some of John's disciples did follow Christ and became even some of the twelve apostles were originally disciples of John the Baptist. But John was a great supporter, a great promoter of Jesus. Because he knew that Jesus was the Messiah.

And he had certain expectations about the Messiah. Now, remember, John was a prophet. And because John was a prophet, we think, Well, how could a person who's had prophetic revelations from God ever have any doubts or disappointments? How could that ever happen? And yet, read the Old Testament prophets.

Elijah called fire out of heaven on Mount Carmel. And the next day he was depressed and said, You know, God, I guess it's all over for me. I might as well just die.

Jeremiah had his times of great disappointment with God too. The New Testament says that many times the prophets of the Old Testament, Peter says this in 1 Peter 1 verses 10-12, that the Old Testament prophets didn't really understand everything they were talking about. And they inquired diligently to obtain more insight.

But God told them, It's not for you to know. It's for a later generation, namely ours, to know. And Peter says, So they didn't know.

They spoke by revelation. They spoke what God showed them. But He didn't show them everything.

And I believe John the Baptist was no exception. God showed John the Baptist, That's the Lamb of God. That's the Messiah.

But I don't think John understood exactly what the Messiah was supposed to do more than most of the Jews did or more than most of the Old Testament prophets did. They thought that the Messiah would drive out the oppressors of Israel. That He would bring in an age of peace and security and independence for the nation of Israel.

And at the time that John came and Jesus came, the nation of Israel was not independent. They were under oppression of the Romans. And so, of course, it would be the Messiah's duty, it was thought, to come and get the Romans out of there.

Maybe even conquer Rome and bring them under tribute. At least to give Israel a place of independence and freedom and ascendancy in geopolitics. And that is what I think most of the Old Testament prophets figured the Messiah would do because God didn't show them otherwise.

Paul said in four places in his epistles that the mystery of what Christ came to do was not understood in generations past. Eye had not seen it, ear had not heard it, nor had it entered into the heart of man, but God has revealed it to us, Paul says, the apostles, through His Spirit. Elsewhere, Paul says, that was 1 Corinthians 2, but in Ephesians 3 and in Colossians, and also in Romans 16, Paul says all these, he says the same thing in all those places.

He says, you know, the gospel I'm preaching you is the mystery which was hid from generations past, but was made known in these last days to the holy apostles and prophets through the Spirit. That means that even the anointed and inspired prophets didn't really understand what they were saying. They didn't have to.

They didn't live to see the thing materialize. But when the thing did materialize, God sent His apostles, revealed it to them, and they announced this is what the prophets were speaking about. John was one of those prophets.

He was not one of those apostles. So, John predicted and had his expectations, but he didn't have the revelation of how it was supposed to happen. And so, I'm sure that John probably expected the Messiah to do that political thing that the Messiah was, people thought he was going to do.

We understand, I hope, because of what the apostles later taught and what Jesus taught, that the Jewish expectation was not entirely enlightened. They did not understand the spiritual nature of salvation. They thought He was going to save His people from the Romans.

But the angel said to Joseph, His name should be called Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. It was the oppression of sin that was the main enemy that God was going to save them from through the Messiah, not the Romans. And there was a spiritual aspect.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus. Nicodemus has the same hopes all the Jews do. And before he can get two sentences out, Jesus takes the conversation in a totally different direction.

The guy says, he just kind of starts with some opening formalities to open the conversation. He says, well, Jesus, we know you're from God because no one could do all the things that you're doing unless you're from God. And Jesus says, well, now that you've spoken, let me take the conversation the way I want to go.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, unless you be born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. Well, Nicodemus hadn't even mentioned the kingdom of God. He had never indicated that was his interest.

But Jesus knew all Jews were interested in the kingdom of God. When is the Messiah

going to bring in the kingdom? When is he going to drive out the enemies and establish an independent commonwealth of Israel under the Messiah? And Jesus decided to just cut to the chase and anticipate the question in advance and said, listen, you're not going to see it unless you're born of the Spirit. This is a spiritual thing.

You can't see it otherwise. And so, there was a spiritual thing that many of the Jews, including the prophets, I think, did not fully understand. John the Baptist being one of them.

And so, when Herod, a Roman official, a Roman king in Galilee, put John the Baptist in prison, John, no doubt, was thinking, well, this is not a development that I thought would happen with the Messiah already on the scene, but maybe that's just to make it look like the hour is always darkest before the dawn, and it'll always make, you know, if he delivers us now, it's just going to look even like a greater victory because the enemy's coming in like a flood. And so, I believe he sat in prison thinking, well, any day now, Jesus is going to drive these guys out, Herod's going to be history, and I'm going to be sprung from this place, and we're going to have the kingdom of Israel under the Messiah. But he waited and waited and waited, and it didn't happen.

Eventually, he sent a message to Jesus, and said, by the way, I wasn't wrong about you, was I? You are the one I said you are, aren't you? Or are we supposed to look for another? Now, a lot of people have different opinions about what John was really getting at when he said that. Some people just can't believe that John had any doubts at all, and so they say, well, it wasn't John who had doubts, it was his disciples. John's disciples had doubts.

And so, not for John to allay John's, you know, questions, but the disciples' questions. They said to John, do you think that Jesus is the Messiah? I don't think so. And John says, well, you go ask him.

Go ask him if he's the one. Tell him I want to know, and see what he tells you. And it was really for his disciples' sake, not John's, that this question was asked.

But, I don't know, I don't think that's the most likely interpretation. I think John really was wondering, what's going on here? You know, and his comment, or should we look for another, might have even been a little bit cynical. They say, oh, John wouldn't be cynical.

Why not? All the prophets were cynical. So were the apostles a lot of times. Read them once in a while.

They had some sarcastic remarks once in a while. But, if John said to Jesus, you know, are you the one we're looking for, or should we be looking for another? You know, it's kind of maybe, you're going a little slow on this enterprise here, and maybe we, maybe someone else will come along if you don't put your hand to the plow and start doing

something here. I personally believe that sitting as he was in a third world jail, John the Baptist was disappointed with the course of events.

And there was somebody on the scene that he had reason to believe could change them. Jesus. But Jesus wasn't making no moves that direction at all.

Jesus wasn't coming through for him. He put his faith in Jesus. He'd done what God said.

He announced Jesus. John had been faithful to everything God said to do, and where is he now? He's rotting in jail. And you know what? It didn't get better for him.

He never got out alive. And it wasn't exactly what he expected. He was surprised, and I suspect disappointed.

And that is why I believe Jesus said in his final comment to the messengers, go tell John what you see. He said, you see the blind, their sight is restored, the deaf are hearing, the lame are leaping, the gospel is being preached to the poor. And this final little tag before he sent them back says, oh, and tell John this.

Blessed is he who is not stumbled by what I'm doing. In other words, trust me. I know what I'm doing here.

It may not be what you think I should be doing. But trust me. Blessed is the man who doesn't stumble because of me.

Because I'm not doing it his way. I'm not following his agenda. Because you know what? God is never obliged to follow anybody's agenda.

And that is one reason people get disappointed with God. They have an agenda, and God doesn't share it. And God doesn't come through for them when they think he should.

Now, disappointment with God, as is the case with disappointment with anything or anyone, is simply the result of unfulfilled or unrealized expectations. When you have no expectations, you cannot be disappointed. But we do have expectations, rightly so.

We have certain expectations of people. We have expectations of, you know, the nature of reality. It would be a disappointment if the sun didn't come up today.

We expected it. And we had good reason to expect it. We have good reason to expect God to keep His promises.

And if we perceive that He did not, and I say it that way because, of course, it is never the case that God has ever failed to keep His promises, but if we have perceived that He did not keep the promise that I thought He made, then there is occasion to be disappointed. And when we are disappointed, it's a short step from that to disillusionment. From disappointment to disillusionment is a short step.

And bitterness is the next. Now, not all disappointment must lead to disillusionment or bitterness. But it can, and it can when there is another aspect to disappointment, and that is a perception of injustice.

When I perceive that what God did is not really what's fair, it's not fair. Somebody else got all the good looks. Somebody else has all the great experiences.

Somebody else has all the talent. Somebody else has all the muscles, all the athletic abilities. Somebody else sings, you know, better than I do.

And it's just not fair. I'm as good a person as they are. How come God gave them all that? Or, in the case of the person we're thinking of, she was concerned that her friends had a satisfying experience with God in their Christian walk, but she did not.

So, that's an injustice. How come I did everything that person did? How come that person's happy in Jesus and I'm bored with the whole thing? I'm bored with religion. It's a sense that God has somehow not delivered on the goods that He owed.

That is perceived as an injustice. And when disappointment is combined with a perception of an injustice, that's when disillusionment and bitterness result. People leave the faith because they become embittered toward God.

But that begins with disappointment with God. Now, I'd like to say that as all disappointment is simply the result of unrealized expectations, any disappointment with God must be the result not of only unrealized expectations, but unrealistic expectations. Because if God didn't do something that you thought He would, I'll guarantee you, He was not obligated to.

If He didn't do something you thought He would, I'll tell you something, He didn't promise that He would. Because God has never broken a promise. Now, you might say, well, that sounds like, you know, Christianese.

That sounds like a typical cliché that Christians always say. Well, Christians ought to say that all the time because it's true. I don't get it from my own experience.

I mean, frankly, God has never broken any promise to me. I can guarantee you that. But that's not what I'm basing my assertion on.

When I say God's never broken a promise to anybody, I'm basing that on His own word. God is not capable of being unfaithful. It is impossible for Him to lie.

He is, you know, all else may fail you, but God, let God be true. And every man a liar. The Bible indicates that there is nothing of unfaithfulness in God at all.

He is incapable of being unfaithful. Therefore, if you thought He was supposed to do something, and He didn't do it or maybe hasn't done it yet, it's only because your

expectations are not realistic. Either you have misunderstood His promises or you're being impatient.

And both of those are problems on your part, not His. I see this kind of disappointment in Mary and Martha when Jesus showed up to the funeral of their brother. Martha first comes out to me.

Jesus says, Lord, if you had only been here, our brother would not have died. Mary comes out next. Same words exactly.

I don't know if they'd probably said it to each other. They'd probably say, if Jesus had only been here, Lazarus would not have died. So, when Jesus gets there, they both have the same speech.

Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died. Isn't that an expression of disappointment, maybe bordering on bitterness? Our brother's dead. You could have fixed it.

You could have come. We sent you a message. We let you know well in advance.

He lasted a couple more days after you got our message, and you didn't come. And Jesus said to Martha, well, your brother's going to live again. She said, I know, in the resurrection of the last day.

Of course, everybody's going to live again. And He said, they went to the tomb, and He said, remove the stone. And Martha says, Lord, you know, he's been dead four days.

By now he stinks. And Jesus said, did I not say to you, if you will believe, you will see the glory of God. Well, when did He ever say that to her previous to that? Well, it was back way earlier.

Back when they first sent the messengers to Jesus and said, the one whom you love is sick. Lazarus is sick. Jesus sent this message back to them.

This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God. Okay. Now, when He said, this sickness is not unto death, I'm sure they thought, oh, great.

He's not going to die. Jesus said, it's not unto death. He'll get better.

But they didn't get better. It got worse, and He died. And they thought, Jesus broke His promise.

Jesus said it wasn't going to be unto death. And so He says, move the stone. She says, no, it's too late now, Jesus.

You didn't come through when you had a chance. Snooze, you lose. It's over.

The guy's gone. I mean, he's decayed. I mean, it's just, it's in poor taste now to open the tomb and let all that smell out.

And Jesus said, didn't I tell you? What had He told them? He had sent them this message. This sickness is not unto death. They thought, no doubt, that that meant, oh, He's not going to die.

Well, Jesus didn't lie. The end result of that sickness, indeed, was not death, because the end result was resurrection. It was unto resurrection.

He had to go through death to get there. They didn't know that part. They only knew about the part that, in the end, He wasn't going to be dead.

But they didn't know He's going to die first and come back. Jesus knew that, but they misunderstood His promise and became embittered because they expected something from Him that was not exactly what He said. He said, I told you, if you would believe, you'll see the glory of God.

I told you it's going to be for the glory of God, didn't I? Have you seen it yet? Then it must be still coming. You have to believe what I said. Now, when we misunderstand what God has promised, there is great occasion for our faith to be destroyed.

That is why I'm very concerned about the prominent teaching. It's not in this church, as far as I know. I mean, maybe some in here hold it, but it's called the Word of Faith teaching.

It teaches that really all you have to do is confess, and you'll get better. Just confess your will. Well, try it sometime.

I have. I'll tell you something really interesting. In my experience in 30 years of knowing that doctrine, although I've rejected it since, but I once believed it.

I found that, in my experience, when I was sick and I confessed I'd get better, I didn't. I mean, that's just the case. It didn't happen.

And, strangely, on occasions when I said I wasn't going to get better any time soon, I did get better. It was clear that whoever told me that you have what you say had not read the Bible carefully, but they thought they had. They had Bible verses.

They think it's in there. I know the verses they're talking about. I look at them, too.

But it is possible to misunderstand the promises, and that is very commonly done in this particular case. And when people say, well, God promised I'd get well, but I confessed and confessed and confessed and confessed, and if you can't get well with the kind of faith I've had, then it just doesn't work. So, the Bible must not be true.

God must be either not there or not reliable, and there goes their faith out the window because they misunderstood promises. They thought He promised something that He didn't. If you want to go into that particular point more with me sometime, we can.

I've got tapes on it, too. But I'd just like to say which promise... If someone says, I tried Christianity and it failed me, I'd like to say, which promise of God did he fail to fulfill? And if he did not fail to fulfill some promise that he has made to you, then on what grounds do you have any basis for disappointment? Did you get your hopes up? There's times when my wife and I are talking about the possibility of something we do that the kids would actually like, and they overhear it, and we say, well, don't get your hopes up. This might not happen.

Don't get your hopes up. And then eventually it doesn't happen, and then we get some complaints from the kids, and we say, we told you not to get your hopes up. Whose fault was it that you are disillusioned about this? It is your fault because you got false hopes up.

You see, bitterness is hope deferred. It says in Proverbs 13, 12, hope deferred makes the heart sick. Bitter.

People get sick hearts, spiritually speaking, when they have hopes that are deferred. Now, deferred can mean it's just put off. The realization of what you hope for is not immediate.

Or it could be that it never happens, in which case it's deferred forever. But what it's saying in the Proverbs there is there's something in the human nature that when it sets its hope on something and it doesn't happen, it's more than a disappointment. It makes the heart sick.

It grieves the heart, and in many cases, because we thought our hopes were justified, we feel that an injustice has been done in that our hopes were not realized. That is what causes the heart to become sick. Is there any injustice with God? When I hear of somebody who has fallen away from God, I often think of this verse in Jeremiah 2. I mean, for many years, it's been the first thing that comes to my mind.

God is complaining that Israel has gone far from Him after all that He'd done for them. And He says in Jeremiah 2, in verse 5, Thus says the Lord, What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they've gone far from Me, have followed idols, and become idolaters? That's a great question. Are there any great answers? What injustice have you found in God that you've gone far from Him? Where did He let you down? Now, I dare say if you have any kind of an answer for that, the answer will come from an unrealistic expectation that you had upon God, not based on what He said He would do, or even what is normative necessarily for Him to do.

It's what you thought God ought to do. And when we think God ought to do something, in most cases, we are succumbing to the dread plague of meism, which is so natural. I mean, all people since the fall have put self first, but my generation might have been the first to actually establish it as a religion.

You know, everything should revolve around me. Now, see, previous generations wanted everything to resolve around me. Self has always been there to assert its claims, but most people thought selfishness and self-centeredness were bad until about my generation.

And then it was sort of elevated to a religion itself, the religion of me. I should get what I want. And I think this disappointment with God is much more common in my generation and the younger generation perhaps than in earlier generations.

I mean, people went through the depression, people who, you know, just went through hard times in past generations. Maybe some of them got disappointed with God, but it seems like an awful lot of people held on to their faith through times that must have been really, really difficult. But I'm a member of the wimpy generation, and if things don't go our way, we just can't be expected to hang on, you know.

You can't expect me to continue with something that isn't pleasing me. You can't expect me to believe in something that doesn't flatter me. You can't expect me to stay in a relationship that doesn't excite me.

Because I am me. And by definition, me rules. Now, you see, that is the plague that's in all men.

It's become more of a plague to those who actually embrace it as a right thing. We call it self-esteem and self-love and things like that. And we give it names that therapeutically make it sound like it's something we need to have that in order to be healthy.

See, that's the weird thing. I mean, any generation before ours, someone says, I need to learn to love myself. Any person with common sense would say, Excuse me, I never noticed that you had any trouble loving yourself.

I thought that was your problem. And nowadays they say, No, your problem is you don't love yourself enough. Well, okay, you got a problem now.

And that is me. Not me, your problem. You are your problem.

I'm my problem. And, you know, the gospel is something that has been very poorly understood in the me generation because Jesus has been viewed as something that's there for me. And by the way, people who want big churches have learned that this emphasis works well to draw the me generation into the congregation.

Say, you know, you're probably very unsatisfied, unfulfilled in life. Guess what? The problem is you've got a God-shaped hole. Nothing will fill it but God.

But when you get God in there, you'll have found all that you're looking for. You'll be fulfilled. You'll be happy.

You'll have the peace of mind and the tranquility you've always wanted. You'll love everybody. Everybody will love you.

And it'll just be a great, great life. Now, you don't give that kind of gospel. Let me put it this way.

You don't expect the me generation to come forward at all to cause without giving that kind of gospel. You have to present the gospel as Jesus is there. He's there for you.

And Jesus died for me. And you know what? If you were the only person in the whole world, Jesus would have come and died for you. Anyone ever heard that? Anyone ever found that in the Bible? It must be a different translation than the one I read.

I never read that Jesus came for me. I heard that Jesus came for his father. That his father sent him.

And Jesus came for his father's glory. And that the problem was me. I was the one who was not living for God.

I was the one who was falling short of not my own satisfaction. I was falling short of the glory of God. I had sinned and fell short of the glory of God.

I didn't fall short of self-esteem. I didn't fall short of self-satisfaction. I may have, but that wasn't the problem.

The problem was that I fell short of bringing glory to God in my life. And Jesus said, that's a problem. We've got to fix that.

And Jesus came down here to bring glory to his father by redeeming those who were rebel children. And saying, okay guys, it's turn or burn. You repent or you'll perish.

Do you want to live with your father in a way that pleases him? Or do you just want to go the way you're going? Now, Jesus, I will admit, Jesus did put out some incentives out there. Like, if you pluck out your eye, if it's the thing causing you to sin, it'll be better for you than if you keep it and go to hell. I guess that's appealing to one's self-interest to a certain degree.

But it's not exactly making it a sugar-coated kind of a message. The fact is, Jesus came with a gospel that is God-centered, not me-centered. And the modern church is more familiar with a me-centered gospel because I'm more likely to go to a church that makes

me feel good about me.

And if I get good vibes from religion, I just might stay around. And if I don't get good vibes from my religion, maybe I'll look for something else that'll give me the good vibes I want. But when it really gets down to it, whose religion is it? It's God's.

If I'm coming to him, I have to come on his terms. Whose salvation is it? It's God's salvation. It's God's salvation.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, the psalmist said. It's God's salvation. He's the one who saves and he does it on his terms.

I don't come and say, God, I'm a busy person. I heard you've got something for me. I understand I'm supposed to jump through this hoop, this hoop, this hoop, pull this chain, and I'm supposed to get some kind of a, you know, the windows of heaven are supposed to open up for me, right? And so, you've got ten minutes.

I'm a busy man. I mean, that's really, I mean, that may be a caricature of it, but that's not too far off from the attitude that we encourage people to have when we invite them to come to Christ. The gospel is not for you.

I may have told this story before to you, I don't know, but I tell it a lot because I think it illustrates it. A woman in a school that I was teaching at in Honolulu had encountered a woman on the street while witnessing and asked me what she should have said to her because the woman said, Christianity is not for me because as I, if I were to become a Christian, Christianity holds women down. Christianity doesn't let women rise to the highest positions, and I could never be fulfilled, and my gifts and my aptitudes and my potential could never really be fulfilled if I became a Christian.

And the girl who had had this conversation with her said to me, what should I have said to her? And I said, well, you should have told her you're right. Christianity isn't for you. It's for people who are willing to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Jesus.

It's not for people who are saying, God, these are the terms. Meet these terms, I'll sign. God, if you will let me experience the fullness of my potential, then I'll give you some consideration about this.

God says, well, don't call me, I'll call you. And because God is not desperate, we are desperate. God is not hard up.

We are hard up. We're in trouble. God's not in trouble.

God is the one who's making an offer, but it's on His terms. I don't come and say, okay, God, I did the things you said. You didn't come through the way I thought you should.

You owe me more than that. I think I got a little more change coming back, don't I? Well, God doesn't owe you nothing. God owes you hell, as far as I recall, but He'll give better than that.

He does better than that. And a person who is disappointed with God needs to realize that even if they didn't get everything that they hoped they'd get, if they really came to God, they got much more than they deserved. They got more than they deserved.

Forgiveness of sins is more than you deserved. We've got to remember and we've got to let people know God is not just another guy that we are there to manipulate for our satisfaction. We learn to do that with people out in the world.

And then when we hear there's a God out there who really can pay off, then we think, well, I know how to get stuff out of people. I'll just do what I do to get that stuff out of God. But God's not another guy.

He said in Psalm 50 and verse 21, He says, You thought that I was altogether such a one as you. And there's an awful lot of people who think that way about God. He's just like one of us.

He's just bigger. No, He's more than bigger. He owns us.

He made us. He has all the cards. He has all the rights.

We don't have any, except what He chooses to give us. And we don't have any claim on anything that He does not prefer to give. Now, I'm not trying to make God sound like some kind of ogre out there who's not pleased to give.

Jesus said, like earthly fathers, Delight to give good things to their children. God even more delights to give good things to those who ask Him. He's not stingy.

But the problem is people come with their trick-or-treat bag to God's door like He owes them something. And He doesn't. And if there's not enough candy in the bag, they want to throw eggs at His house.

Because He didn't pay off. He's not what they wanted. He's not what they expected.

They think some injustice has been done to them. It hasn't. It's just hope deferred because the hopes were unrealistic.

Now, there's something more involved when people are disappointed with God and fall away from Him. Two other things. Very common things, but I want to say some things about them because they relate to this.

One is a love deficit on their part. Most of us don't love God enough. But hopefully we love Him enough to have a relationship with Him.

He really deserves more from us than what we normally give Him in terms of our love. But when a person stops seeking after God because they haven't found in Him what they believe can be found in Him, it's clear that their love for Him was very, well, tentative. Let's put it that way.

They've got a deficit in love for God. I tried drugs, I tried surfing, I tried skateboarding. I tried God.

Nothing materialized there, so now I'm into double espressos. Well, God was one of the things I tried to make me happy. Well, you don't try God.

He's not just someone that you go take for a test drive and say, Well, fairly comfortable, handles well, a lot of power under the hood, but there's price tags too high, so I won't try Him out anymore. You know what? If you try to test drive God the way that people test drive cars, which, by the way, test driving a car is okay. You shouldn't buy something until you test drive it.

But that's because the car has to please you. And you can tell right away if the car you're driving is one that pleases you, or if you're going to pay for it. But, you know, you can't tell in a few days or a few months or even a few years all that God has for you.

You won't realize it all right away. It's a lifetime commitment, and if you don't have a lifetime commitment, you don't get any of it. It's like marriage, you know.

You don't commit for life, you don't get any of it. It's not meted out to you in increments. You don't take the woman home and start sleeping with her and say, later we'll talk about this business of me supporting you, you know, or this business of forsaking all others.

All that's there at the beginning, or it doesn't happen. You have a total commitment for life, or you don't have any commitment or any relationship. God is not one to be trifled with.

And people who love God don't want to trifle with Him. People who love God as He is entitled to be loved, they don't just seek for a while and say, well, I'm not getting it, I guess I'll try something else. God said in Jeremiah 29, 13, You will search for Me, and you shall find Me when you shall seek for Me with all your heart.

With your whole heart. You're not going to find Him short of that. It's got to be the whole heart.

In Proverbs 2, verses 1-5, it says, I've got to read this because it's a little long for me to quote, but it's the same idea put very graphically. Proverbs chapter 2. It says, My son, if you will receive My words and treasure My commands within you, so that you incline your ear toward wisdom, you apply your heart to understanding, yes, if you cry out for

discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, if you search for her as for hidden treasures, then you'll understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. When will you find the knowledge of God? When will you really make contact? And know there's a God there.

I'm in relationship with Him. I know Him. It's when you are seeking as for hidden treasures.

If you were poor, and you didn't have enough money to eat your next meal, but somebody told you that your great grandfather had buried a treasure on that acre you're living on somewhere, and if you find it, it's yours, and you're hungry, and you don't have any money, you'll say, well, there's nothing for it but to go and apply for welfare. No. No.

What you do is you go out and say, I've got to find that treasure. It's out there. I need it.

I'm desperate. And I'll dig. And when do you stop digging? When you find it.

And not earlier. Not earlier. You don't say, well, I'm getting kind of sweaty, and it's been three hours, and we've got three quarters of this place dug up, and I just haven't found it yet.

Let's just throw in the towel. What, and go home and starve? No, you keep going until you find it. You don't stop.

You're not told how long it will take, by the way. We have, again, in our modern evangelicalism, the idea of the painless, instantaneous, get it all by a simple prayer. But the way evangelicalism was understood two generations ago, or a century ago, or two centuries ago, by evangelists like Finney and Moody and those kind of guys, they didn't see it that way.

They said, you cry out to God as long as it takes to break through to God. And it was not uncommon in Finney's crusades for people to be in agony of soul for weeks before they sensed the presence of God came upon them. Now, we say, well, that's putting too much on feeling.

We need to go by faith, and faith means you expect little in the way of satisfaction. You just decide it's there. I said the prayer, so it's there.

Well, maybe something is there. But, I mean, Spurgeon, for example, he was in agony of soul for months over his sin after he heard the gospel. And God finally broke through to him, and he had a pretty good conversion.

I think people who have pretty good conversions that really stick are people who are serious, serious enough that if God says, come a little longer, try a little harder. Now, you might say, well, what's God, teasing? No, God knows exactly how much we need to be

tested. God knows exactly how much it's going to take to really bring us through to a place of total sincerity.

God says, I'm watching, I'm paying attention, I'm reading the meter, keep coming, keep coming. It's going to take a little more than that. But we say, no, that's feeling-oriented religion.

We just need to tell people, come forward, say a prayer, and it's in there. You got it. You didn't feel anything, and you maybe never will.

But you got it. Well, that may be true in some cases. Sometimes you don't feel all that you think you're going to feel.

But we need to find biblical norms. People in the Bible had to seek, seek, seek with their whole heart. You know, the problem is people come forward, and we tell them they got it when they were seeking, but we don't know if they were seeking with their whole heart, and therefore, we don't know if they really got it.

We don't know if they really met God, because all we know is they said a prayer. We have no idea what was in their heart. We can't give them some kind of false assurance.

Or we shouldn't. We could. But we shouldn't give them false assurance that they got saved when they maybe didn't.

The Bible says, he who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. If someone doesn't have some self-announcing presence of God in their life, maybe he's not there yet.

And for us to say, well, you said the right words, you're in. Send them off when they could be just at the threshold. Maybe they're not quite in.

Maybe their heart's not all there yet. We don't know. It'd be better to let God let them know when they've come in.

The Holy Spirit, Paul said in Romans 8, bears witness with our spirits that we're the children of God. If they don't have that happening, I'm not going to tell them what God's not telling them. Maybe they haven't sought Him with their whole heart yet.

And so, we need to have a passion after God that is a love for God that says, I'm putting everything else aside to go for it, and I'm not going to stop until I find it. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 5 and verse 6, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Who will be satisfied? Those who say a prayer? No, those who hunger and thirst.

Hunger and thirst are the most intense, natural drives of any living creature, human or animal. As the deer pants for the water brook, so pants my soul after you, O God. That's

what the psalmist said in Psalm 42.

And Jesus said, whoever hungers and thirsts, and you know, we might think, well, hunger and thirst, that's a pretty strong drive, but there's some other drives more important. No, I mean, we, you know, Americans are more likely to think that the sex drive is the strongest drive because we've never been hungry and because we have all kinds of stimulation for the sex drive all around us. Let me tell you something, the sex drive is nothing compared to the hunger drive if you haven't any food for enough days in a row.

I mean, you find yourself out in the desert without water and without food for a few days, and you're not going to be thinking about sex, not even a little bit. You're going to be thinking about water, water. And you know what? You're not going to say, well, I've gone three days through this desert and I haven't found water yet, I guess I might as well not go any further.

You know? No, you say, I'm going to go until I die because that's what's going to happen to me if I don't find it. And I'm going to be driven on and on and on. And if a person doesn't have that passion after God, Jesus gave no promises that they'd be satisfied.

He said, I didn't get any satisfaction. Well, did you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Did you search for her as for hid treasures? Did you seek after God with all your heart? And are you sure you did? If you didn't get any satisfaction, maybe you didn't do what God said. Maybe you haven't met God's terms.

Now, someone says, well, I sought God for a while, but I didn't get what I thought I'd get, so I'm going somewhere else. I mean, that's not the spirit of a disciple. The disciple said, Lord, to whom shall we go? I mean, everyone else was flaking off and departing from Jesus.

And he said to his disciples, are you going to go away too? They said, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. Like, I mean, if we haven't found everything we're looking for yet, it's not like there's some other alternative out there for us. We just have to stay with you.

Or we'll stay after you. We'll understand this. We still haven't gotten the... The light hasn't gone on for us yet, but we're not going anywhere.

We're staying right here. We're going to follow after you. And I think that when people give up their pursuit of God, it's because their love for God was never supremely wholehearted in the first place.

There are, after all, other things out there that are attractive. It's called the world. The Bible says, he that loves the world does not have the love of the Father in him.

And isn't it interesting that very few people just forsake God and don't go anywhere.

They forsake God for the world. For a relationship.

For something they want from the world. In other words, it's not so much that they just have decided God's not worth seeking. It's just that they don't love Him or they're not as attracted to Him as they are to something else right now.

Something else out there is more pleasing to me right now than God. Well, then, that tells me a lot about your heart. It tells me a lot about the wholeness of your heart being given over to God.

If a woman loves a man with her whole heart, and they're engaged to be married, and he goes away to war, and he doesn't come back for two years, three years. In fact, maybe he gets lost. Maybe he's a POW, and they're not sure if he's alive or dead.

But if she loves him with her whole heart, she's not going anywhere. Her hope is deferred, but she's not going anywhere. He may be alive.

He may yet come. I'll wait a little longer. I'll wait forever if I need to.

I'm not going to go after one of these other suitors over here, because my whole heart is with the one I love. And when people love God with their whole heart, there's nowhere to go. There's no love for the world there.

It's not an option. It's not an alternative. And so, when people fall away from God, there's a love deficit there.

A problem there. They think they love God because they got some good feelings once when they sang a song about, oh, how I love Jesus. But there's really not a total commitment there, because they love the world too.

And the world is now offering instant gratification in some area where Jesus didn't come through with instant gratification. So, we see where their love was in the first place. One other thing I want to say real quickly here.

I know it's kind of late, but the other thing that is a problem when people become disappointed with God is that their faith faints. The Bible says, Jesus said in Luke 18.1, Men ought always to pray and not to faint. Now, the New Translations might not use the word faint, but that's the right translation.

It means, you know, to faint. But it's used metaphorically. Like the New King James will say, lose heart.

Men ought always to pray and not lose heart. Well, that's really what it means. The word faint is literally translated faint, but metaphorically means to lose heart.

If people continue to pray, they should not lose heart. Even if the prayer is not instantly

answered. If people are seeking God, and He doesn't show up in the way that they think, then keep going.

Don't faint. David said in Psalm 27.13, he says, I would have fainted had I not believed. Had I not believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land we live in, I would have fainted.

I would have lost heart altogether. But you know what? I didn't. I didn't lose heart, and I didn't faint.

You know why? Because I believed God. Believing God is the answer. Believing God is what will keep you from the disaster of a shipwreck on the rocks of disappointment with God.

If God doesn't do what you want, what you thought He should, believe Him anyway. It's in the darkness where we can't see the provision. We can't see God.

We don't have any sense of God. That's when our faith is called on to really come through. In Isaiah 50, in verse 10, Isaiah says, Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God.

Is there anyone here who is in darkness and you have no light, but you fear God and you love God, and you say, I don't get it. I thought this was supposed to be sweetness and light for the rest of my life, and now I just feel like God is hiding. It feels like God is gone somewhere.

It feels like I've been on this path. I've gone into a dark tunnel, and it's cool and damp and dark, and I don't feel like God's anywhere around me. I didn't sign up for this, did I? Well, you might have.

You signed up for whatever God wants when you signed up, and if He wants you to have your faith tested by withdrawing the feelings that you were so accustomed to, or that everyone said you would have, that's His business. What are you supposed to do when you're in the dark? Well, He who walks in darkness and has no light, let him trust in the name of his Lord and rely upon his God. These tunnels on the path are there by God's design.

The path you're on is God's design, and if there's tunnels there, it is because, A, it turns back the fearful, the unbelieving. The people who are in it just for the feelings, they go through a tunnel and say, I don't think I'm going any further here. And they turn back.

And the other thing is it conditions you who are a true believer to trust God in the absence of feelings, which is a very important lesson of faith. We need to recognize that faith is a choice. Faith is not imposed upon you.

Faith is something you impose upon yourself. You choose to believe. That's why people are scolded in the Bible for having little faith.

Do you know, the church in Revelation that had little strength, the church of Philadelphia, Jesus didn't scold them when He said, you have little strength. He encouraged them. It's not blameworthy to have little strength, but it is blameworthy to have little faith.

Jesus said, oh, you have little faith. Where is your faith? Because you don't have any more strength than you have, and you can't just decide to be super strong. But you can decide to believe.

And that's how people survive the Christian life who survive it. They say, you know, when it's easy to believe, that's great, wonderful. When it's hard to believe, that's when the believer says, I will believe God.

I will trust God. There's temptation to worry. There's temptation to fear.

There's temptation to doubt. I will trust God. That is my resolution, and that's not going to change.

You know, the Bible says in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 16, and take the shield of faith, wherewith you will be able to deflect all the fiery darts of the wicked one. You might say, you know, the reason I'm stumbling in my Christian life, the reason I'm bailing out is because I just got pummeled by fiery darts of doubt and disappointment and anger and fear and all these fiery darts. You know what? The Bible says, you have no excuse.

You have a resource that can quench every fiery dart. Where was it? Where were you? Why didn't you quench them? You have a shield. You know, if I see a guy aiming an arrow at me and I have a shield, I have a bit of a responsibility.

Hide behind the shield. Put up the shield. Here comes the doubt.

I take the shield of faith. How do I do that? I just say, I believe God. I will believe God.

No one is going to take that from me. No circumstance can shake that from me. I will believe God.

That is my decision, and God is going to honor that decision. And He's going to give me the grace to go through whatever test there is because grace comes through faith. By faith we have access into this grace by which we stand.

And so, when a person chooses to believe God, they don't fall. The darts don't get through. That shield of faith will quench every fiery dart, the Bible says.

That's a promise. I'm convinced that that promise cannot fail. If your faith has failed, it's

you who didn't take the shield.

You just decided to stop believing instead of saying, no, I will believe God. That's my choice. You can tell me anything you want to, but I still choose to believe God.

I'm just going to be stubborn about this. You know? Now, I'm going to close on this matter of faith about the tests of faith that God sends us. I think John the Baptist was going through a test of his faith.

He thinks God wasn't doing what he thought God was going to do. He was disappointed, I think. But, Jesus just said, blessed is he who is not stumbled by me.

If your faith is being tested, if you say, I know I've sought God with my whole heart, but what I have found is not what I expected. Well, maybe your faith is being tested. If you give up your faith, that's your choice.

But as soon as you do, you show that you can't pass tests. If you can't pass tests, you can't make it. You can't be promoted to heaven if you don't pass the faith tests.

You've got to believe God. You've got to believe Him to the end. And, the test of faith, the greatest danger is that we won't understand that our faith is in the crucible.

That our faith is being tested. And we'll just give up on God too soon. A lot of times God comes through, but later than we thought He would.

A lot of times. That was Mary and Martha's problem. Jesus, come quickly.

Lazarus is dying. Quick, quick. Oh, you got here too late.

Our faith is really shattered. It's hopeless now, Jesus. You might as well stay where you are.

In fact, I'm a little mad at you. Well, they gave up too soon. They gave up their faith too soon.

So did the disciples when Jesus died. I think the men on the road to Emmaus were fairly characteristic of the attitude of most. They said, this Jesus of Nazareth, He did all these wonderful things.

We had hoped. We had hoped. But, not anymore.

He died. We had hoped He was going to fulfill the promises. But, well, just wait a little while.

In a moment you're going to know that He's risen from the dead and He has fulfilled all the promises. Don't give up too soon. Sometimes the answer is right around the corner and you don't know it.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, among other things, He fasted for 40 days. He was starving to death. And He was tempted to turn these rocks into bread.

He could have done it. He could do that. But, He didn't.

Now, after 40 days of fasting, He was starving to death. That must be a strong test. Now, God, You've told me to fast.

I can't stop fasting until You say. And yet, look, I'm dying here. What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to give up now? I'll just turn some of these rocks into bread and play it safe.

No, He didn't. He just held out and said, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. And no word has come from my Father yet about breaking my fast.

So, I will not turn these stones into bread, even though it would otherwise not be wrong to do. It's the wrong timing. And He held out.

And the angels came and fed Him. He didn't know that was going to happen right then. He didn't know when it was going to happen.

All He knew is He didn't have the option of giving up soon. And a lot of people, I think, do give up too soon. Well, I won't get into all this.

But to faint when there is not immediate gratification shows that your strength is small, your faith is fainting, and you're not using the shield of faith. There's a story about Adoniram Judson, as I recall. If you've read his story, first American missionary out to Burma.

He was, I think, at India or somewhere first and ended up in Burma. But it's been a while since I read the story, and the details I forget. He buried several wives and children in Burma and elsewhere because they died of sicknesses over there.

And worse yet, well, I don't know if that's worse. I'd say added to that was the fact they didn't have any converts for about eight years. Now, imagine leaving America, going to someplace as foreign as Burma, and spending eight years translating, learning the language, making a dictionary.

And you're eight years there. You don't have one convert yet. And you went over there to save Burma.

Eight years. I mean, if we had an evangelistic service, and we went a week, and no one got saved, and we were planning to go two weeks, we'd probably call off the second week. He went eight years.

And the mission board back in America wrote to him and said, Mr. Judson, what are the prospects, sir? After about seven or those years. Any prospects? And he wrote back and he said, The prospects are as bright as the promises of God. And he didn't give up his faith.

He didn't say, well, I guess this isn't happening. I'll go on home. He stayed.

And you know what happened is someone got saved. And one of those guys who got saved became a great Burmese evangelist. And hundreds of thousands of people got saved through that man.

Because Adonai Judson didn't say, well, God, I thought you sent me to Burma. But I've been here two years. And I don't have any converts yet.

I guess I heard you wrong. I better go back home. Well, he stayed.

And eight years later, his converts began to evangelize Burma. And it made a tremendous impact. Well, being disappointed with God is the result of having a hope deferred.

The hope, if it's deferred, is an unrealistic hope. You either expected something God didn't promise. Or you expected it to happen sooner than God chose to make it happen.

That's the problem. You're calling the terms. You don't call the terms.

You're bound to be disappointed if you think God's going to jump on you and crack your whip. God makes the terms. You meet the terms or not.

You meet the terms, he'll give you what he wants you to have. And you'll have what he wants you to have. He will not disappoint you.

Unless you had plans other than his. In which case, fault's on your side. If you give up, your love is little.

You've stopped seeking. You haven't sought him with your whole heart. You've got a love deficit.

And also, if your faith faints, it's also your choice to believe or not to believe. To give up on waiting on God or not. The Bible says in Psalm 37.7, wait patiently for him.

Sometimes it's not instantaneous the things we think God's going to deliver on. I'm just going to read real quickly here. I won't comment because it would take too long.

But this is just a song. I don't know who wrote it. It was on an album that Phil Kege made back in the 70's.

But he doesn't know who the author was. He actually got the words from graffiti at a

Christian camp. Probably like this one.

But I'll just read it. It's called Disappointment, His Appointment. And I often think about this when people are disappointed with God.

It says, Disappointment, His Appointment. Change one letter, then I see that the thwarting of my purpose is God's better choice for me. His appointment must be blessing, though it may come in disguise.

For the end from the beginning open to His wisdom lies. Disappointment, His Appointment, proves the Lord who loves me best, understands and knows me fully, who my faith and love would test. For like loving earthly parents, He rejoices when He knows that His child accepts unquestioned all that from His wisdom flows.

Disappointment, His Appointment. No good thing will He withhold from denials. Oft we gather treasures of His love untold.

Well He knows each broken purpose leads to fuller, deeper trust. And the end of all His dealings proves our God is wise and just. Disappointment, His Appointment.

Lord, I take it then as such, like the clay in the hands of the potter, yielding wholly to Thy touch. All my life's plan is Thy molding. Not one single choice be mine.

Let me answer unrepining, Father, not my will, but Thine. That is what has gone wrong if I become disappointed with God. My answer has not been, not my will, but Thine.

It's been, God, not Thy will, but mine. And if God doesn't do my will, then I gave Him a chance. It's going to something else.

Obviously that is not any way to really know God or get to know God.