

A LONGING FOR THE LORD

Revelation 6:9-11—When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

Psalms 90:13-14—Do return, O Lord; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants. O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Revelation 22:16-17—I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Lord, we come to You; we thank You for this time of worship we have had together. We thank You for this time of singing. We pray now that You will reveal in our hearts that longing and the reality of our love for You. We thank You, Lord, for all that You have spoken to us, and how You indeed have not sealed the book at all but declared to us the many wondrous things that were revealed to John. Now Lord, we ask by Your Spirit that You would draw us more closely to Yourself as we prepare to leave this place. Knit our hearts together as one bride and by Your Spirit give us one voice. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. We pray in His precious name. Amen.

In the book of Revelation we are made aware that above our heads in the invisible place called the heavenlies, there is a lot of spiritual activity going on. And as the time comes closer to the end there is more and more static in the air. Satan and principalities and powers and various angelic beings are trying to discourage the saints, condemning us night and day, hindering us in whatever way they can. Of course, we are exhorted in the Scriptures time and time again to put on the full armor of God and live in Christ Jesus in His victory. There is a lot of noise in the air but there are three voices to be heard in the heavenlies as well. There is the Lord Jesus who is saying, “Behold, I come quickly.” And there is the bride along with the Spirit saying, “Come.” And there are those, maybe some of you, who have heard the Lord’s call and are responding: “Let those who hear say, ‘Come.’” These voices are also in the atmosphere, as it were.

I would like to conclude this time by trying to help us all understand that since the time we were born again, a longing actually entered into our hearts. These things are often ignored because we do not really understand ourselves. Over the years I have spoken and counseled and prayed with a lot of young people or teenagers who have truly been saved. And I

remember on one accession talking to a boy who was quite rebellious and acting out and he was giving everybody a tough time. So I took him aside and said, "What is the matter?" And he started off on his parents and this and that. And I said, "Well, you can act this way, but you are not acting in the truth." And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Because I know you and I know that you love Jesus, and I know that you have Jesus in your heart. You love Jesus and He loves you. And even though you are trying to hide it now, it does not change the reality. Inside your heart you love Jesus with all your heart." And this mad, angry young man just burst into tears and began to cry. It was as if I had exposed something, but it was real in him. And yet because of all his struggling and circumstances and his carnality, all the problems of youth, he had forgotten that, and we got back in touch with that love for Jesus. Before we were through he was praying and saying, "Jesus, you know I love You. I am so sorry." And he just carried on.

And so it is with many of us who are Christians. We are just walking along and going through this life so busy and sometimes we lose touch with something that is very seminal to our being and it is this: If you really know the Lord you long for Him. From the very moment you were born again the Spirit of His Son through you cried out: "Abba, Father." There was some kind of connection there and a longing to be with God.

The Groaning of the Creation

Paul talks about that longing in Romans 8 in terms of the creation groaning for the revealing of the sons of God, and sometimes he says it is also my body that is groaning. I want to be present with the Lord and I am groaning for the new creation. I am in metamorphosis for this something. I know we hate to use examples from movies, but there was a classic that most children knew when they were growing up and it was E.T. And a lot of Christians have forgotten: "E.T., go home." There is something in you that wants to go home; it is a longing. And the thing about a longing is that you cannot fake it. You either have it or you don't. And I am convinced that there are Christians who really do not know the Lord yet; they think there is something better. But the more you get to know the Lord the more you long for Him.

How Long? How Long?

As I was meditating on what to share, this phrase came to me: "How long? How long?" Did you notice it in the psalm we read: "How long?" I discovered that the person who says, "How long" the most is the Lord Himself. Our God is longsuffering and the most frequent speaker of this word, "How long?" You remember when the three disciples and Jesus went down the mountain and saw that demon possessed boy and nobody could do anything about it. Jesus just sighed and said, "How long must I bear with this wicked and unbelieving generation? Bring that boy to Me." Everything that Jesus did was against the tide, against the stream of a generation that was unbelieving and wicked. "How long do I have to bear with this?" He said. And how many times the Lord has spoken to Israel and said, "How long? How long do I have to put up with this?" The Lord is longsuffering; nobody suffers as much as the Lord does. One day we may understand that longsuffering patience, but it will only be as He works that same kind of longsuffering in our hearts. Even part of the reason we are waiting right now for the Lord to come back is that this character trait of longsuffering might be fully developed in us.

On the first level, of course, it is the Lord who said, “How long” the most, but then we have a number of prayers of brothers and sisters and saints who are crying, “Oh Lord, how long will I pray and you do not answer me? How long will I be in this fix and You do not show up?” Have you ever had that kind of prayer: “Oh Lord, how long I have prayed! I have wept until I have no more tears and still You do not answer.”

Nobody said, “How long, Lord, till you answer me,” more than David. David was about as impatient as you and I. In Psalm 74:9-10 he says this: “We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, nor is there any among us who knows how long. How long, O God, will the adversary revile, and the enemy spurn Your name forever?”

So this “how long” sounds like a complaint.

Psalm 80:4-5 is a wonderful psalm of Asaph. What a wonderful prophetic understanding of God’s love and discipline. “O Lord God of hosts, How long will You be angry with the prayer of Your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and You have made them to drink tears in large measure.”

The Higher Prayer for ‘How Long’

That is the second frequent reference to “how long”. Yet there is a higher “how long” in a third category as I would put it. Some saints, who beyond themselves and their own complaint, are actually praying something like this: “Lord, how long until Your righteousness is revealed? How long until Your glory is shown? How long until Your city is built again? How long until Your people can join and worship together?” They are seeing and asking the Lord how long until they can say, “There is our God and He is winning and He is glorious”?

Zechariah, who is a wonderful prophet right at the end of the Old Testament, says this: “Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, how long will You have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which you have been indignant these seventy years?’” (1:12)

And the Lord said, “I am glad somebody asked Me. I am so jealous for Jerusalem, but when was somebody ever going to say that: “How long, oh Lord, until Jerusalem is restored? And God says, “Thank you, thank you. I am so jealous for Jerusalem.” Isn’t that wonderful! Sometimes we need to lift ourselves beyond our own desires and pray something a little higher. And as we read earlier I believe those martyrs under the altar wanted something more than just revenge. They were not saying, “Oh Lord, how long until You avenge us and we watch our enemies dying in a pool of blood.” No, “Lord, how long before righteousness has its day. How long will it be?” And the Lord says, “Quiet, rest a little longer; believe it or not you are going to have to suffer some more because there are others who are going to die for the faith along with you.” It is an amazing statement, but there is a longing on yet a higher level, higher than all these things when there is a heart that loves the Lord and cries out: “Oh Lord, how long?” That is the highest cry. Above circumstances, above things being rectified, “Lord, how long?” And I have never heard a song that so expresses just sheer love for the Lord than our brother Nee’s song: “Since Long Ago” but actually it should be, “Lord, how long?” That was really his heart.

The More You Know Him the More You Long for Him

So I want to look at this emotional longing. It is found among those as I said who know the Lord. Do you know the Lord? Have you seen Him more and more? Have you known Him and His saving love for you? Have you known Him in His Lordship? Have you taken His yoke upon you and learned things of Him? Oh, the more you know Him, the more you long for Him. I want to put this longing in two simple phases although it all goes together. There is a front end of longing which would be best interpreted as the eager desire of a lover who once having been loved or promised love longs eagerly for it again. It is an eager longing which is the front end. It is like the final words of the bride in the Song of Solomon: "Hurry, my beloved." That is eager waiting.

We find this also in Philippians 3. Those who long for the Lord and love the Lord have realized that their citizenship is in heaven and so Paul says, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (v. 20).

Eagerly Waiting for the Lord

This is our latest dock right here. We have been stationed on earth, but we know where our real home is. We cannot wait for the Lord to show up and relieve us of our duty. We are all in this embassy; we are all citizens of heaven; and we all know it even though we are living on earth. Won't it be wonderful when heaven joins with earth in the new Jerusalem!? And for these things we eagerly wait.

In Hebrews 9 we find this again: "So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him" (v. 28). He is going to come back for those who eagerly wait for Him.

Then in Titus chapter 2: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (vv. 11-14). That is wonderful; we eagerly wait.

From Eager Waiting to Long Suffering

From the moment we have been kissed by the Lord, from the moment we realize how much He loves us, we wait for the fulfillment. We eagerly wait for Him to come. But as time stretches out, eagerness changes. I am sure you cannot fault them in the first apostolic century when they said the Lord was going to return. They thought it was certainly going to be within two or three years; and they died in that eager waiting. We have been waiting a little longer than a few years, and actually the saints themselves, John included, found that this longing actually changed in its composition from eager waiting to longsuffering because longing begins as an eager desire, but with time it becomes a suffering that is waiting and waiting and waiting.

Those of you here who have lost a spouse, a daughter, a son, even mom or dad or a grandmother you loved, there is a longing that involves suffering. You will never be satisfied until you see them again. I know a number of my own family who have gone on to be with the Lord and I will never be fully satisfied until I see them face to face again.

I actually remember being in Seattle and I was preparing to preach on “How long oh Lord until You return?” The night before I was to speak on Sunday I got a phone call that my sister who was forty years old had died giving birth to her sixth child. She was a missionary far out in a remote place and hemorrhaged and died before they could get proper help to her. And this sense “how long” came with unusual force to my heart. How long before I see my younger sister again? There is that longing that must suffer because it waits long. And the same applies when you have known the Lord for a long time. There is a certain aspect in which there is a suffering because you have been together through so much and so many things with the Lord and you long for Him. This longing goes beyond doctrine, beyond songs, even beyond utterings in prayers. What can you do? There is a longing.

Paul sounded almost relieved in one of his final statements he made in II Timothy 4. You remember how he said, “I fought the fight; I have run the race, and I have kept the faith, and now there is a crown of righteousness laid up for me and for all those who love His appearing” (see vv. 7-8). In those days of II Timothy there was much compromise in the church and there were faithful ones who were suffering for their faithfulness to the Lord. But Paul was assuring them that their cry for the Lord was indeed a good work. Did you know that to love the Lord’s appearing is a good work? It is something of faith; it is something of love; it is something of hope.

To love the Lord’s appearing is such a wonderful thing, and so we come simply to ask this important question: “How can we keep our hearts eagerly longing and waiting for the Lord? I know that is where most of you are because you would not be here if you just wanted to hear some good messages. You are hungry for meat and you have received some meat this week; thank God for that. And you have a hunger and a longing for a fulfillment that has not yet come. Now how can you keep this waiting alive?

Now I know that every servant of God, every brother and sister who truly love the Lord have known times when their heart has grown cold. I wish somebody had a perfect record on this, but I have never found one yet. However, there are some thieves around that want to rob us of that longing for the Lord, and I will mention just three.

Keeping Our Hearts Eagerly Longing and Waiting for the Lord

Busyness

Busyness is a great robber of longing and love. I know some marriages that have been destroyed just because of busyness. It is not that the people did not love one another; they were just too busy to build love and something went wrong. And there is a busyness among Christians today that I have to say causes most of them to have little time to realize this longing in their hearts. I think one thing that can be said about the church of Ephesus was that they had gotten so busy being Christian that they had lost the dynamic of first love as the motive for doing those Christian things. It is possible for a church to get so busy that the brothers and

sisters do not have time even for devotions. They are always preparing a message or visiting somebody in the hospital, and they do not have a personal devotion to the Lord. They do not even have a time when they say, "Jesus, I love You," or sing one of the simple songs like the kids. They do not have time for that anymore. This is grown-up Christianity—just busyness, busyness. What a robbery! Don't be robbed by busyness.

Worldliness

Of course, worldliness is another thing that dulls us. And it is very simple because our treasure is on earth. We keep trying to polish up that old rusty treasure on earth, that old jalopy, instead of storing up treasures in heaven. Worldliness really does a number on our longing for the Lord because there is a certain shame that comes in there. The Lord is a very honest Person; I find Him so. And if you go to Him and say, "Lord, you know I love this world more than what I see of Your kingdom in the Word. The Kingdom of God in the Word seems a little restrictive. I think I like the United States better. I have a pleasant life; I have a nice wife, kids, one and a half cars, and a dog." Just go on and admit it; it's okay. Especially for young people, they still have before them college, career, marriage, kids, a dog and family. All that is for them to realize those things do not satisfy. But go on and believe the world's hype; it is advertising all the time: "This is all you need to be happy." And it is usually some drug that tells you that you can have a fatal episode by taking this. So if you are a young person and you say, "You know I love this world, I like going to this school, and all this." Just be honest with the Lord and then say to Him: "But Lord, would you sensitize my heart so that I can understand the beast behind the world."

The world does a bait and switch. That is when a used car salesman says, "I have a car here which is just what you need for a thousand dollars." When you get there, he says, "Oh, I am sorry; I sold that one. I have one here for ten thousand." The world continually tells you a whole lot of lies. Just about the time you are going to get that promotion or that bonus the boss says, "Well, I need another eighty hours a week out of you." It is meant for bondage. The world lies and even if it gives you a lot of worldly possessions, it is out to dull you. And one of the things that you lose is your longing for the Lord.

Discouragement in Tough Times

The third thing I will mention is that some people get really discouraged in tough times. Some people do not get married and they want to. Their job did not work out like they wanted or the vocation they were hoping for did not materialize; there were many plans and hopes. We are planners and hopers, but we have been lied to by our worldly parents who say, "You can do anything you want." No, you cannot. Some people get very discouraged and disappointed, and actually a number of these people have been very faithful.

I often tell the story when I was a pastor in the denominational church. It was my first experience of sharing with people and trying to shepherd the sheep. Then one day when I was shepherding the sheep, I got sheep bit. Now who would ever think that sheep would bite the shepherd? That was just the beginning of my problems when I was in that business. But the whole point is that many times people who serve the Lord get disappointed, even offended,

and their hope dims. They do not know whether they have a longing for the things of God because they have been offended in some way. These are the kind of things that sometimes can affect this longing.

The Key to Keeping the Incense Burning

There is a key to keeping the incense burning. It is usually discovered in a Christian's life somewhere between the early stages of that eager longing and the entering into longsuffering. Something happens in the middle, but there is a key that keeps your spirit fresh and your longing alive. And what is that key? It is "Christ in you the hope of glory." Sometimes when we talk about this whole thing of waiting for the coming of the Lord, watching and praying, waiting, are you saying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come." If not repent. Sometimes this waiting for the Lord, even longing for the Lord, even loving the Lord can be misinterpreted as some kind of a work. "I have to commit myself; come on, honey, slap me. I think I am falling asleep. I cannot fall asleep, I have to love the Lord. How can I love the Lord? Give me ten steps in how to love the Lord." We think it is a work: "I have to wake up; I have got to watch and pray. I keep hearing 'watch and pray.'" You watch and then you snore. Then you say, "This is not working; I am losing my way. I know I will be in that second group that does not get taken."

Christ in You the Hope of Glory

The truth is that the longing and longsuffering is not really yours to keep up. It is Christ in you crying out to the Christ of glory. It is the Holy Spirit dwelling in you who wants to be reunited, as it were, in the fullness of Christ. There is a great mystery here when we talk about the Spirit and the bride saying, "Come." Now you know the Holy Spirit is God which means He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. There is no limitation with the Holy Spirit, and yet because of His responsibility, which is to perfect the bride, He has voluntarily in some fashion, even as Jesus did, suffered long in bearing in the body of Christ. But He longs to be free to express Himself through the saints. There is a longing that the Spirit has in this whole matter. That is why the Spirit and the bride say, "Come," because the Spirit feels so restricted in the body of Christ. He feels quenched sometimes; He feels grieved sometimes; He feels like He has been slighted sometimes; He feels like the Lord is not being honored; He gets offended when Jesus is not the Head over us. But in the midst of the whole thing He longs for that which the Father has longed for and which the Son desires. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are longing for the church to be ready, and so it is the spirit in you, Christ in you, that is the key to that burning desire. If you realize that He dwells within you and He has this passion and desire, how it will help you in your life.

The Buoyant and Joyful Life in Paul

There are so many titles you could give to this wonderful letter of Paul to the Philippians. Many times he talks about Christian joy and things like that. It seems to me that the testimony of Paul in Philippians is this: "I have joy and buoyant overcoming life in me." We have to remember that Paul wrote this letter when he was in a decrepit situation. He was completely bound from any traveling and working and all he was able to do was pray for the saints and

write a letter as he was in prison. How could he be so buoyant? And how could he overcome the discouragement and being bound in prison and still long for the Lord? He says, “The way is: Christ is my life. I had rather go and be with Him, but I guess I need to stay here for your sake because that is what the Lord seems to indicate to me. But whatever, it is this buoyant life in me. I have all things in Christ that I need.” He had found the well-spring, and it kept that burning alive as we see in Philippians.

In Philippians 1 we hear and think of these things in terms of our own perfecting and rightly so. “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (v. 6).

In Philippians 2:12: “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

The Alpha and Omega Lives in God’s People

The hope that you have of longing and waiting and keeping that incense burning for the Lord is because the Alpha and Omega lives in you. The Alpha—He who began a good work in you will be the Omega who finishes it in you. The problem with the Colossians was that most of them were Gentiles. They were looking at the Jews who seemed so much further along. And then there were Jews who were believers and had gnostic ideas of angels and a whole kind of system of religion, and they felt like they were far behind them. And Paul said, “Don’t be deceived by all of that stuff. Your hope is that Alpha and Omega is in you. Christ is in you. Have you been saved? Now walk in Him. You will get to see the boundaries of Christ more and more and you will see all that He has done. Paul reveals what I call the macro-cosmic and micro-cosmic Christ. Micro-Christ in you, macro-Christ over all, and we are in that. What a revelation! But that is your hope.

What is your hope for being faithful to the end? Are you just one of those Christians who can do it? Now there are some who can’t, but not you. You have will power and you are going to do it. I do not think you have much hope. But the person that realizes that he does not have much hope finds that there is One within him who is very hopeful, and it is His life that keeps stirring up that longing if you will let Him do so. So Paul rejoiced in this Philippian letter because the Lord kept stirring something up in him, something towards life, and something that made him long for the Lord Himself.

Let’s look at a few practical examples of what I am trying to say. If you are willing to look away from yourself, even deny yourself, strangely you may discover a life within, a life that helps that longing turn into faith. Now longing can go one of two ways. Longing can get into you and become full of self-pity. Or longing can be turned into faith and bring you closer to the Lord. It depends on whether you understand that life which is living within you.

Speaking to Our Soul

Psalms 42 and 43, which in many Hebrew manuscripts, are actually just one psalm. In Psalm 42 we see that famous verse 1, which was one of the most famous songs in Christendom in the twentieth century. “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O

God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" What a longing there is there. But we see that there is something that seems to be contradictory to this. Look at verse 5: "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence."

We see this taken up in verse 11 once again. "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God."

Then in Psalm 43 which is possibly the continuation of Psalm 42: "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" (v. 5).

Now let's make the basic point here. Sometimes your soul gets down. "Why are you cast down, oh my soul?" Sometimes your soul is panting but maybe for the wrong reason. I remember back in the "charismania" days in the early seventies that there were people desperate to get baptized in the Holy Spirit. And they were searching for something outwardly so much that they were straining and striving and tarrying, and they could not get there for the very striving of it. There is such a thing as being a deer whose soul is panting for the water so much that somebody has to stop that soul before he conks out and faints. And who can stop a panting soul? "I am desperate; oh God, I am desperate. Where are You, God? I need You, God." "Shhhhhh." Who said that? The Spirit of God within. "Come drink of the waters within." Who talked to David's soul? "Why are you in despair O my soul?" Who is talking to him? Is that David being like the good cop and the bad cop? In a way it is, but actually it is something deeper. David had found his spirit and his spirit knew that God was going to come through, and he rose in faith and talked to his soul.

Have you given your soul a good talking to? This is the problem. In longsuffering there are some people born to melancholy like the sparks that fly downward. Give somebody a week and they are down in the dumps. "How are you doing, brother?" "Well, not so good." This is such a melancholy, a discouraged person, a downcast person that they usually go to at least twelve people for counseling, receive twelve different prescriptions to take to the apothecary and receive no help at all until they hear a voice from within saying, "Why are you cast down, soul? What is the matter with you that you have to be all cast down?" Has God forgotten him? Hope in God, and suddenly you realize you will yet see. Hang in there, be patient, the Lord is coming. You need to speak to your soul.

David Strengthened Himself in the Lord

One of the most wonderful passages to me in the Old Testament is at the end of I Samuel where nothing could be bleaker. Saul and Jonathan are dying; everything is falling apart and it is just before David becomes king. David and his band of mighty men had gone off to fight, and while they were gone the Philistines came to Ziklag where their wives and children were staying, burned the city down, took the children and wives and ran off. Now when David and his soldiers returned, they saw what had happened. All their wives and children were gone and it says that the mighty men thought about killing David because they were so angry. They were actually serving David and, as a result, they lost their families. David did not know it yet, but he

lost his wives as well. But it says in I Samuel 30:8, "And David strengthened himself in Jehovah." How on earth do you strengthen yourself? This is not one of the jingles from Broadway that says: "Pick yourself up; brush yourself off." How do you strengthen yourself in Jehovah? You do some talking with the Lord: "Lord, I have been serving You and we have come to this, but I trust You, Lord. I have gone this far with You and I am not going to quit now." And somehow he strengthened himself in the Lord and sure enough they found their families miles down the road. The Malachites were having a party and were all drunk, so David and his men got their families back.

Sometimes you need to strengthen yourself in the Lord or you just get discouraged. That longing is in your heart for the Lord, but you get so discouraged that you do not realize what is there, but the spirit within you, Christ in you is that hope of a rebound of a buoyancy in learning this. So there is an important principle here which I will just underscore for a moment or two.

Longsuffering Needs to be Turned into Faithful Service and Worship

The important and great principle is this: Longing even longsuffering needs to be sublimated, turned into faithful service and worship. No more "Why are you cast down, O my soul." When you realize that your soul is cast down, here is what you say. "Praise God, glory to God; You are altogether worthy. I will not allow my soul to speak bad of my God." You take a step of faith and you find the Spirit restoring you. Longsuffering can get maudlin; it can get nostalgic; it can get melancholy; it can drive you into paralysis and make you think you are a failure and you might just as well wait for the three and a half years. And all the time there is One in you who can overcome. There is One in you who can overcome your melancholy, your discouragement and all of that, but you need to turn it, actively turn it. I know this may sound trite but sometimes you just have to speak words of faith with your mouth. Sometimes you have to stand up in your living room and say: "God, You are on my side and I side with You; I bow before You as my Lord over this issue." It is a fight turning these things into faith, but thank God we have the Holy Spirit within us.

To me there is no better example than the song we just sang from our brother Nee. He could have gotten frightfully morose with such thoughts but actually what brother Nee was doing was turning his longing and his sense of lack, his void, his sense of being in exile, all those things that are the stripping of the cross by faith into a song. He did not keep it in a minor key; he sang it like Danny Boy, a great old Irish song. And after talking about the lonely vigil and the exile and the stripping and the tears and the suffering, he said he was seeking a better country, and he was going to join with others who were crying out as well. If we are going to change this attitude from passivity, from hopelessness, then we are going to stand together and say, "Lord, we realize there is no fulfillment in the world until You come back. The happiest of days has a cloud because you are not here." Your happy marriage, your happy children, your successful job, the blessings that you have, that wonderful vacation, whatever it is, there is still a void. Do you sense it? Then say, "Lord, it is You that I want. Thank You for all these things; but I want You." That is what brother Nee did. Do you sense in that song that He was suffering? Absolutely. Do you sense in that song that he was stuck suffering? Absolutely not!

I do not know why the Lord likes to do this, but it is often in a discouraging moment when things have not gone well, when we feel like the world is getting darker and darker and there is

not much plan or purpose, and our families are even falling apart, that the Lord says, "My son, do this for Me." It may be some little thing such as calling somebody, talking to somebody; there is some little obedience. But you are so totally discouraged that you wonder how you could possibly help somebody when you need so much help. Have you ever been in that place? It is totally dry and you are to the place where you have pretty much summed up that things are quite hopeless. "I think I am going to die before the Lord comes back." And the Lord says, "Just go do that."

Know that the World Will Not Satisfy the Longing within You

It is just like Elijah, sitting in the cave: "Oh Lord, I am so zealous for You; that is why I am sitting here." And the Lord says, "No, no, get down the hill." "No, I want to complain a little longer." Isn't that us? Doesn't Elijah find us out? And the old cave mood? And the Lord says to him to go down and anoint that guy, and Elijah does it and he comes out of his mood.

There is a longing in our hearts. What are you going to do about it? Sometimes there are some people who love the Lord so much and this world is really beating them up so bad. What are you going to do? There is a life within you that wants to cry out: "Lord, I see that this world will not satisfy my heart."

I am sorry for the wives that believe marriage was going to satisfy them. Marriage is a wonderful thing; but you know my wife found out a long time ago that I do not completely satisfy her. Now can she make that shift and say, "Lord, it is because that final top stone is You. I have a marriage but it is not perfect; nevertheless, You are the perfect marriage." We can admit that everything on this earth falls short because of our corruption and because that is just the way it is, but it is not enough unless you transmute it and you say, "Lord, that is what I learned today. You are my everything. I am running after You."

Let's take one final look at Paul in Philippians 3. He is in jail, and he does not know whether he will get out in the future or not, but here is what he says: "I may be in jail; I wish I could be out and see the saints. How I love the saints. I wish I could visit you there in Philippi; I do not know whether it is going to happen or not, but this is what I do. I forget what lies behind me; I set my eyes on the goal and I am running for what I know will fulfill my life. I was an apostle and a lot of the apostles left me while I was in jail. Some went into the world and some thought I was too fanatical." I do not know what happened, but sometimes Paul was left all alone. He says, "That is okay; that is what men do, but I can run after Jesus and He will never leave me alone." This is somebody who has learned.

Turning Your Sorrow into Hope

I was really touched by a good preacher who has now passed away. His name was Paul Bilhimer and he wrote a wonderful book: "Destined to the Throne". But he wrote another little book for those who were grieving. You know my wife and I lost our son when he was eighteen years old, and this book he wrote "Don't Waste Your Sorrows" really helped me make that change, sublimate my crushed heart.

Do you have sorrow? Don't waste it on yourself. Turn it into hope. Pray: "Lord, I will see my son one day face to face. Set that hope and that longing in the right direction. Don't let these

things turn in on you all the time—your sorrows, your struggles, and your failures. They will kill you. But there is a Spirit who dwells within you and says, “Turn that around.” What is He telling you? He is telling you that you only have satisfaction when you are with the Lord and with the saints in the holy place. I will see my son again, my mom and my sister. That makes me happy; so I can live today. You never get over the emptiness, the sense of loss, but for you to burn your life out in despair is no excuse for it. So I say one final time: Repent. “Christ in you the hope of glory.”

That Burning Life within Will Say ‘Go Home’

It is true we need to repent; it is true we need to deal with ourselves; it is true that we need to turn from sin; it is true we need to turn our backs on the world. All of these things are exercises of self-denial and exercises toward holiness. But in the end that is not what is going to keep you. Do you have that burning Life within that is saying, “Go home.” Do you long to be with your Savior? That longing lives within you and especially those of you who have come to know the Lord, truly know the Lord. You know that you have that longing. If you let the Spirit fan it into flame in practical ways in your life, turn discouragement and problems into an upward direction, you will find yourself in that party who gains the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, it is so good to be with people who love the Lord and know the Lord and long for the Lord. It is so wonderful to hear people sing a song with conviction in their hearts. Fan that into flame by the Spirit who dwells within you. That Christ within you longs for Christ in fullness, Christ uninhibited, the Spirit free to be Lord in the body of Christ and to cry out: “The Spirit and the bride together say, ‘Come.’” What a wonderful prayer that is and may the Lord quickly answer.

Lord, we do pray and thank You so much that You have turned us and taught us and You have given us a longing in our hearts that is really not our own. We are so thankful that the Alpha and Omega lives within us and He intends to complete that which He has begun if we will listen and respond to that Life within. Oh, how we thank You for all the work Your Holy Spirit has done this week and we do pray that the end result will be that that sound in heaven will be clear: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come,’ for Christ’s sake and the sake of His coming we pray. Amen.

