

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Lies We Believe

Part 4 Spiritual Lies

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 11.22-23.08

We're continuing our series that we've been in for the last few weeks or so called the "Lies We Believe". Now if you have not been here and would like to get caught up what we've been talking about, where we've been, you can also go to [Crossroadswired.com](http://Crossroadswired.com). There you can listen to any of the messages that we deliver as well as watch the worship service. So if you're not going to be in town, that's a way to stay connected. But today we're going to focus in on one category and that is the lies we believe in our spiritual life. A couple of months ago I was talking to a woman named Susanna that has a story that resonate with truth. And maybe you'll pick up on some of this and...and even relate. She started going to church at a very young age. Her parents took her to church and she started getting involved in the Sunday School program and she was faithful to do her lessons week after week. And it didn't take long for her to figure out the do's and don'ts of Christianity and she then progressed and got involved in the student ministry and went through that program. And even when she went away to college, she found a local church and she was involved in that ministry...really spent all of her life in church. And she said to me that church is just becoming less and less exciting to her. And as I delve a little deeper, I found out it wasn't so much church, it was the idea that God was becoming less and less exciting to her. It wasn't that God was that point of joy; it was that God was really now becoming a point of dread in her life. And what I appreciated about her was...that she was brave enough to admit how she felt. That she was brave enough to just set aside in her mind and say, you know, this is what's going on in my life and...and I feel that God is no longer a sense of personal joy but of personal dread. What had happened was Susanna was that she began to buy into a spiritual lie. That's what we're going to focus on. That's what we're going to talk about today.

Now there are many spiritual lies that we can get trapped into believing. And they...like we've been talking about run like digital tracks in our mind over and over. And if we grab on and gravitate towards them, they can actually put us into a life trap. For example, one spiritual lie that maybe some of you will...will resonate with is...is this one: Because I'm a Christian, God will protect me from pain and suffering. And we buy into this and then we experience our own pain and suffering. And...what in world...what happened? Where did God go? But the truth is all you have to do is kind of read through the Bible. What do we find out? Is there anybody in the Bible that experiences pain and suffering? Absolutely. I mean, Job, is a good example. David, Paul, Peter, Jesus, God's Son...so obviously that's a lie. The truth needs to break through from those lies that we kind of wrap our minds around.

Another lie is problems are punishments for sin. Now I'm very strategic with the words that I use. Problems are punishments for sin. Now there are many times that the things we do can get us into problems but nowhere in the scriptures does it say that our problems that enter our lives are God's way of punishing us. Another lie is a good Christian doesn't feel angry or anxious. Or a good Christian doesn't feel depressed. Read the psalmist. The psalmist just say...emote...this emotion....all levels of it...joy,

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ecstatic...but then also rock bottom, depression, anxiety, fits of anger. Those are just normal feelings and when we...we become Christ followers it doesn't mean they go away. That's a lie we gotta put away. Another lie ...God can't use me unless I'm spiritually strong. In other words, unless I've got my life together, God can't use me. That's a lie because God specializes in using us just where we're at. You see, the thing is that we buy into these lies because many times they're taught to us by really well-intentioned people. We're...we're usually at a vulnerable state in our life...maybe young like Susanna was. And...and someone taught her this world view that...about God that now covered her concept of who God is and how she relates to God and how God relates back to her. And she bought into this concept. What concept?

It's the same concept that I think many of us buy into. I think it's the number one lie that we struggle with and the lie is God's love is dependent upon my behavior...that somehow God's love is conditional...that it's dependent upon how I act. In fact, if I act a certain way that I perceive he does not like, then his love for me lessens or as Susanna so boldly said that...that somehow he's mad at me. You...but I think we've been conditioned by life experiences to believe that God's love is conditional. Let me say that again. I think many times we've been conditioned by life experiences to believe that somehow God's love is conditional. Think about how you've learned about love and what you think about love.

Think about your first love. I was in fifth grade at Brinkerhoff Elementary School when I first remember falling in love...a little brown-eyed girl named Holly. And we use to spend all recess together and I remember the day when she told me that she loved me and I loved her. In fact, I loved her so much that I...I don't know what my parents were thinking but they had this scarf thing would go around me with this gold ring that would kind of push up...I took that gold ring off and I...I glued some kind of little...little speck of something...it looked like a diamond. And I remember one day, I gave that to her just as an expression of my first love. Now...now a couple of days later...Holly, the tramp, dumped me for my best friend, Steve. And I learned a lesson, you know, love can be fleeting, painful. We laugh about that but most of us have had a first love, right? Most of us have had an experience in our life where we were really hurt deeply by somebody. Maybe it was...not a first love...maybe it was friend. Someone you put a lot of trust into who told you they were going to love you unconditionally and then something happened and they kind of vanished. Or...or maybe that was a spouse who made a vow to you and somewhere along the line, love became conditional. And we start to transfer these concepts in real life over to our relationship with God and we think, well, maybe God's love is somehow conditional in our life. You know, if you believe and you really put the energy behind the concept that God's love is somehow dependent upon your behavior, you're going to go through about four steps real quick

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The first step is that you're going to become a Christian perfectionist. You're going to think that everything you do, even the most minute detail will somehow jeopardize the way God feels about you and you're going to want to spend your whole life making it as perfect as possible. The problem is you're going to quickly move to step two. And that is you're going to move from Christian perfectionism to Christian defeatism. You're going to become a Christian defeatist. You're going to realize that there is no way if this is what God requires of me...there is no way I can maintain a relationship with him and you're going to then move to the third step and that is Christian depression. And you're going to say this is an irresolvable issue and, ultimately, go to the four step, Christian abandonment where you will abandon God. Now you might not abandon God on the outwards...you know, you might be a Christian in name but somewhere inside you're going to disconnect. Because you're going to see God as someone completely unappeasable...unpleasable. And he's not going to be that source of joy, he's going to be a source of dread.

These four steps remind me of a man in history whose stories are legendary. He's one of my favorite people to read about. His name is Martin Luther. Now not Martin Luther King who lived in the sixties but Martin Luther who lived in the sixteenth century and who is called the father of the protestant reformation. This man has impact into who we are as protestant believers over five hundred years later. But he didn't start out as this champion of God's grace and mercy. He actually lived in fear at any moment that God may pounce upon him. In fact, he totally bought into this lie that...that his behavior was dependent...or caused a condition of God's love. He...he...he started out as a young man going to the University of Erfurt in Germany to become a law student. And there he was excelling greatly. He was a terrific orator. He...he had an acute mind with the law and he was head and shoulders above his peers of the day. But he always had this underlying fear of God and how he related with God. And he was sure that God's love somehow depended on his behavior. And he actually lived in fear of God.

This is illustrated in one day he was at home visiting his parents in Mansfield, Germany. Mansfield—it's...it's our sister city today. And he was coming back from Mansfield to Erfurt on what now has become a very famous road. And there was this tremendous lightening storm and there was lightening strikes all around him and he thought this storm was a direct result of his life and that God was somehow sending this storm to punish him. And he was praying 'all the saints' because he was a good Catholic. And he was praying through 'all the saints' for protection. And on this one open stretch just out...outside of Erfurt where there is this huge tree, this lightening struck very close to him and he dove into the mud under this tree and he prayed out loud, "St. Anne, help me, I will become a monk." He had a near death experience. Now, most of us if we have a near death experience and we cry out to God, when things settle down, we look back on that and we say, you know what, maybe I got a little carried away and I'll just kind of tuck that statement back in the closet of my life. Not Luther. Four days after he made

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

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that statement, with a rising career to be a genius in the field of jurisprudence, he gave it all up and showed up at the door of the Augustinian monastery having given away all of his worldly possessions. Over the next two days, he took vows to become a monk and he committed his life primarily because he was afraid of God. Because he felt God's love was somehow dependent upon his behavior. He committed his love...rather his life to being a monk.

Now one of the functions of being a monk is to give daily confessions in the confessional. I always thought...thought that was hilarious because how much trouble can a monk get into in a monastery. But he would do it. He would go in and just like all the rest of his brothers and they would spend five, ten, fifteen minutes confessing their sins. They would do this on a daily basis. But not Luther. Luther wouldn't spend five, ten, fifteen minutes, sometimes he would spend one, two, three, sometimes four, five hours at a time confessing every single sin he could think of and he was doing it to the point that he was driving his superiors in the monastery crazy. And they actually came to him and they said, Martin, stop this preoccupation with peccadilloes. If you're going to confess, make it a real sin. But in...in Luther's mind, every single sin was a grievous act to a just God who was like a judge over him and he knew that he had to make recompense for that and so he would spend hours thinking through every single detail of his life to see if there was anything wrong that he could confess before God. And he said there are times after these marathon confession sessions that...that he would come out of the confessional and his heart would be light and his step would be...be soft and he would sense this overwhelming joy until he remembered that one thing he thought or said or did and immediately a sense of dread would overtake him. And he would really be in a state of panic. Because once again, God's love was contingent on his behavior. One person came to him during this time in the monastery and said, "Martin, do you love God?" And you know what he said, "Love God?" "Sometimes I hate God. Sometimes I see Christ as a consuming judge." Now can you imagine a young man preparing for the ministry declaring that he hated God. Now you might be thinking that Luther was just crazy...maybe he was just a meglamaniac. You know, he couldn't hold it all together. But I don't want you to forget, before Luther ever studied theology, that he had this brilliant legal mind and he took this sharp, acute, trained mind and he applied it to what he thought was true. He applied it to this concept that God's love was dependent upon his behavior and he said, I could never live up to God's expectations.

And some of you might be thinking, well, how in the world did he become the father of the Protestant reformation? How did he make such impact into the church that lasts all the way up to this particular day? Well, one thing that you need to realize about Luther was that he took this well-trained mind and when it was exposed to truth, it suddenly started to blossom into the rest of his life. You see, when he was a monk, his superiors said he needed to get in the real world and so they sent him to Wittenberg to become a priest of the local parish and then to teach at Wittenberg university—a brand new

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Lies We Believe

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Weekend 11.22-23.08

university. And there he was exposed for the first time to the word of God. Now that might seem odd to us because we have the word of God...all of us have Bibles and...and many of us have number of Bibles and different versions of Bibles and our pastors....our seminaries are filled with...with scriptures. But not back then. The common person did not have a Bible. In fact, many priests of that day did not have a Bible. And so for Luther to go to the university where he would spend his life studying it was a great gift but really he backed off from it. He had to be pushed towards it. But then when he was exposed to it, it began to radically change the way he thought. In fact, on one particular occasion when he was studying, preparing a lecture for his students, he came across a now infamous verse in the life of Martin Luther. It's found in the book of Romans, Romans, chapter 1. He was studying Paul's writings and he was trying to get this handle on the justice of God...that God being this judge. And he comes to verse 17 in the very first chapter and it says for...now listen carefully. It says: For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written. The righteous shall live by faith. Now this can also be translated for in it the justice of God is revealed for faith from faith. As it is written, the just shall live by faith. And he picked up on this concept of justice of what he understood of God demanding justice and he felt that it was responsibility as the just to live up to this expectation of God. In fact, he felt like it could never truly happen.

And he...he wrote of his struggles in a journal: I greatly long to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way of God. In fact, he felt like it could never truly happen. And...and he wrote of his struggles in a journal, I greatly long to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans. And nothing stood in the way but that one expression, the justice of God. Because, he writes, I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. He said my situation was that although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscious and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore, I did not love a just God but rather I hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the Apostle Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. So night and day, I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that the just shall live by faith. Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God's justice is given to us through faith. He had a sudden concept that burst upon his mind that God's love is not dependent upon our behavior in any way. That God's love is freely given to us by God...that God himself reveals...better yet...provides the justice to justify us. And so now the just live by faith and he realized anyone who puts their trust in Christ receives that justice...receives that righteousness. And he wrote: It broke into my mind and I realize for the first time that my justification, my station before God is established not on the basis of my own naked righteousness which will always fall short of the demand of God, but that it rests solely and completely in the righteousness of Christ which I must hold onto by trust, by faith. When I understood that, he writes, I understood the gospel and I looked and beheld the doors of paradise swung open to me and I walked through. Truth, utterly, changed Luther's life.

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

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And later, he wrote, about the impact of another passage, Romans, chapter 5, verse 18 that may ring just as true in your life. Romans, chapter 5, verse 8 rather, verse 8: But God chose his love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Just stop there parenthetically for a moment. Do you hear what that says? You don't need to be cleaned up to come to God. God takes you as you are where you are at. He showed his love to us while we were still sinners, enemies...Christ died for us. Verse 9: Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we're enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are we reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. In other words, it's not just a one momentary type of thing that happens at salvation but it continues through our entire life...our relationship with God. Then verse 11: More than that, if there could be more than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received...what's the word? Reconciliation. What does it mean to be reconciled? Means two opposing parties coming together. God bridges the gap and says that if you by faith will receive Christ, he will be the justifier. And so God's love is not dependent on my behavior, rather, God's love is dependent upon nothing I do. Write that down. God's love is dependent upon nothing I do. And when that lie creeps into your mind because of something you thought, something you said, or something you've done that tells you God loves you less now, you repeat to yourself the truth...God's love is dependent upon nothing I do.

And if you haven't bought into that...if you say there's got to be something wrong with this, all you got to do is flip over to Romans, chapter 9, just a few pages, verse 16. I love this verse because it just says it point blank: So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. Let me give it to you in the NIV: It does not, therefore, depend on man's desires or effort. It does not depend on your effort but on God's mercy. The Apostle Paul so desperately wanting the Ephesians to understand this, writes: I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of God's love. How wide, how long, how high, how deep that love is. The greatness of Christ's love in your life, in other words, is immeasurable. And that's my prayer for you.