The Catastrophe of Following Jesus Part 1
By Dr. Steve Porter

Announcer:

Let me introduce our speaker, uh Dr. Steve Porter. He's uh actually a professor of theology here and-and philosophy at Biola University. He primarily teaches in the Institute for spiritual formation and as well at Rosemeade School of Psychology teaching clinical psychologists integration of psychology, philosophy, and theology. Dr. Porter uh came to Biola and he had his bachelor's degree in Christian Ed and then he went to Talbot and got a master's degree in philosophy, and from there he went to USC to study under Dr. uh Willard in PhD and philosophy. But on the way he decided um to take another detour he-he he didn't have enough education so he went to Oxford and got a master's degree in philosophical theology and then came back to finish the doctorate with Dallas Willard. We- part of the hiring of uh Dr. Porter was we wanted to bring to spiritual formation kind of the integrity of a philosopher and a theologian to bring that rigour, and yet also with the heart to to spirituality, and so, uh that's why at Talbot at the institute, and at Rosemeade, um it's a real privilege to have him as I think of Steve, Dr. Porter I think primarily of as a theologian as a philosopher as someone interested in spirituality, I think of probably three words. I think of honesty, sincerity, and clarity. And so I just want to offer our own hearts to the Lord that we might be honest with him and that with clarity we might open our hearts to the Lord. So let's welcome Dr. Porter.

Dr. Porter:
You know John-John talked about emotional chastity last week for those of you who were here and John and I's relationship kind of reached a new level today, uh because he kissed me earlier today um. I uh I've John I have gone to some conferences together and-and I hear him on the phone with his wife and daughter, you know or in some other city and he's calling them and he's saying goodbye his wife. [imitates kissing] I love you. [imitates kissing] And there's this constant kissing [imitates kissing] over the phone. Well today, I-I ran into John on campus and uh he was riding his bike and took to his office and we exchanged you know greeting and hello and then he was taking off and he said "Well see you". And I heard him go [imitates kissing]. So I-I thought I got I got kissed by John Coe. This is, I feel like we've entered a new plane.

Well it's good to be here. I've uh I've attended this lecture series myself many many years ago. I've uh in recent years helped plan them, and now I'm on the docket and I don't know if that's a promotion or not. The pay hasn't increased but uh. So the theme is spiritual formation in real life, and and Willard talked about pornography, that's pretty real life topic. John talked about kind of romance relationships. Um I'm going to talk about catastrophe: the catastrophe of following Jesus. How-does anyone not have a handout? I think there's a I don't know if the handout-does anyone not need a handout? If you don't you-raise your hand, there's some handout, uh there's a handout person coming through with some handouts so if you didn't get a handout, just a one page thing and it might help you-I'm going to do a lot up here on uh PowerPoint as well, so keep your hands raised if you need a handout.

So where's this topic come from. i-i-i Henry Nouwen wrote a book called 'In the Name of Jesus' and in the introduction to his book he says something to this effect. He says "I-I have to trust that
how the Holy Spirit is working in me, in some way resonates with how the Holy Spirit is working in you. And it's kind of in that uh spirit that I that I have come to this topic tonight, that this is something that God I think has been working on in me, uh in recent years and months and and I and I trust and hope that it somehow connects with your uh spiritual life too. Let me give you a little example of that: a few months ago, I was talking with a friend of mine and-and I was talking about my spiritual life, and I said, "you know one of the things that's that's going on here is I-I feel like I'm discovering that some of what I thought were my virtues are actually my vices. Some of the things that I thought were the best parts of me, I'm discovering are maybe some of the worst parts of me." And let me give you an example of that. uh I don't know if my my wife was coming in I don't know if she's here yet-oh yeah she's there in the back, uh with our five month old so she'll probably be not here the whole time.

But a while back, Alicia and I've been married for about 10 years, a little over 10 years actually, and a while back, um, well let's go back to beginning when we first got married, okay. I-I I thought, well, I'm going to serve my wife, right? Scripture says we're supposed to love our wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for the church. I'm going to serve my wife, I'm going to love my wife-wife sacrificially. And I start out our marriage with much uh gusto in loving and serving my wife. And-and-and part of that for me meant you know I-I was trying to to meet her needs in various ways and whether that was a-a cup of water, uh before we went to bed at night getting a cup of water for her, or changing my schedules to fit with her schedule so we could spend more time together, or uh or just putting her needs first and deferring to her on various issues. I tried to sacrifice for her, right? That's service.
And when I first started out in our marriage I did that with a lot of, uh, cheerfulness and-and-and energy and enthusiasm. But I noticed as the years went on, my cheerful service became a little bit more reluctant service. I still did it but not with the same zest. And as the years went on I noticed that that reluctance turned oftentimes to resentment and I would still go get that cup of water before bed, but it was oftentimes with some grumbling or just a lot of internal, kind of 'why don't you get it yourself', you know? And-and-and I noticed it, and Alicia noticed it, and I began to really ponder what-what's going on here? How-how come my my service and love of my wife is not flowing from me so easily? And as I began to reflect on that, uh-uh an experience that we had fairly early on our marriage came back to my mind, and I can remember this was this was a night uh and it was late, it was about eleven o'clock we had gone to bed, I-I was just about ready to fall asleep. I remember Alisha turning to me and she said, "Steve I'm having trouble falling asleep, I-I kinda feel like I need to talk about something. Could we could we talk about something?" So-so I-I kind of you know peeled myself off the pillow so I knew if I remained laying down I would not stay awake, so I sat up and kind of opened my eyelids and tried to focus in and and listened and there was something going on at work and I remember what it was but she shared it. And-and you know 20 minutes later as she shared and I don't know what I said, but I said something.

I just remember she said, you know, "thanks. That was really helpful. I feel better now. I think I can go to sleep now, I-I feel better about this." And-and then as I was, you know, laying my head back down, I remember she said, "Steve thank you for doing that, you're so selfless" right? And as I was trying to pat myself on the back while I was, you know, laying my head down, I remember thinking to myself just before I kind of faded off into, you know, La La Land, um that
"Steve? The whole time you were listening to Alicia, you were thinking to yourself 'I hope this gets over soon, so I can go back to sleep. And if I pay attention, then we can get through it quicker, and at least I don't have to deal with it in the morning.' right? And what she experienced as selflessness was actually pretty ugly. That actually I was listening more for my own needs and for my own self than I was for her. And that's that's an example of of various revelations in my life that things that Alicia saw in me as a virtue, right? My my sacrificial giving things that friends of mine would have said "Oh yes Steve that you do that well", actually I'm realizing no this is an area of weakness. This is an area of ugliness, of brokenness, of selfishness in my life.

And this friend I was talking to about this he said "you know that reminds me of a of a quote from Kirkegaard" and he paraphrased the quote something like this uh "if you're going to follow Jesus, you better be ready for personal catastrophe". And that phrase hung with me, now Kierkegaard's quote was actually slightly different than that, as I searched for it. But it's the spirit is right. Kirkegaard says "nothing is more certain: coming close to God brings catastrophe. Everyone who's life does not bring relative catastrophe has never even once turned as a single individual to God." Then he has this analogy with touching a generator. I haven't been around generators too much, I guess Kirkegaard knew what it was to touch uh touch generators, I trust him, that it is it is impossible to do not have catastrophe as it is to to touch conductors of a generator and not get shocked.

But this began me thinking about 'what does it mean, uh to enter into personal catastrophe in our relationship and discipleship to Jesus.' So what I want to talk about tonight are really three,
kind of separate parts of my talk. And-and-and the first one is is, and this is kind of all building on this theme of catastrophe, but the first one is: the benefits of following Jesus. The benefits of following Jesus. And then I want to return to this topic of of the catastrophe of following Jesus, what is that. Then lastly, I want to I want to bring try to bring it together with with uh-uh the role of weakness in following Jesus and in St Paul's theology of weakness. And-and so I'm going to really have three parts to my talk, we'll take a break between the second and third part, but just to prepare you, at the conclusion of each of these three parts, we're gonna sing a song together, and I-I have a, a friend to-to help us do that so. So when that time comes you can be prepared for it.

So first I wanna talk about the benefits of following Jesus, because really the-the-the real catastrophe, right, is is to not follow Jesus. This is what Willard calls 'the cost of non-discipleship'. Of course the-the real loss, the real catastrophe, would-would-would be to not follow Jesus. And-and so I-I want to stress that yes, there is great goodness in following Jesus. In fact, the-the Christian life is the good life. We're gonna look at a bunch of texts, biblical texts, here in a second that that I think make this point. But but this is this is important right it's important to see that life with Christ is actually the best life for us. Because if we don't see the Christian life as the good life, we're liable not to desire it. We're liable not-we it seems that it's part part of our psychology as human persons that that we tend to desire those things that we think are good. And so it's a real question: do we actually think that the way of Jesus is the good life, it's the best life for us. Well it seems that scripture holds it up as if it is I'm gonna throw a bunch of uh-uh texts at you we're not gonna spend a lot of time with this but you can look up here. Blessed is the man who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. This person is like a tree
planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when he comes, for its leaves remain green it's not anxious in the year of drought for it does not cease to bear fruit.

Jesus says, "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, take my yoke, take my way of life upon you and learn from me for I'm gentle and lowly in heart, you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke, my way is easy, my burden is light. John," he says "I have come, that they might have life and might have it in abundance". "Everyone who drinks of this water," he says to the woman at the well, "will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I give him shall never thirst, for the water that I give him this-spiritual life will become in him a well of water, springing up to never-ending life." And that's just not 'eternal life' in terms of duration of life, but an eternal quality of life, a never-ending source of life that Jesus says, he has living water. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" Paul says. The peace of Christ-does the peace of Christ rule in your hearts? See there's lots of things going on my heart and-and there's maybe a little peace, right? Jesus says in his sermon on the mount, "you know don't worry about your life, your clothing, what you're going to wear, what you're going to drink, what you're going to eat" right? He says "Seek first the kingdom all these things will be had unto you so therefore don't worry." You don't have to worry about anything! John says, "there's no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear." The perfect love of God should make fear a diminishing issue in our life.

The fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. That's a good life, right? I mean who wouldn't sign on for that? Jesus once again in John 15, He says "abide in me and I and you." And he says "I've told you this that my joy may be
in you and that your joy may be made full, fullness of joy. The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the spirit is life and peace. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus". And there's plenty more passages right? A life of peace, a life of rest. In fact, I have more. [laughs] "If you abide in my word, you are-" I thought-I thought that was the last one, there's more. "You're truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

Uh J.C. Ryle, who's a-a writer from really the-the 19th the early 20th century. And his book called 'Holiness' says "we must be holy because our present comfort depends much upon it. We cannot be too often reminded of this we're sadly apt to forget there's a close connection between sin and sorrow, holiness and happiness, sanctification and consolation. God has so wisely ordered it that our well-being and our well-doing are linked together. He has mercifully provided that even in this world it should be man's interests to be holy. A life of peace, a freedom of love, of patience, of joy." This is this is the-the vision of the Kingdom of God: that that that God holds out to us that Jesus holds out to us, He says this is this is the life you were made for, and once again I think it's very important to to to ask ourselves 'do I really believe that the way of Christ is the best life for me' because if I don't, I'm liable to pursue other ways. Or at least augment Jesus with other things, right? Well I'll have a little bit of Jesus, but I'll have some success too. I'll have a little bit of Jesus, but I'll have some, you know a nice house and a nice car too because, well, yeah he's something but he's not everything, is He? So the goodness of Jesus' way is is is a significant point. Um which brings us really to to the problem of miserable sinner Christianity. I mean the problem with just saying that that that Jesus has saved us to make us miserable, is that
if well if that's the case then why would anyone want this kind of life? If God is really a God of love, what else would we expect?

Wouldn't we expect that-that what--and by the way I mean that we wouldn't expect him to make us miserable-- but what else would we expect? We'd expect that that life with him is-is the best life for us. Come and follow me and I will make you miserable that that wouldn't have sold very well. And it's-it wouldn't have gone over. I can remember where I was, in fact I was I was I was walking from my car into the door of the house that I lived, when it dawned on me in my early twenties, that God's commandments were actually in my best interest. That was a realization to me I remember. I thought "oh you mean God's not up there just telling me to do things because he he likes to be in charge? He actually wants my best?" You know and of course John says that in first John, that God's commands are not burdensome. But, to be honest, they oftentimes feel burdensome, don't they? And oftentimes I think, I wonder is this is this really the good life that Jesus has on offer for us. And-and of course part of that good life as well, is that as we begin to enter into this this inner flourishing of joy and peace and kindness and patience that that is that is a witness to the watching world, right. Jesus says in John 13:35, right, "the world will know that you are my followers by your love for one another." So part of the goodness of Jesus' way is not only does it transform our lives, but but then we are that city set on the hill that will draw all people to God because people see us and they see what God is doing.

I love this quote by uh Frederick Nietzsche. It kind of gets at maybe our failure in this--you know Nietzsche was no friend to Christianity and he said of the Christians of his day, "If your belief makes you blessed then appear to be blessed. Your faces have always been more injurious
to your belief than our objections have. If these glad tidings of your Bible were written on your faces, you would not need to insist so obstinately on the authority of that book." A book was written not too recently called 'Unchristian' and it was uh basically a-a social uh research, social scientific research that was done on-with nonbelievers between the ages of 18 I think to 29 or something like that and they ask them 'what's your perception of Christians, of evangelical Christians?' And probably needless to say their perception of evangelical Christians was not love, it was judgmental, hypocritical, insensitive, right? And of course there's a there's a PR issue there, we're not portrayed very well in the media, of course there's also the the rigid resistance of unbelievers to the truth. But also I think Nietzsche and and and those 18 to 29 year olds, they're probably perceiving something: that oftentimes we don't live out the kind of life that we claim to have, and we struggle to live that out.

We can't talk about the benefits of following Jesus for too long, uh before we start to sound like we're in denial or out of touch with reality, because the truth is is that many many Christians myself included struggle to really live that kind of abundant life, right? "How are you doing today Steve?" "Oh, somewhere between perfect peace and fullness of joy, yeah." That's that's not my experience, right. Even tonight, knowing my wife and young daughter were going to be here, I found-and they you know-and-and not seeing that they were here, uh right on time, I found myself worrying. Are they OK. Did something happen. It wasn't peace, it was anxiety, it's anxiety. I'm aware right now that my son is being babysat at a home with a swimming pool and that it's hot today. And I was thinking earlier tonight 'I wonder if they'll go swimming', and my son doesn't know how to swim. [laughs] Now the person who's taking care of him knows that. But still it's anxiety. Right? You might say "well you care about your son," right? But Jesus
seems to say that I don't need to worry about that, I can trust Him with those kinds of things. So, so how do we enter more fully into the goodness of Jesus' way how do we how do we begin to experience more of this good life.

And Danny here's where I want to sing this song for the first time around, so I need to tell you something about this song, and before before we uh sing it. Um I learned this song uh from a friend, and I learned it with slightly uh different lyrics than than what it what it originally had. And so so when I thought of this song for tonight I I was I was thinking of it under the way I learned it. Then I did a search for the song and I listened to I thought "well this this is these are the wrong lyrics." Well turns out, now the right lyrics are different than the ones I learned in there. So we're singing it with a little a little bit different lyrics more or less the same but slightly altered lyrics, so we want to let you know that but Danny is going to lead us in this song and this song is gonna be kind of a refrain. So why don't you stand up, just to kind of take a moment, then we're gonna continue going. So come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light and you will find rest for your souls.

Where are the rivers of living water where is the rest and the peace and I know that we've all experienced some of it but it looks like there's more available doesn't there.

It looks like scripture holds out a vision of life where worry and fear are diminishing realities. So how do we enter more into that, and what is the catastrophe of following Jesus have to do with that. Well, I think the first thing to say here is why isn't that our experience? I mean why not when we just first came to Jesus, why weren't we just immediately filled with joy, and peace, and patience and, I mean why weren't we just immediately filled with that and it was just a unceasing
reality, right? Well I think that I think the-the key here is that we weren't ready for all of the good life of Jesus and we still aren't ready for it. That our hearts weren't ready to receive the fullness of Christ, and so our hearts aren't ready to receive the fullness of the benefits of Christ. This text from first Corinthians has been floating around in my head for a while now, and Paul here in first Corinthians uh chapter 2, and then now going to chapter 3, is is talking about how the Spirit of God is is-knows the depths of the mind of God and the Spirit of God reveals the mind of God to us, but then he says the Corinthians believers he says he says "but to you brethren I could not speak to you as as spiritual men. I had to-I had to speak to you as-as people of the flesh, as-as mere infants in Christ." He says "I had to give you milk to drink," and he uses this once again this analogy with with with infants, right? "I gave you milk to drink like an infant, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it." Some translations say you weren't ready for it. Why weren't they ready for it?

See I have I have a six month old or five and a half month old little girl and and just now she's ready for just some solids, right. At two months old if we had put a chunk of steak in front of her, she would not have known what to do with it. And if we'd tried to force feed it, it just wouldn't have worked right? She was not ready for it. She needed milk. Her her digestive system couldn't handle the meat, and Paul saying "Corinthians, you you should be ready for the meat but you're not ready for it, your your internal world is not ready for it. I'm still giving you milk. Why? Does even indeed and even now you're not ready, for you are still fleshly". They still have this, this flesh this this fallenness. They still have sin in their members. "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly? Are you not walking like mere men? Are you are you not just like an unbeliever? For when one says 'I am of Paul', another says 'I'm of Apollos' are
you not mere men?" See what are that what are the Corinthians doing? Well they're comparing themselves to each other. They're saying "well I-I follow Paul I follow Paul, they're trying to they're trying to find their value in comparison. Comparison with others is always a sure sign that we're trying to find our value in something external to ourselves, right? Am I better looking, or is she better looking. Do we have a nicer house or do they have a nicer house. Are our kids better behaved or are their kids better behaved? Well maybe my kid isn't better behaved but at least he's cuter, right?

Cost comparison of-of how do I measure up, am I smarter? Well if I'm not smarter, am I stronger? If I'm not stronger, then am I more spiritual? Right? Comparison is a huge problem in human life. And the Corinthians were dealing with it. And what does it show, it shows that our hearts are looking to find value not in God, not in Christ, but in how we measure up. And Paul says "you're not ready, Corinthians, for the meat. You're not ready to move on, because your hearts aren't ready to receive it." You're not able to receive it. Why? Because there's something else in there: your own efforts to justify yourselves, your own efforts to find value, your own efforts to to be God. And it looks like when we are full of ourselves, there isn't much room for anyone else, including God, so we're not ready for the good life because we're not ready for the fullness of Jesus. Now we're gonna come back to 'what do you what do you mean by fullness? What is that fullness thing?' We're going to come back to that.

See now, but if that's the situation, the situation is we're not ready for the good life because we're not ready to receive all of what God has for us. Then then what's catastrophe about. Well, it looks like there's a problem here with blessings and consolations. So, on the handout here, I'm
under the catastrophe of following Jesus, the problem with blessings and consolations. Um see there's a problem, if God just keeps giving us good experiences, if He keeps blessing us, there's probably going to be some tendencies in us. See if you can see these in yourself. The first one is that blessing's consolations tend to make us think that we can make it on our own. Self-sufficiency. Right? I-I-I'm amazed at how often when my life is going good, you know, I feel like I'm on top of things. How I start to think that "hey maybe I can do this. Hey I'm a pretty good guy, like I can I can handle life pretty well" right? When things are going well, we tend to think that we can do it, right. I always find myself giving lots of parenting advice when the day that my kids are behaving really well and I think "hey I'm doing pretty I'm-we're pretty good parents" right? Or lots of marriage advice when Alicia and I are doing well, right. It's amazing how when things are going well, we kind of think "hey I I'm pretty good" success tends to breed self-sufficiency.

There's this proverb that Betsy Barbour helped me find. Proverbs 30, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say 'Who is the Lord?'" See don't give me too much riches God because I might think that I don't need you. See blessings and consolations oftentimes encourage us to think that we are self-sufficient, that we can make it. They boost our ego. This is kind of what's going on with the prodigal son, right? He he thinks that he can live life apart from his father, and when things are going well and the money hasn't run out then yeah by all appearances he's doing OK. It's only when he looks down at the pig slop, right, when he suffers a little bit, that he comes to his senses. And he realizes, you know the servants are in my father's house eat better than me. And he begins that long journey home. It looks like continued blessing and consolation
oftentimes is not going to bring us closer to God. But it's going to increase our autonomy. Now not all the times, but I think for most of us that's probably going to happen.

We think we might be able to make it on our own. Someone has says "it's easier to be God than to love God", and I think consolations and and blessings, and when I say consolations I just mean good experiences, things going well. Whether that means kind of in your own spiritual life, or uh in you know in your work, in your family. There's a second problem here. Blessing's consolations tend to make us think that we deserve them, so what we might call self-righteousness. I remember um at Christmas time growing up, my wife--or my wife--my mom uh well there's a Freudian slip, my my my mom um she made a horrible mistake. See Grandma, Grandma had it right. Grandma had one of two options when it came to Christmas presents. Either she all gave us money, and so it was ten dollars, and everyone got ten dollars, or twenty dollars when, you know when we got a little bit older, or or she gave us all the exact same gift. I remember that Christmas in the 1970's where she gave us all beanbags. Now we had different colored beanbags, but we all had beanbags OK. And so Grandma was smart.

My mom, uh she did it differently. She had us make Christmas lists. We asked for things, and she would look at our list and she would try to buy some things off our list. Then also, she would bump into things that she thought maybe it would be nice for us to have and she might buy a couple of those. And then also she might think of things that we really needed, right. And so she'd buy some things that she thought we needed. Well what that meant I had four older, uh three other older sisters one older brother, is that come Christmas time, things could be very inequitable, [laughs] okay? Some people might have done really well, right they asked for certain
things that mom happened to find, she bumped into some things that that uh she you know that she thought they would like, uh maybe she had some ideas of what they needed. So, sister Susan might have got quite a bit of presents and Stephanie and Sherry by the way we all start started with S's, so they're all S's. But Scott and Steve right. So, so every Christmas. Guess what we did as we were opening our presents. We're looking around, right? What what what did Scott get? We're comparing right.

We're comparing because somehow, I even went home for Christmas at last Christmas and I found myself still doing it. I thought this is weird I'm still I'm still I'm still looking over at my brother going what did you what did you get? I got three pairs of socks you got boxers I don't know. I mean I think I'd rather have boxers, and I think part of it, part of it, was that somehow if I got more, that meant I was better. That meant they loved me more. And if I got less, then maybe that person's better, right? That somehow getting good things in life means that I deserve them. Yeah that's right. Right? Someone's finally noticing me. I'm a good guy, right? Self-righteousness: the attempt in our own power to to to be good, and and we think oftentimes when things go well that somehow it was because of us.

My uh, one of my brother-in-laws and his wife uh recently got given a minivan. A nice minivan. They they had they had their third child, and they couldn't fit all the kids in the car. And so someone knew of their need and said we'll trade you cars, we'll take your old beat up Toyota and we'll give you our minivan. That had far less mileage and was much nicer. I mean they got a good deal right? And as I was driving in the back of their minivan, I was very happy for them but you know I jokingly said "wow you guys really got blessed, you must be doing your devotions or
something." But I thought, you know, there was some truth in that statement because I think if I was honest, there was a part of me that said God where's my minivan? I want a minivan. You never gave me a minivan. Why did they get a minivan? Am I not as important as them, are they better than me? Right?

There's this tendency for blessings and consolations to make us think that somehow we're better, somehow we deserve them. I think here of of uh the story of that Jesus tells in Luke Chapter 18. You don't have to turn there. You know it. It's the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. And Jesus starts this story by saying uh "here's a parable of some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." They trusted in themselves, that's self-righteousness. They trusted in themselves for their own righteousness. He goes on and tells a story about this Pharisee right who stands up in the synagogue and says "Oh thank you God, that I'm not like these people over here, I'm not an adulterer, I'm not an extortioner, I'm not like that tax collector. I fast, I tythe. Look at all the good things, I-I'm good, God, I'm right!" And how really the blessings of the Pharisee's life, that he was, he was in perfect keeping with the law, exalted himself.

He thought he was doing it. And and of course Jesus says "You know the tax collector just beats his brass and says 'Lord have mercy on me a sinner'" and Jesus says, "You know who goes home righteous? Who goes home right with God, justified? It's the tax collector." Now we all know that story so we're not surprised by it, but can you imagine how surprised the people of Jesus' day would have been by that story? That the Pharisee who was keeping the law, to an excess, right, he was so good, and yet it's the tax collector who's cheating his people who goes
home right with God? And then Jesus says "those who exalt themselves will be humbled, but the one whohumbles himself will be exalted." And so blessing's consolations, they oftentimes lead us to think that somehow we're okay and we deserve those things, we earned them.

Third problem here with blessings: blessings consolations tend to make us think that that God exists for me, for our sakes. I was watching the movie Aladdin with my uh son recently, and I hadn't seen Aladdin for a while, right. And Aladdin gets the the genie, right. Robin Williams plays the genie, and the genie comes out, and the genie says "ah you have three wishes" right. And the genie complains about how you know everyone says that they will use their final wish to set the genie free. And Aladdin says "aw I'll use my final wish to set you free!" Right? And then the genie starts granting him his wishes. Gets his first wish, and his second wish. And now he's down to his last wish and the genie comes to Aladdin and says "So you promised you would use your last wish to set me free." Aladdin can't do it, because now that the genie has been granting him his wishes, his blessings, he doesn't love the genie that much. He needs the genie. He needs to use the genie. He can't he can't let the genie go. He can't he can't appreciate the genie for who he is and and give back to the Genie no. He needs the genie. See when God becomes our our blessing consolation machine, oftentimes we begin to think He exists for our sake. We begin to love him for what he can do for us. It it doesn't mature our love.

It doesn't mature our love, it's like the student that comes to me and says um, "You know Dr. Porter I'm I'm dating a girl, or I'm dating a guy, and we're in love. It's so fun." And I say "well well tell me about it, what do you like about her? What do you like about him?" Oftentimes something like this will come out, "I love the way she makes me feel" and I say "Oh, well, that's
a very immature form of love", right? Because after a few weeks, or maybe even only a few
days, she's not going to make you feel good anymore. And are you still gonna love her. See of
course we would all love God if He made us feel good all the time, but that's a very immature
form of love. It's what St. Bernard of Clairvaux called "Loving God for self-sake, rather than
loving God for God's sake". And it looks like blessings and consolations are oftentimes going to
keep us loving God for our sake because we need to keep getting them right. And so our love
never develops.

I think here of the rich young ruler, he runs to Jesus and says "what must I do to inherit eternal
life?" Jesus says "keep the commandments", he says "I've done that!" The text says that Jesus
looked at him and he loved him. He said "Okay well then go sell all you have all you have and
and come follow me" and he walks away sad, the text says, because he was a rich man, right? He
he he would he would wanted to follow God and he wanted to love God as long as it didn't cost
him too much. And he wasn't ready to give up his wealth to follow Jesus.

I was thinking of my son, and, you know my son is in that stage where the best thing in the world
for him is to stay at home and play in his bedroom. And so it's hard to get him to go anywhere,
right. So I bribe him, I say "Luke Luke come to the store with me I'll buy you a treat" you know
and try to make the outings fun. But I was thinking, you know if every time we go to the store, I
buy him something--I don't by the way, that that'd be a bad parent-- um but you know he would
go to the store with me every time I went, but not because he wanted to be with me, he'd go
because he'd want the gift. And so by by always giving us good things right.
Our love for God would never mature. We would just love him for what he could do. So here is where I think catastrophe comes in. It looks like blessing consolation is going to be an ineffective agent of change in our lives. And I'm going to throw some more scripture passages at you here. Sometimes I just find it fascinating to look at all the different texts that point towards the same basic reality, and all these texts have slightly something different going on, but I just wanna look at some of these together. So here's Jesus he said "if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross." All right, once-the cross was the symbol of death, right, this is the form of execution. So if you're going to deny yourself, you're going to die. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, whoever loses his life for my sake will save it, for what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits his soul."

Luke 14, "Now great crowds accompanied him and he turned and said to them 'if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, his wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple, so therefore any of you who does not renounce all, right, give up everything." That doesn't mean you necessarily have to give it all away, but just know "Jesus nothing else is as important to me as you all as you are. Well you cannot be my disciple." Dietrich Bonhoeffer says in his book 'The Cost of Discipleship', "when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." "Do you not know that you were all baptized to Christ Jesus you were baptized to his death?" Paul says, "That I may know him and the power his resurrection, may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."
Consider it all joy, right, when you encounter various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, let endurance have its perfect result. Be made perfect and complete. I love Eugene Peterson's translation of this, "Consider it a sheer gift friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure your faith life is forced out into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely, let it do let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in anyway."

First Peter: "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while if necessary you have been distressed by various trials," very similar to James's idea, "so the proof of your faith be more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire may be found a result in praise and glory. And not only this will we also exalt in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance and perseverance character and character hope and hope does not disappoint." Second Corinthians: "But we have this treasure in in jars of clay, we are weak, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus or the life of Jesus may also be manifested. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake. So the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh, so death works in us but life in you."

See what happened to the good life of joy and peace and rest.

"Therefore we do not lose heart. But though the outer man is decaying let out-yet our inner man is being renewed day by day for a momentary light affliction-" I always find that amazing, I mean here's Paul. He's been beaten within an inch of his life several times and he calls it 'light
and momentary affliction'. "Is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." Eternal weight of glory. "For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself." Now here's Paul's talking about a certain experience he had in Asia where they just about were killed. "Indeed we felt that we had received the sentence of death" that they were gonna be killed. He says, "But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." See it looks like what Paul is hinting at here is somehow catastrophe has a way of making us turn to God. Someone has said that we don't realize God is all we need until He's all we got and when He's all we got we realize He's all we need. Danny we're gonna sing this song one more time and then we're gonna take a break.

But as Danny comes up let me let me just because I want to just and I just kind of prepares for what we're going to turn to after the break. C.S. Lewis calls this "God's intolerable compliment" that He loves us so much that He wants all of us. He wants all of our hearts, and so those parts of our hearts that we want to keep for ourself, those parts of ourselves that we want to remain in control of, He says no. I want you to give those up. It's His intolerable compliment that He wants all of us. It's intolerable because it means we have to die to self. And it looks like one of the best means of getting us to die to our self-righteous, self-sufficient, self-centered way of life is catastrophe, because it opens us up to our need. It's a compliment because He loves us and He wants all of us. But it's going to be painful. And so that's what we're gonna turn to after the break. But let's sing this song one more time.