

Pursuing Passion, Part 1

By Dr. Thoennes

[Musical Introduction]

Announcer:

Let's look to the Lord in prayer. Lawrence is going to come and lead our hearts.

Lawrence:

Let's go before our father, Lord, we just come before you now, so thankful for everything you have blessed us with. We just thank you for this worship that we offer to you. We just hope that you can open our hearts and our minds and just fill this room with the Holy Spirit and just bless Dr. Thomas and what he's about to preach. Lord, we just hope that it will cut straight through to us. We thank you for Biola. We thank you for our lives. We thank you for everything that you blessed us with. Heavenly Father in the Lord's name. Amen.

Announcer:

Thank you. Oh, thank you so much. Tory, conference day two, very exciting what the spirit of God is doing on our campus. Let's thank Irene and her band for their worship again. Appreciate them so much. I think as long as I will live and I turn to Acts Chapter four, I'll always picture Simon Peter, as we saw him yesterday, so beautifully illustrated, answering the challenge of those who wanted him to silence his preaching.

I just simply cannot stop. It's more important than my life. I'll never forget that. So we're looking at data regarding pursuing the Passion of Jesus Christ. I'm excited. I know you are. Dr.

Thoennes. Come and open the word, please.

[Applause]

Thoennes:

What is a passion for Christ look like? And how in the world do you pursue it? Listen to the words of Jonathan Edwards. The greatest theologian America has ever known. Produced. A puritan, they say, the last of the Puritans, in many ways, a theologian par excellence, someone you would expect stereotypically to be cold and detached from a true spiritual connection to God. Listen to what Edwards says. Once as I rode out into the woods for my health. To walk. For divine contemplation. In prayer. Let's pause right there. How often do we do that? Just go out for divine contemplation to think about God, just to think about who he is. And to pray to him. Does it mean to pursue a passion of Christ for for Christ, sometimes it can look really simple. But we can have a very hard time doing those simple things.

He says, As I went out into the woods for my health to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view for me that was extraordinary. Of the glory of the son of God as mediator between God and man and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love and meek gentle condescension.

The person of Christ appeared so ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception. Which continued as near as I can judge. About an hour, he's not quite sure how long it lasted. Which kept me in the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be what I know, not otherwise how to express, empty, annihilated. To lie in the dust and to be full of Christ alone, to love him with a holy and pure love, to trust him, to live upon him, to serve and follow him and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure.

With the divine heavenly purity. I have several other times had views, very much of the same nature. In which have had the same effects. What a picture we have of a passion for Christ, of being so overwhelmed with the excellences of Christ, with his character, who he is, his grace, his mercy, his compassion, his greatness, his holiness, that it's overwhelming to us. We can get so used to Jesus, we've seen flannel graphs of him since we were little kids.

Doing miracles even. Miracles made of flannel. And that can make you sort of jaded to the Excellency's of Christ, man. Now, what I want to do is put out before us that sort of picture of a passion for Christ, I think because these sorts of experiences with Christ can be so few and far between. They were for Jonathan Edwards. That's what he said. He had a few of these in his life. And because they can be so in few far between and so elusive and so ultimately out of our control to manufacture, we give up any hope of experiencing Christ in that way.

And we make the Book of Acts in the Bible, a history book only, and we read about the heroes of the faith. And we think, oh, isn't it amazing how God used to work and how deeply God's people used to love him and experience him. And we check out of the process of pursuing a passion for Christ that's above mediocrity, that really is worthy of Jesus himself. And part of the problem of pursuing a passion for Christ is we forget that the Jonathan Edwards in the polls, in the Peterson, the Moses and the Davids lived long lives of tedium in between these sorts of experiences. Jonathan Edwards devoted his life to the study of God's word and helping God's people understand his word tedious study hour after hour. He devoted himself to loving his wife as Christ loved the church and he had a beautiful marriage to show for.

He was a pastor and he got kicked out of his church after standing for truth and he reached out to Indians and took a vaccination to try to stop the smallpox as an experiment that the Indians were having, and it ended up killing him. Well, he had a passion for Christ, he had an experience of Christ, but it was filled in in all the betweens with the mundane things of life. That for you,

would look like going to class. And going to chapel and going to work and reading your Bible one more time and getting on your knees one more time in the morning.

You see, the Bible in some ways can lead us astray from this understanding. It's not supposed to it tells you that there are big periods that go on between the highlights, but it gives us the highlights. It'd be way too big if it wrote about the 40 years in the wilderness threw out and and Moses 40 years in the wilderness and Jesus 30 years leading up to his public ministry, there's so much that goes on in between the highlights. So let's realize that we have experience of crisis and we pursue a passion for Christ, mostly in the normal.

Let's be devoted to that, let's have the patience for that. One of the things I love most about teaching college is I get you guys in your salad years when, you know, five course meal, the salads, the second course, you're not even in the main course yet in your dreams are out there and you're filled with passion and enthusiasm. And that can be mean. You're filled with impatience along the way.

So we need, as one preacher says, cardiac Christians. Where the heart just keeps pumping for Christ instead of just adrenaline Christians, and I love your adrenaline. But let's start to develop hearts that just keep thumping for Jesus in the midst of it all, while at the same time never letting

go of the ideal of that sort of experience of Christ in the ways we see Jesus manifesting his presence and power in the New Testament. Let's hold on to that. Yesterday, we thought about pursuing a passion for Christ through proclaiming Christ when we're overwhelmed with who Jesus is, he so takes over in our lives. We can do nothing but proclaim him, tell others of who he is.

And we saw that there's actually something about that proclamation that perpetuates Passion for Christ. It feeds on it. Increases it and we gain a deeper understanding of our great blessings we have in Christ when we give them away to other people.

Today, I want to think about pursuing a passion for Christ by obeying Christ. A passion for Christ should instill in you. A deep desire to obey him. And obedience to him fosters a deeper passion for him, because you see that he is true and good and right and worthy of following. And he reveals himself to you through simple daily obedience. Obedience. It's not a popular thing. Obedience has fallen on hard times is a great value we have, you know, when we talk about Passion for Christ, it's almost always described as these emotional overflows, which is good.

And Edwards had a right to religious affection to defend religious over emotional overflows. But you know, what Jesus said will really mark you as someone who loves him. Jesus said, if you

love me. You write poems about me. No, it's good, as that may be said, if you love me. You will have really emotional experiences all the time about me, know as much as we value and want those, Jesus said something bold and starkly simple. He said, If you love me, what did he say? You'll obey my commandments, you'll do what I say, that should make perfect sense, right?

But somehow we miss that. The Passion for Christ, love for Christ, he says. Is shown and proven fundamentally in one of the most important ways by simply doing what he says, obeying him not in a vague, general way, but obeying his commandments, which are very clear. Obeying Jesus, if you love me, you'll obey me. Let's ponder that. Let's open our Bibles to Acts Chapter 19. In Acts Chapter 19, God is establishing the church at Ephesus, you know that.

Paul is not the star of ABC's right. You know, Peter's not the star of ABC's, you know, the star of Exes. So Holy Spirit, as he exalts Christ, when he shows up, things happen. The Holy Spirit is the essential power and presence we need to pursue a passion for Christ, to proclaim Christ and to obey Christ. And so God's establishing the church offices and Paul moves in emphasis. He leads 12 men who had an incomplete understanding of the gospel of the New Testament to a full understanding that Jesus is the Messiah.

John prepared them for they come to Christ and things really start to happen. Paul moves into the synagogue, as he always did, as his savior did, and starts there and he boldly preaches and proclaims the truth. And as the Holy Spirit starts to move through the ministry of Paul, we pick it up in verse 11. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick and their diseases left them in, the evil spirits came out of them.

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus. Over those who had evil spirits saying, I adore you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims. Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Steve, we're doing this. But the evil spirit answered them. Jesus, I know. And Paul, I recognize. But who are you? And the man in whom was the evil spirit leapt on them, mastered them all. And overpowered them so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.

My friends, that's a good old fashioned button up, and that's what that is. You know, I've been beat up in my life actually a few times. But never that bad. Never saw my clothes come off. And I ran out of the house naked and bleeding. We've got a butt whipping right here and it's by. The demonic. You see, what happened here is these seven sons of skibo wanted the power pole, had they wanted the power of Christ, they were exercise, they dwelt in the spiritual realm and they had power and prestige in their society because of it.

And they wanted some of what Paul had, it was starting to take over and it was obvious he had a power that they wanted to tap into and they thought they could just use the name of Jesus like some incantation, something they could just throw out there as if it were just a word and not a person. And so they throw out the name of Jesus expecting to have the power pull had without the person Paul had, and that doesn't work.

And they got themselves into something they had no idea they were getting into. A power well beyond their understanding and they got beat up for it. What do we find out in this passage? A couple of important things, what I just said, there's no power without the person. I just, you know, please learn to go to the word of God with reverence, but with a healthy sense of the humanity of the Bible and the reality of the Bible. It's at times it's generally a very serious book, but at times there's real humor here. And I think we can miss it. Look, I, in my opinion, is the funniest author in the Bible. But it's so easy to miss the way he writes, I mean, he's got these great scenes where he is always pointing out the folly of human nature that we all can relate to.

You know, he's got these scenes. There's a riot right after this scene takes place. And he says, you know, everybody ran in the theater of one accord and some were yelling one thing, some were yelling another. And most of the people didn't even know why they were there. That's

funny, I mean, it's that human nature, gradishar to this, to the effete, what are we doing here?
Again, I can't remember.

Do whatever you need to do to that guy. I'm angry. What am I angry about? And we're just foolish. We are foolish people. And Luke points out these sorts of foibles all the time. And and this is an amazing scene, as serious as this is. And it's serious. How about what this demon says to them now I know Jesus and I know Paul, but who are you? Were you? I don't seem to recognize you thump and he wipes them out, you know, he wipes these guys out.

And so what we see in this passage is that there's no power without the person you can't tap into the saving power of Jesus, the power over evil and death and hell and sin. If you don't have a relationship with this Christ and if he's not working through you.

And we live in a culture that has grown weary of powerless, lonely, living apart from the spiritual realm, and we're seeing the pendulum swing towards spiritual obsession at times, and we see people seeking spiritual power without the person who holds that power. So you've got Rosie O'Donnell and Madonna following Kabbalah, this mystical Jewish religion. You've got Tom Cruise doing the Scientology thing. You've got all these people wanting something beyond the here and now. But they need Jesus for the power.

That's what they need. And we need to help people realize that a little angel pin on your lapel does not give you any power. Angels are big now. Why? Because they help you find your keys, but don't demand holy living of you. Right. So I got my angel. Well, that's nice, do you know, in the Bible, when angels show up, the first thing they have to say to people is get up. Fear not. Precious moments, angels. I have never had to say get up here. Not all they have to say is. Do you have a tissue? I mean, we are we're Christians, we're weird, we take things in the Bible and just redo them. So they sell a lot. Fear not is what they have to say, so we find out that you can't have any power without the person. This is what we need. We also realize clearly that the spiritual realm is real and powerful.

And this is where our ultimate battle always has been and always will be. It takes place in the flesh and blood routine of life. But Ephesians 6:12 says our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places. Our primary battle field is in the spiritual realm. Our main weapon of warfare is truth.

It's righteousness, it's the gospel of Christ, it's faith, it's prayer. So I'm so thankful students are devoting themselves to prayer during Toriko. Just beautiful, I went over last night and this

morning and there's praying together. They realize this truth, that the battles in the spiritual realm fundamentally, well, what's the result of this? It's quite a quite a response, like a first twenty one. Now, after these events, Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia and Asia.

Oh, I'm sorry, let me back up I mean, the totally wrong place for 17, thank you. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, no doubt. Hey, did you hear about the seven sons of skeeball, what happened? They have any clothes on. It's amazing. I mean, imagine how quickly this got around town. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus. Both Jews and Greeks.

And fear fell upon them all. And the name of the Lord Jesus. Was installed. Also, many of those who are now believers came confessing. And divulging their practices and the number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the side of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. As foolish as Luke wants us to see these humans are, he wants us to see how almighty and worthy of fear Jesus is. That tends to happen that way.

This is an amazing scene, the fear of Christ grips them. I said we're going to talk this morning about pursuing a passion for Christ through obedience to Christ. I don't know if there's any more important ingredient in obedience than fear of the Lord. Seeing him for who he is and going, oh. I had no idea. What I was getting myself into. It's the I say a six we're talking about. I saw the Lord high and lifted up in my immediate response was, woe is me, I'm undone, I'm unclean. I live among a people who are unclean. I need the anointing work of God to be used by him at all.

It all begins with a realization of the holiness of God. So good when Doctor, you have preached on in chapel just a couple of weeks ago on seeking a sense of God's holiness, we get so used to him, don't we, and taking intentional steps in our prayer life to do that. Think about what it means to stop taking God for granted, he hates being taken for granted. He hates being an assumed thing in our lives, in our doctrinal statement that doesn't carry any weight whatsoever in daily living.

He hates that. So let's let God have all the weight in our lives, that's what glory really means, literally, it's this weightiness. He's not just a word, he's not just a doctrinal affirmation, he's the almighty living God, the creator of everything that is. And so we have to look to these magicians who had the fear of God, gripped them, and along with other believers who are starting to divulge their evil practices and confess their sins publicly, that they had been involved with this was an evil and wicked place. It was a center of cultic practices. Gross sexual immorality, there was this process where believers would come to Christ and then have to come to new

understanding of their their wickedness before God and the sanctification process had to take over and they had to come to deeper and deeper realizations of their own sin.

I can remember as a young man. I think it was a senior in high school, and I, I can remember engaging in gossip one day. I was just gasping, that's kind of what that's your job description in high school, right? That's what you do for a living in high school. He's such a jerk, I can't stand him, you know, she's so ugly, I should have skag and we just were idiots, right? And that's what you do, it's in and you get used to it, right? You just get used to it.

And one day I was talking like that about someone. And the spirit of God gripped my heart and showed me the ugliness of gossip. And I came under conviction, I remember it so clearly, and up until that point in my life, I didn't see it for what it was. Using the mouth God gave me to shred someone made in his image, and I was horrified at my own skin. We need to come to those sorts of realizations in our lives, don't we? Doesn't mean the process is over and internalizing these things, but sometimes we need to just come to new realizations of, oh, I thought I was living a holy life and I wasn't. I had somehow learned to justify my sin and call it poor education or bad parents. I had somehow learned to live on righteously and excuse it with psychobabble. And now I can't do anything. But repent. And know the forgiveness that comes through true repentance. Imagine these guys, fifty thousand drachma, fifty thousand pieces of silver, one drachmas, a day's wage, we're talking millions.

And it's not just it's their livelihood, it's the way they support their families and put food on the table and they're quite wealthy from it. So it's money, but it's power. It's prestige, it's respect. It's people needing you, all these fundamental things we want. And they got it through their sorcery, through their magical practices. And it seems they had come to Christ and had made the connection between following Jesus and getting these things out of their lives.

And when they saw what happened with the seven sons of Scherba, the fear of God gripped them. They realized that they were dealing with something they hadn't realized and they got their lives right before God. They were convicted of sin. And that always happens whenever God is present and powerful and active and moving in our lives. Conviction of sin. Jesus moves in, and if we had a summer, imagine these guys. They take their magic books that everyone knew they had been using.

And they pile them up on Main Street, apparently. They bring them out of their houses and they they throw them in a pile. And they torture. They light them on fire, they have a public bonfire where they burn their own skin. Since a thing of the heart, but they're external things that we engage in for this in. And they do it publicly, they divulge their evil practices. Because the fear of God gripped them. What an example we have in these men.

The miraculous power of Christ brings fear and reverence, and we can no longer live as practical atheists. Affirming something with our mouths and living contrary to that, what does it mean to be a practical atheist? Quite simple, it means. You go on the Internet and look at pornography when no one's in the room. That's human. And you click off at the second your roommate walks in. That's living as a practical atheist, as if God didn't exist.

Or at least that he doesn't care about, he's got more important things to do than be concerned with me in my dorm room, you know? We can so easily live I can live as if God doesn't even exist. He doesn't carry weight in our lives, and these guys couldn't do that anymore. Listen to Matthew Ten, whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. You want to pursue a passion for Christ, it's all out exclusive passion, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

I've had to surrender my wife because I realized she was becoming an idol. It doesn't detract from the kind of love God wants me to have from her at all. Ultimately. But I have to open my grip on even good things God gives me. That I love. Or else I can become an idol worshipper. And denials, anything that competes with God for your ultimate affection, devotion, love, obedience. Whoever loves Father, mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves

son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will find that Jesus is saying, don't spend your life on transitory things that won't last. Devote your life to me. I am the source of eternal and abundant life. Come to me if you want to find your life. Jim Elliott said it this way. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep. To gain what he cannot lose. Whoever loses his life will find it.

That's what we're being told in this passage, it's not enough to change your creed, you have to change your life. Following Jesus may mean forfeiting material prosperity, status, popularity, worldly pleasure, the approval of men, your rights. And these men were willing to give up power and prosperity and prestige and their lifestyles because of what they wanted. That lasted. Don't miss that they were seized with fear and the name of Jesus was held in high honor, those two things always happen whenever God shows up.

If you have someone claiming revivals happening and there's no increasing fear, the Lord.

And the name of Jesus isn't being exalted. Go ahead and call it a fake revival. If a man, a ministry is being exalted instead of Jesus, if sin and fear the Lord isn't increasing, it's not a work of God. Those things always happen when God is at work. Bible tells us the fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom in Proverbs nine, and Holy fear is a God-given enabling to reverence him his authority and obey his commands and hearts in.

He gives us this fear of who he is. And we need to realize that bottom line in disobedience is a lack of fear of God. We lack a fear of God, and so we're not satisfied in God, and so we don't obey God. Jeremiah, 2:19, says no one see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord, your God, and the reason it gives is this the fear of me is not in you, says the Lord God of hosts.

God protects and provides for those who fear him, Proverbs 34:7, the angel of the Lord in camps around those who fear him and rescues them. Oh taste and see that the Lord is good. How blessed is the man who takes refuge in him of fear? The Lord who his saints. For those who fear him, there is no want. We're all needy. We all have desires and wants, God given desires and wants, if you want them really satisfied, fear him and follow him.

That's what it means to be his children. In the Bible, the primary motive often given for holy living is that it brings delight to the heart of our creator. And we get there through fear, Second

Corinthians seven one, since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit making holiness. Perfect. And the fear of God. Our basis for loving submission, loving that roommate who's driving you crazy.

That spouse or that friend or that parent who is just hard to love, how do you submit in the body of Christ to each other when Christians can't get along? It's the hardest challenge in Christian ministry, in admissions. Did you know that? It's not the pagans, it's the Christians. It's the tragic truth. And how do we submit to one another, give deference even when we enjoy each other and offend one another and sin against each other?

This is how it happens. Ephesians five twenty one. You probably never even miss this because all the attention goes elsewhere when we study this passage. Be subject to one another. Submit to one another. In fear of Christ. It's the basis for Christian submission. Do you need lots of other reasons to obey God except for the fact that he is God? I think in our efforts at times to make the Christian faith. Winsome and compelling to people who aren't Christians, we easily reduce it to principles for living that make really good practical sense. I suppose there's some truth to that. But if we ever lead people away from thinking the main reason you don't have promiscuous sex is so you don't get sexually transmitted diseases. We're missing the fundamental reason and motive and ability to be sexually moral. It's fear of God, it's seeing him for who he is. Otherwise, it's just moralistic principles for living that we might as well go get from Dr. Phil.

Which can be OK as far as they go. But if obedience isn't starting with a fear of Christ or recognition of who he is and a life that is living in accordance with that, it's not Christian. Let's not call it Christian. We can call it a worldly wisdom that, by the way, Ecclesiastes says, is chasing after wind apart from the things of eternity. It's a fear of Christ that does this. Do we really need more accountability groups for our sin issues that don't help us cultivate a fear of God?

Where we sit around and say, yeah, me too, I blew it again this week. Yeah. If we're not about focusing on God, developing a fear of Christ, we don't need any more accountability groups, they won't last, they don't work. I've seen it fail over and over again. And when I sing and sing repeatedly, the question I need to start asking myself is, Eric, do you fear God? Or have you been so sucked into our glib, cynical, disengaged, pessimistic, godless culture that you don't have any fear for him anymore? He's the big guy, the man upstairs. I got some questions. Ask him when I get to heaven. Oh, really? Do we fear God? That's the question. Does his presence bring fear and awe and a changed life for you and guys? I'm not I'm talking about but shaking fear. Sometimes we say, well, fear is a bad translation. It's really reverence. There's a little truth to that.

But it's boot shaking. Oh. Oh, and if you're in sin, you do something about it. You can't be in the presence of God if it's really God's presence you're experiencing and just continue. One of the

main signs that you're a Christian and the Holy Spirit lives in you is that you have conviction of sin. You know, being a Christian doesn't mean you don't sin any more. Means you can enjoy it like you used to. It bothers you. Because God lives in you. It's the kind of fear that a good dad. Instills in his children. It's kind of fear, my friend, Mark. As for his dad, my friend Mark Clark is a pastor in Florida. Dear friend Mark Clark is a fear of God. That is healthy and good and right, and I love to look to Mark as an example of fear and God, and I believe one of the main reasons he fears God is because he had a healthy fear of his father.

His dad was not primarily interested in being Mark's buddy. He wanted to be a father. One time, Mark was out with some friends who got 16, they were driving around and they were running out of gas, had no money, so they went into a gas station that was close that they knew left the pumps on and they stole a tank of gas. While they were pumping gas, they're playing Frisbee in the parking lot of this thing and they get about five miles down the road and they realize they left their Frisbee at the gas station. So they go back to get it. They get up the gas station, they get out of the car, all these police let go, go on and they're busted, they immediately separate them.

But as the cops are coming over to them, they say nobody says nothing. We don't know nothing. Nobody say a word. So they bring him down the police station and they separate him and they start to grill these kids about this gas theft. And if you know my friend Mark, he is he's kind of wild in these sorts of things, don't faze him. He was actually enjoying being interrogated. He was

sitting there going, I don't know nothing Kopper's he was thinking he was James Cagney or something, you know, is like, come and get me.

Got my eyes. He was like, you sort of liken it, you know, take a guess. I know. But, you know, he was like, kill me if you must. You know, I'll go to the chair if I have to. I'm not turning my buddies head. And he was like, I'm not breaking in the shining lights on him and he's loving it. You know, this goes out for about an hour. He didn't know they had called his dad.

After an hour of not budging, his father walks in the room, walks over the table, puts his hands on the table and says, Mark, tell them everything your name, rank, serial number, distinguishing birth marks or anything you want to know, he's telling you because Dad just showed up. I am not talking about the abusive fear that an abusive father instills in his children. You know, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about healthy fear that sees dad is dead. And one of the reasons I think we might not even have a category for the fear of God in our day today is because our culture is packed with dads who are wimps.

Who sit there while the kids are getting out of control with the remote control, letting the wife take care of it. It's their wimps and we don't know anything about the fear of God. We don't know anything about the wrath of God, even because our dad's never taught it to us. So how do

we develop this before God now we don't make excuses, now we move on and we look to the word of God and develop an understanding of who he is from there.

It's a healthy fear that a child has of a good father. We see God for who he is and we live accordingly, we live in such a glib, irreverent age and we don't really want the joy that comes from Christ enough to fear him and obey him in revival. When God's presence comes, it always brings fear and confession and repentance and obedience and a changed life.

Jonathan Edwards, who sparked the Great Awakening with his preaching in his book Religious Affection, says there are a few things that must be happening when God's really at work. One of them is the steam of Jesus is raised just like in our passage. Christ is exalted. He's getting all the attention Satan's kingdom suffers, just like in our passage, the demonic evil sin darkness goes down.

There's always an increased devotion to the Scriptures. When I want to obey God, I go to his word to know how to do that. There's increased a certain amount of truth in error, Edwards tells us, especially in regard to sin. Suddenly all the grey areas aren't so gray anymore. There's increased love for God and man, and there are change lives through loving obedience. And

becoming a Christian means dying with Christ. The old man must die. If a new man is to be raised in Christ, that's what it means to be crucified with Christ, he said.

Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it won't bear fruit. And sometimes this sort of confession doesn't take place because we have a worldly shame that prevents us from doing that. Godly shame leads to repentance and confession, even if it's before a human being as well. Proverbs, 28 13, says he conceals his transgressions will not prosper. But he confesses and forsakes them, will obtain mercy. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord always, but he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

James says this: Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. Listen to Bon Hoffer. In the confession of concrete sins, the old man dies a painful, shameful death. Before the eyes of a brother, because this humiliation is so hard, we continually scheme to evade confessing to a brother in the deep mental and physical pain of humiliation before brother, we experience the cross of Christ and our rescue of salvation.

The old man dies, but it is God who has conquered him. Now we share in the resurrection of Christ and eternal life. It's so hard to live walking in the light. Oh, I felt this a lot in my life. One time I was speaking at a conference in Cincinnati. And I was giving a concluding illustration at

this in this talk I was giving. And I lied. Preachers and public speakers have this evil expression it's never let the truth get in the way of a good story. And I lied, I made the story just a little better. Not a lot, just a little.

And as soon as I did it, I realized what I'd done. And almost couldn't finish, but I did. But as soon as I was done, I knew that the next night I had to confess that I just lied to a conference. It's hard enough to come to my own wife and say I've lied. Never mind a conference. And for twenty four hours, it just rip me to shreds. There were moments where I just wanted to get there so badly in other moments, I said, no, this would not be a good thing to do because everything else I said is true. And now about everything else I've said board, that wouldn't be good with it.

And I was making all these reasons why I didn't have to do this. But the next night I had to get up and I had to start my talk by saying, I lied to you all last night. Would you forgive me? It was so hard and it was so good. It was so liberating. It was so freeing. Before God and his people. You need to let people respond the way they're going to respond, that's not your problem. True repentance brings change of behavior and grace based obedience is the core of discipleship, Jesus tells us following Jesus cost us our lives and Jesus invites us to come and die so that we can live in gospel driven sanctification.

You know, I got a glimpse of repentance in a community in an overwhelming way. I've had that several times in my life, one that stands out, though, was in nineteen ninety five at Wheaton College, Don and I had worked in residence life and were real, very aware of the fact that this highly performance oriented community had lots of skin underneath the nice, shiny cultural veneer of cultural Christianity. And some students came up from Texas and shared what God had been doing on their campus in Texas and in their church, bringing revival and bringing people to a deeper understanding of who God was, bringing repentance. And they said we have no idea what God may want to do here, but we pray you would open your hearts to what he may want to do.

Then he sat down and it was just quiet for a while at the World Christian Fellowship meeting, which is kind of like our separation, except it's got this world missions focus. And it was quiet for a while and then a fifth year senior got up and Doug had been involved in the big gossiped about scandal on campus that year, he ended up turning in some of his roommates for breaking the contract after he confronted them. They wouldn't do anything about it.

And he got up and he said, so many of you know what I've been involved in this year and I need to ask for the forgiveness from so many of you for feeling bitter and angry and resentful toward this campus, into so many people on it. So would you please forgive me? And he sat down. It's quiet for a little while longer. Another guy got up and he started to confess in. And other people got up and they stood in line.

Waiting to confess and to. And we started to hear confession after confession. Battles with homosexuality and fornication and pornography. With need to control. It can lead to eating disorders. Racism, materialism. All these sins that plague God's people, that hide underneath this veneer were being exposed and the people of God were coming together, embracing one another, physically, literally, spiritually offering the forgiveness God offers through Christ, weeping and praying together. I'd never seen anything like it in my life.

I could tell you story after story of the way God came in and restored relationships between a father and a son who hadn't spoken in eight years. Of a graduate student getting her degree in Michigan's. Who realized she wasn't a Christian? Never saw herself as a sinner and gave her life to Christ during that time. There was one night a man got up and went out for four nights, by the way. It went on all night that first Sunday night, people were lined up down both sides of the aisles and it went on all night that night.

We broke at 6:00 a.m., reconvened the following night at 7:00. It went on all night again. We did that four nights in a row and concluded it with the most amazing time of celebration and worship and call to ministry I've ever seen. One night, a guy got up and he said, I've been badmouthing

the president of our university of our college all for years I've been here, and he looked out at our president. He said, Dr. Litvin, will you please forgive me?

And he broke down crying and he walked over and he got on his knees in front of the president and the president and the student wept together as the president offered forgiveness based on Christ. We saw example after example of God's presence instilling a fear in us and getting right, at one point a guy got up and he said, I want to I want to ask for forgiveness from the women on this campus because I've objectified you since I got here. Attorney, the objects.

I've evaluated you with my friends on the floor. I've lusted after you, I've treated you as things, not human beings made in God's image, will you please forgive me? Women started to weep, another guy got up and he said, you know, I have a feeling a lot of the men in here have to deal with that. And so anybody who is dealing with lust or turning women into objects, would you come forward in? A bunch of guys got up and went forward and you should have heard the women start to weep and thank God.

They knew that's the case. God moved. One of the nights I was standing in back. And a guy got up and he started confessed racism. He said, I've been racist since I got here three years ago. He said, especially toward the Asians on campus. He said, I've talked badly about you, I've ripped

you up, I've made fun of you, I've mocked you. And I need to deal with that as my brothers and sisters in Christ, I beg you for forgiveness for what I've done to you for three years.

And he just sat down and started to weep. Now I was sitting in the back and you need to know at this point, the aisles were filled with people praying together on their knees. You couldn't get to the front unless you went outside and around. I was standing in back with the Koinonia Fellowship, which is the Asian Fellowship on campus. It was mostly their intramural basketball team. About eight guys I was standing in back with them, and that's they listen to this guy confessed his racism toward them.

I couldn't read their faces at all. They were entirely stoic, especially max their center, who was about six five. And I looked at these guys saying, what are they think? When that guy was done praying and he sat down. These guys standing next to me. Literally crawled over people to get to him. Not to beat him up. To pray with them and cry with them and offer the forgiveness they had received in Christ. Oh, don't focus on what you give up, what are your magic books? What are they? It's not just money, it can be possessions or sexual pleasures that compete with God and it can be materialism, one guy one night got up and cut up his credit card and threw it on the pile.

We made a pile of stuff. That represented the sin in our lives, we carted it off to the dump. One guy put his red leather jacket on there because he said, I always have to match. He said, I'm consumed with my image. It was it was the most amazing thing I'd experienced in my life to see the grace of God applied to the sin in our lives because of the fear of God and a desire to have life in Christ and unencumbered fellowship with the God who made us and loves us.

This is what we're called to, what are your magic books? It's going to be different for all of us. Ask God to show you what they are. And don't miss verse 20. Verse 20 of this passage says. That the word of God. Continue to increase and prevail. Michael, you want to be used by God, you want to reach the nations with the gospel, you'd want to be a light to this dark world. You want to be salt to this unsavory world.

Oh, have a fear of the Lord and obey the Lord. A cleansed church is a growing church and a church that has an impact. Judgment begins in the house of God and let it begin here. Father, help us to have a passion. For you, help us to know what it means to be consumed with an understanding of who you are, like Isaiah and Jonathan Edwards and Paul and the road to Damascus had. Or would you help us? To be filled with a sense of your presence and a fear of you and humble, obedient lives that grew out of that.

Or would you free us would you help us to see? How short sighted it is to live. This obediently before you, Lord, I pray this would always be gospel driven sanctification, that it would be never anything we're trying to earn from you as if we ever could or as if Jesus didn't earn at all. Would you help us to be so grounded in who Jesus is and what he's done for us that we can't think but live any other way? We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

[End of Recording]