

Charley:

Let us be in an attitude of prayer together. Lord, we do thank you for being so steadfast as we face such unknown times, such anxiety. And so as we continue to worship you and we stand together as family, as loved ones, as the church, even though we're apart physically, we count on your steadfast love, we stand on it and rely on it, knowing it will guide us through these times. Get us through it, empower us through it, and we will have victory through it because that's the kind of God you are.

And now, Lord, you've given me the amazing privilege and responsibility of preaching your Word to these my friends and your servants. And so Lord, I ask you to speak to me and through me in such a way today that all of us here and those watching everywhere will receive a word from you that will make a difference to our lives. It's in Christ's name we pray, amen.

Well, one of the things I'm enjoying about the social distancing, there are a few things, is people seem to be sharing a lot more videos and photos through social media, lots of interesting pictures. People are doing some very creative things. You are doing some very creative things, and so I'm enjoying that. Of course, Brandon and I are enjoying taking pictures and videos of Paul, poor Paul. He's just suffering through that, but we continue to enjoy that time together and taking all these pictures and videos and seeing all these photos reminds me of an old story that's told by my colleague about his five-year-old daughter at the time. There was a big thunderstorm, there was lightning and thundering and pouring down rain and he couldn't find his daughter. And so he ran upstairs and found her in her room and she was pressed up against the window and it was lightning and it was thundering and it was raining. And he said, "Jennifer, what are you doing? Get away from it. That's dangerous." And she said, "Daddy, daddy, no, no. I think God's trying to take my picture."

Well, that's a nice thought, isn't it? God taking our picture. That is an interesting thought. If God does take pictures, I'm curious what kind of camera he would use. But more importantly, I would hope that if he does take pictures, he's capturing us at our best moments, not in our worst moments. It's all on how you look at things, isn't it? It's all about perspective.

Sometimes things in life can completely change just because we gain new perspective. And I think that's true right now in the midst of this crisis, in the midst of this social distancing. I for one, have learned to appreciate the things I didn't appreciate so much before, that love and relationships, they're the only things that truly matter. And I think it's given all of us perspective. And that's the great thing about our Christian faith as well. We stand on our faith, we rely on our faith because it gives us perspective. It reminds us of who we are and whose we are. It reminds us of the true meaning of life. It gives us perspective.

I have a hunch that many of you are watching and many of you are listening right now because you want to gain perspective on your life. You want to use this time wisely in the midst of all this social distancing. You want to claim the life that God has for you. You want to be proactive rather than reactive. And that's great. You're already way ahead of the game. You've decided to worship and tune into worship instead of doing a myriad of other things. You're not like the person who wrote, "Well, I get up each morning and I dust stuff my wits. I pick up the paper and I read the obits. If my name is missing, I know I'm not dead, so I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed." You're not doing that. You're tuning in. You are worshipping because again, you want to take advantage of the life that God has for you. And I tell you, if we're truly connected to the Lord and really want to live out what he has for us in our life, it is an exciting adventurous life.

J. Wallace Hamilton, the great preacher of a bygone era, used to talk about Sir Francis Drake sailors and how they would come back from their big voyages on these big ships and they would tell these stories to these young lads that would gather on the dock, but they wouldn't tell of the seas pleasures. They

would talk about its dangers and its adventure. They would talk about these gallant ships riding out all these storms and these stout winds and waves, and it was so exciting and these young kids were so fascinated that they would run away from their homes to be a part of it.

I'll tell you right now, Jesus walks on the shore of our lives today saying, "You want excitement? Follow me. You want adventure? Follow me. You want to see things that you've never seen before? You want to experience things you've never experienced before? Follow me. Follow me into the high waves of love-finding wholeness of ministry." That's what happened to the disciples. When Jesus encountered them in the midst of their work, in the midst of their regular lives, he called them to something extraordinary. And so they left everything. They left the ordinary in order to do the extraordinary. And if we're willing to do that, we can live an exciting, adventurous life, even in the midst of these times. So where does it begin? Where does this life of God begin? This life of wholeness and joy and excitement and adventure? Well, it begins, and some of you won't be surprised by this. It begins by getting proper spiritual nourishment through prayer.

Wayne [inaudible 00:06:19] did some interesting research on the American diet, and this is what he discovered. Check this out. Every day, 220,000 people because of what they eat, will see a doctor because of a stomach ailment. Every day, 80 million aspirin will be taken. Every day, 1.6 million pain relievers will be taken. Every day, 4,000 will suffer from heart attacks, 2 million will experience some kind of heartburn, \$1.9 million will be spent on anti-acids to keep the food in, and \$1.4 million will be spent on laxatives to get out what you put in. Now, those are interesting statistics. We take in a lot of things, don't we? A lot of bad things. And that's true by these stats, and it's also true by the way some of us look. There's an old statement, "You are what you eat."

Now, I want you to imagine something. I want to imagine what you would look like and what you experience if you only ate one decent meal a week and then snacked on junk food the rest of the week. You would feel gaunt. You would feel emaciated and fatigued and weak. I mean, it wouldn't make any sense to do that. Yet did you know that around 80% of Christians who though they're members of a church and though they're connected to a church, do not have a daily, regular spiritual feeding program through prayer and Bible study? 80%. Let me tell you, we can't survive spiritually on one meal a week. We can't live the exciting, adventurous life of God on one meal a week. If we want to live the life God has for us and the great joy and adventure he calls us to, we need to take the initiative and have a daily spiritual feeding program.

I mean, after all, now is the perfect time. So turn off the news, turn off Netflix for a while, get off Facebook and take the initiative and begin reading Scripture. Because I know many of you for a long time have been saying, "You know what? I need to read more of the Bible. I need to pray more. I need to grow my relationship with God." Well, now is the time. And the great thing is if you do that and you're committed to doing that, the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God will mentor you, will coach you, will guide you. That's the purpose of the Holy Spirit. It empowers us and it nourishes us. It guides us as we live the life of God. I mean, think about that. The spirit of Almighty God will mentor us through prayer.

Now, say for a moment, I was... And this is a dream of mine, so just bear with me, but just say for a moment that I was invited to this group, golf clinic that Jack Nicklaus the great golfer was teaching. And it was just a one-day event, and there was maybe 30 or 40 golfers, and he was again giving this clinic. But say for example, and again, this is my dream, that he came up to me and watched me hit the ball, and Jack Nicklaus looked at me and said, "Charley, I see some promise in you. So here's what I want to do. Here's what I offer you. I will come to you, to your house and your local golf course every single day, and for an hour every single day, I will coach you and teach you everything I know about golf and the golf swing." What do you think I'd do? "Do you want to do it?" "Well, heck yeah. When do we start?"

And it wouldn't be six months, maybe a year when I'd be playing golf with my buddies and they would say, "What has gotten into you? You strike the ball amazingly well, better than you ever have. Your scores are amazing. What did you do?" And what would I say? "Well, I took a group clinic one time." No, they would say, "You have been taught by someone who knows the game."

It's the same wave with the Holy Spirit, and we allow the Holy Spirit to mentor us and to guide us every single day. It won't be long until we begin to see things the way the Holy Spirit sees them, to experience things the way the Holy Spirit experiences them, to react in ways and talk in ways and think in ways like the Holy Spirit does. And it won't be long, maybe a few months, six months, a year when someone comes up to us and says, "You know what? There's something different about you. You have this wisdom beyond yourself. You're more kind and loving and more patient. Well, what's going on?" And maybe you'd say, "Well, I go to church once a week." And they'd say, "No, no, no, no, no. You have been influenced greatly by God Almighty."

And I tell you, if we're willing to be nourished and supported and strengthened and guided by the Holy Spirit that mentors us, then it gets really into the really, really, really, really good stuff. And what's that good stuff? Well, it's making a difference in the lives of other people because I'll tell you this, and this is something I've learned in my own devotional life. The closer we get to the Lord and the more we grow with God in Scripture and in prayer, the more conviction develops inside of us to change lives with the gospel, to do good everywhere. John Wesley said it. "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."

Now, John 14, Jesus talks about something like this. He says something amazing, and I often bring up this text because, well, it just bears repeating. Jesus Christ, he said this in John 14, "You will do even greater works than me because I'm going to the Father and I will be in you." Did you hear Jesus? He said, "You will do greater works than me because I will be in you after I'm gone." Now, what does that mean? I mean, think about it. We know what Jesus did. He walked on water. He healed people. He did amazing things in his ministry. How in the heck can we do greater works than Jesus? Well, listen just for a second, let me explain. Christ has always been.

In John 1 we see, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." But when Christ was here on earth, he was limited. He could only speak to one group at a time or heal one person at a time, but when Jesus went back to the Father and his Spirit indwelt his followers, his influence multiplied and multiplied and multiplied and multiplied. So for these last 2,000 years, we have done great, greater works. And let me tell you that Spirit of Christ is within us, and we are literally the Body of Christ in this world. And that Spirit of Christ within us is chomping at the bit to reach out to others, to love others who feel hated, to give compassion to people who are hurting, chomping at the bit. And I'll tell you, the opportunities are all around us, even now. We just have to look. We just have to think.

His wife was working late that night. And so the husband, it was his turn to feed the kids. And so he made his favorite thing, reservations. They just went to a restaurant. And so he took the kids to the restaurant and they sat in the booth and they waited and they waited and they waited for someone to wait on them, and they waited and they waited. And finally this waitress showed up. Her hair was a mess. She looked hairy, she looked mad, and she threw the water on the table and said, "What do you want?" Well, the husband quickly ordered for himself and his kids because he thought, "We may not see her for a while." So they ordered and they waited and they waited and they waited for their food, and they waited some more and they waited some more. And finally the food came, and most of it was just cold.

Then they waited for the bill and they waited and they waited, and finally it came. And you know what? That man, that husband, that father, he tipped the waitress \$100. Well, she grabbed the check and the

tip, and she said to herself, "Something is wrong. He must have made a mistake." And so she went back to the table and said, "Sir, I think you gave me more money than you wanted to. Here's a hundred dollars." He said, "No, that's for you. You seem upset. You seem to be carrying a heavy burden. You're working hard." And you know what that waitress did? She sat on the corner of that booth and began to pour her heart out and with tears began to talk to that man about her husband who was dying of cancer, her mother who had the beginning signs of dementia, her financial problems. And he listened, and he listened, and he listened, and he listened. And then he offered some kind words and gave her some advice. And as he was leaving with his kids, well, the waitress looked at him and said, "Why are you being so nice to me? I mean, the service I gave you was just awful. I mean, why are you being so nice?" And he said, "Because I'm a Christian, and that's what Christians do."

Now, I don't know what you think being a Christian is, but I'll tell you what I believe it is. It is being the hands of Christ in this world. It is being the feet of Christ in this world. It is being the arms of Christ in this world. It is being the heart of Christ in this world. Romans 8 tells us that the same Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead lives and breathes in each of us who believe. And if we believe that, that Spirit is literally chomping at the bit to reach out to others through us. And you know what? People need it because we live in an age that sociologists like to call the age of the lonely crowd, especially now where we text each other and we maybe call each other, but we really don't connect with each other as a child of Almighty God or connect to others as children of God.

Tony Campolo tells the, for some, the infamous story of a deacon in his church. Campolo is a Baptist, a kind of unconventional Baptist mind you, but a Baptist nonetheless. And he had a deacon in his church that he said wouldn't dick. Now, I don't know what that means, but clearly he wasn't up to par, and he was depressed and he was lonely, he was so into himself. And Campolo said, "Listen, you know what? You need to get out of yourself and go help another person. Go to a hospital and see someone, go to a nursing home and see someone, whatever." Well, the man did. He found a nursing home up the road from the church, and he met this man, this elderly man who had a lot in common with him. And just about every week he'd go see the man and he'd sit through a chapel service and hold his hand and talk. And well, through the months, this man, this older man, his mind began to go a little, but he kept visiting, holding his hand, talking to him.

Well, one day this deacon arrived and he discovered, well his friend was dying, was literally on his deathbed. And so he went into the room and he did hold his hand again, and he prayed for the man, and the older gentleman squeezed his hand and the deacon knew that this man heard his prayer. Well, he left. The next time he visited, he was told that his friend had passed away, but his daughter was there, that only man's daughter was there getting some arrangements together. And she met this deacon and said, "Oh, you're the guy. You're the guy that's been visiting my father. You have no idea what you've done." She said, "Every time I would come to visit, he would say, 'Jesus comes by and visits me and he holds my hand.' Every week he says, 'Jesus comes by and he holds my hand.' And at the end he said, you know what? 'I don't want to die until Jesus comes by and holds my hand one more time.'"

Oh, I know right now we're not supposed to hold hands, but hopefully prayerfully we will be able to soon. But in the meantime, we can care for each other in other ways through a phone call, through getting groceries for someone, through writing a letter and note and email. We are the hands and feet and heart and mind of Christ in this world. And I know there's cynicism all around and people say, "Well, Charley, there's only so much good you can do. No good deed goes unpunished." Well, when I think about that and think about that attitude, I remember an old poem that many of you have probably heard, but maybe it's been a while.

"People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

"If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

"If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies. Succeed anyway.

"Well, if you are honest and frank, people may cheat you. Be honest and frank anyway.

"What you spend years building up, someone could destroy overnight. Build anyway.

"Well, the good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

"Well, give the world your best, and it may never be enough. Give the world your best anyway, because after all, it's always been between you and God anyway."

Son, you go down there and they're going to misunderstand you. I'm going to go anyway. You go around sharing all this truth and they're going to hurt you. I'm going to go anyway. Or they're going to nail you to a tree and lock you up in a tomb. And Jesus said, that's okay, because I'm going to live anyway.

Let's pray.

Oh Lord, teach us at this time the strange, peculiar, unfamiliar time that we have an opportunity to spend time with you, more time with you than we ever have before maybe, and we can get close to you. We won't get a virus from you, but what we will get is a love beyond belief, a peace beyond understanding, a wisdom beyond ourselves, and a call to help people that won't let go. Oh Lord, may we use this time wisely and lovingly. It's in Christ's name we pray, amen.