

*Don't Distance Yourself
from the
God Who Loves You*

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

More than ever, people like to pay to be entertained. The movie industry alone profits billions of dollars each year. With promotions that are part of the mainstream culture, many Christians seem to know more about recent video releases than they are aware of the moving of God's Spirit. In fact, many Christians would rather stay at home and watch TV than go to church and learn to love the will of God and the purity of God's grace through the preaching of the Word (Titus 1:3).

I know that most people in the world do not read the Bible, but I would seriously like to know how many Christians really read the Bible. We talk about reading the Bible in schools. Let's start reading the Bible in our homes. We talk about wanting public prayer in schools, but what about public prayers in our homes?

The problem is that many have distanced themselves from the One who really loves them.

Through ignorance, carelessness, and rebellion, we have filled our lives with things other than the things of God. Yet, the Father still longs to draw people to Himself. As this booklet will show, God wants His people to walk close to Him as we receive His truth in our inward parts.

Chapter One

LOST IN A LOST WORLD

In the book of Jeremiah, God was dealing with a divided kingdom—Israel and Judah. Soon God's people would face seventy years of captivity in Babylon under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar. The king took all the wealthy people and all the craftsmen who could benefit his kingdom, and he left behind the poor and the destitute to fend for themselves. Still, God had a provision.

No matter what situation we are in, God always raises up men of God. In captivity, God raised up the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel, while He told Jeremiah to stay with those who were destitute. That rough and rowdy gang would not hear him speak, and, eventually, even they were taken captive by the Egyptians. They would not listen to the prophet Jeremiah who warned them not to trust in Egypt (Jeremiah 29:19).

Jeremiah had a ministry to people who refused to listen to him. Many scholars believe that he was stoned to death in Egypt. Yet, he stood fast as he proclaimed the Word of God to people who despised him.

Lost Opportunities, Lost Rewards

Exodus 21:19 says that if men strive against one another and one is wounded, the offender “shall pay for the loss of his time.” Numbers 6:12 says “the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.” Ezekiel 19 describes a time of lost hope, lost peace, and lost opportunities for the children of Israel. The Lord wants us to know that wasting time—our own or another’s—is sin.

The principle of being lost is so sad. People lose time, whether days, hours, or moments. With that, they lose meaning, purpose, joy, reality, and reason. They lose spirituality because they cannot find what they have lost, and they do not purpose to restore what they have lost. Lured into captivity by the pleasures of the world, they move away from the heart of God.

First Corinthians 3:13-15 says that at the Bema Seat evaluation (where believers will receive or suffer loss of rewards), “Every man’s

work shall be made manifest....” Whatever goes through the fire and remains will bring eternal rewards. If, on the other hand, any man’s works are destroyed by fire, though he will go to heaven, he will suffer loss of rewards for all eternity.

It is amazing to me how many believers have no idea whatsoever about losing opportunities because of lost time and compromising their relationship with God because of self-occupation, carnality, and ignorance of truth. And yet, because of the Finished Work of Calvary, if we will turn to the Lord, He will restore the years that were devoured (Joel 2:25-26). That is the heart of God.

The Seeking Heart of God

Luke 15 is a chapter about lost things. Jesus said that when one sheep was lost, the shepherd left the other sheep and went into the wilderness to find the lost one. When the shepherd brought back the lost sheep, the neighbors joined together and there was a party. There was joy and rejoicing over the one who had been found.

God is always seeking the lost. He is always looking for ways to show us the areas in which we are lost and then to bring us into His reality

—an eternal state of forgiveness.

Also in Luke 15, Jesus told about a woman who had ten pieces of silver and then lost one coin. She swept her house until she found that coin. Then, she called her neighbors, and there was joy and rejoicing over one lost coin that was found.

Then, we find the story of the prodigal son who came home after wasting his inheritance on “riotous living.” The father gave a celebration, announcing, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24).

The average Christian has little understanding of how, on a day-to-day and moment-by-moment basis, Jesus Christ seeks and saves that which is lost. It is not a last-ditch effort. The Lord is continually seeking the lost.

When we do not have the mind of Christ, we have lost our way of thinking with Him. When we do not have the right confession, we have lost our way of communicating God’s Finished Work viewpoint. When we do not have faith-rest in Christ, we have lost our way of living. When we do not have the proper joy of God, we have lost our way of strength. When we do not have the proper obedience, we have lost our

way of honor. When we do not have the proper comprehension of doctrine, we have lost our way of inspiration.

When we do not have these things, then we are suffering loss, and the loss will be culminated at the Bema Seat, where we will miss eternal rewards.

God is always seeking that which is lost. Some are lost because of ignorance, such as it was with the sheep. Others, just like the coin, are lost through carelessness. Some are lost because of the rebellion revealed in the prodigal son.

Being lost is a terrible thing. Just as the coin was lost inside the house, Christians can be lost within the church. They will go to heaven, but they have no real value system. They lack virtue that redeems the time in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus' entire purpose was to reveal the Father by revealing His nature so that people can find this revelation and not be lost.

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but

dung, that I may win Christ,

“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:7-10).

Chapter Two

THE GOD WHO IS NEAR

“Thus saith the LORD unto me, Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water.

“So I got a girdle according to the word of the LORD, and put it on my loins.

“And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying,

“Take the girdle that thou hast got, which is upon thy loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock.

“So I went, and hid it by Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me.

“And it came to pass after many days, that the LORD said unto me, Arise, go to Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence, which I commanded thee to hide there.

“Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it: and, behold, the girdle was marred, it was prof-

itable for nothing.

“Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

“Thus saith the LORD, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem.

“This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing.

“For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear” (Jeremiah 13:1-11).

As God did with several Old Testament prophets, He gave Jeremiah a very unusual assignment. Jeremiah was commanded to wear a white linen girdle every time he spoke. He was not to clean this garment at all.

Next, God told Jeremiah to travel some two hundred and fifty miles on foot, hide the girdle under a rock near the Euphrates River, and then go back—a total of five hundred miles round-

trip. That is quite a journey to take on foot! With cars and airplanes, it wouldn't be such a big deal; but in Jeremiah's day, that sort of trip took a lot of work.

The interesting thing is that Jeremiah simply obeyed God. He did not ask questions. He walked two hundred and fifty miles with the girdle, hid it under a rock, and then walked back two hundred and fifty miles. A while later, God told him to go back and get the girdle. So he walked two hundred and fifty miles, found the girdle (what was left of it, that is) and walked back. The damp environment near the Euphrates left the girdle soiled and profitable for nothing.

An Illustration of God's Heart

Through this ordeal, God wanted to make a point.

God was trying to demonstrate to His people just what was happening to them spiritually. The girdle was used to draw attention to their lost state, which was a result of refusing to hear the Word of the Lord.

God was saying, "I wanted that girdle near you because I want My people close to Me. Yes, it was dirty and unclean. But just like that girdle

clung to you, I want My people to cling to Me.

“I am after intimacy. I want My people to talk with Me and walk with Me and think with Me. I want you to have fellowship with Me, to honor and obey Me.

“I want you to be able to understand My desire for you who have rejected Me, refused Me, and dishonored Me.”

The children of Israel would not listen to Jeremiah, so God orchestrated this illustration to get through to them and help them comprehend His desire toward them.

The point is that God wants His people to draw very close to Him. Do not distance yourself from God through the ignorance of truth. Do not distance yourself from God through careless thinking when you are alone. Do not distance yourself from God through rebellion, as did the prodigal son.

I must not distance myself geographically from the One who is omnipresent. I must not distance my understanding from the One who is omniscient. I must not distance my weakness from the One who is omnipotent. I must not distance myself through natural thinking about love from the One who loves unconditionally.

There is One who loves me and established

grace toward me before He formed the stars, the sun, or the moon. He saw me in His purpose and plan before He spoke the forests, flowers, and herbs into existence, before He created the fish of the sea and fowl of the air. I must not distance myself from my Redeemer who loved me so much that He made a plan that included shedding His blood on Calvary's Cross.

It is amazing to consider how the world behaves and then to see that many average Christians are operating the same way, doing the same things that the world does. They are living this way because of the distance between them and the One who loves them.

“To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it” (Jeremiah 6:10).

God always wants us to be close to Him. He wants us to draw near to Him in every single situation—even if we have no feelings, even if we have no capacity, even if we have no desire.

We should stay close to Him because it is the right thing to do.

Chapter Three

GOD LOVES YOU: THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Man has a duty. He has a duty to be honest, a duty to honor, a duty when he is married to be faithful. He has a duty to work, a duty to pay his bills, a duty to honor people. Man has a duty to honor the God who sent His Son to pay for our sins by grace on Calvary.

Spirit-filled believers must understand that we are bound to duty. Duty is our response to love. This is not a “salvation-by-works” program. Duty represents a right response to love. As Christians, we have a duty to be fervent, to work hard, and to take advantage of our opportunities to serve Him. It is the duty of the inward man to stay pure, clothed in the meek spirit of

God's grace, using the inner resources he receives as pearls of great price.

"By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life" (Proverbs 22:4).

This verse means that humility toward men and reverence toward God are the riches and honor of our lives.

There was not much left to Jeremiah's girdle. Yet imagine the extent to which God went to communicate His thought to the prophet: "Jeremiah, you represent Me. The girdle represents My people." The dirty girdle deteriorated more and more. It was not on the rock, as Moses was; it was under the rock, and it was far away from the city that God had given His people.

God Seeks Out the Worthless

People get so far away from what God has given them. In Jeremiah's time, many of God's people were in Babylon, mired in captivity. Their days were lost, their hours were lost, their minutes were lost. They were living in a wasteland. Like the girdle that Jeremiah walked two hundred and fifty miles to retrieve, God's people felt worthless. Yet, God still wanted them. This was God's message to the people still living in Jerusalem.

“Yes, you are lost. You were taken out of the way by your own wrong choices. As worthless as the girdle appears to be, I still wanted it close to My prophet. In the same way, I want you close to Me, even in your present condition.

“If you are close to Me, I can minister to you so you can receive My love and have proper capacity for life. I want your life close to Me so that I can direct you and keep you clean through My Word and the Holy Spirit. To those who are far off and without hope, I want to give hope.”

This is the heart of God, who loves us. Do not distance yourself from that love. Draw near.

CONCLUSION

Like Jeremiah's girdle, God still values every soul, no matter what condition they are in. Even those people whose hearts have drifted far from Him remain the objects of His great love. Just as the Lord sent Jeremiah to retrieve the ruined girdle, God sends those who represent Him after unworthy people.

The value of this unusual lesson is this: Every person has value, no matter how lost he is. God would leave the ninety and nine sheep to rescue any one of us who would wander into the wilderness of defeat and sin.

The lost coin in Luke 15 is a picture of someone lost within a church. The house represents the local assembly. God wants the members of His churches to sweep and clear away the old things—to search and to find those who are lost to their purpose. The Lord wants us to redeem the time and to redeem what was lost so there can be celebration and rejoicing, no matter what

we go through.

Even rebellious sons can come home to the Father, because though they may not understand Him or know His heart and purpose, they can still know His love. They will grow tired of being in the far countries of sin and will come back to receive the love of the One who is ever waiting to be gracious.