



---

## Overcoming Spiritual Vertigo

Lance Witt

Good morning everybody. It is so great to be with you. I have been looking forward to this. We love Ted and Amy; they have become very dear friends of ours and we have such respect for them just as a couple and as people in ministry. I hope you know – and I think you do know – how blessed you are to have a couple like that leading your church and the entire staff team. I have to tell you I get to work with churches and pastors around the country and this maybe the most complicated time in which to serve as a pastor. So, as you think about them, I hope that you will pray for them.

I also have to tell you it's great for me to just be with you like in the room together, in person. Some of you are watching online and outside. But where I live in Colorado, most of our churches are still not being able to meet in person, so it is great to actually get to be with you.

About a month ago, my wife, Connie, actually tested positive for COVID. She is fully recovered and is doing great. I thought I should probably go and get tested since I was obviously exposed around her, so I went to one of those drive-through testings. I sat in my truck and got my place in line and I waited and waited and finally I pulled up there and rolled down my window. This very nice, seemingly pleasant nurse type person came up to me and she verified my name and my birthdate. And then she proceeded to attack me. She took this little javelin and ran right through my nasal passages right up into my brain. It was some of the most painful five seconds I can remember in a long time. The good news is I do not have COVID. The bad news is I have a lifelong fear of anything that resembles a Q-Tip now. I just don't want anything to do with it.

We all get that these are bizarre and unusual times in which we live. Six months ago, none of us would have use the phrase "global pandemic." But now, there's not just that; there is civil unrest, hurricanes, fires, massive unemployment, economic upheavals, schools figuring out what they're going to do, NFL games without any kind of fans, a crazy presidential election, a president who is in the hospital now with COVID, and then just throw in the hand grenade of a supreme court nomination to boot. It's like wow, the world is completely turned upside down. Who would have thought, back in February, that a microscopic virus could bring the world to its knees?

I had a friend of mine say that in the history of the world, this is the first time the entire planet has been focused on one problem. The word that I find myself using a lot these days is the word *disequilibrium*. It just feels like we're off balance. It's hard to plan. You don't know where you can find stability. It's unsettling, it's unnerving, it seems like everything is out of control and spinning out of control. It's like we have a case of kind of spiritual vertigo; we just can't find our balance.

But if there is one thing in this world that seems out of control, there is one thing that you and I have complete and full control over and that's what I want to share with you about this morning. Today, I want to talk about the one thing that you have in common with every other person in this room and every other person that you know. It doesn't matter your age, young or old, whether you are a mom or a dad. It doesn't matter what you do for a living, it doesn't matter what your ethnic background, it doesn't matter where you live, you've had this one thing your entire life. You rarely think about it is my suspension, but I have to tell you, you take it with you where ever you go. You've never lived one minute without it.

What I'm talking about is that you what have in common with every other person here is that you possess a thing that the Bible calls a soul. It's the real you. I don't know if you guys have ever seen this sort of, really kind of lousy, B rated movie called Bedazzled. There is this one scene that is very fascinating. The principle character, Brendon Frazier, is having a conversation with Elizabeth Hurley, who plays the Devil. They're talking about his soul. She offers him seven wishes to do anything he would like and the only thing he has to do in exchange is give her his soul.

Here is the exchange that takes place. He says, "I can't give you my soul."

She says, "What's the big deal. Have you ever seen your soul? Do you even know what it is?"

He kind of stammers around and says, "Well, of course, it's that thing, you know, that floats around."

She says, "Can I tell you something? Souls are overrated. They don't ever do anything. Has yours done anything for you lately? It's just like your appendix, you won't even miss it."

He pauses for a moment and says, "If it's so useless, how come you want it so much?"

If you had been able to follow me around for much of my adult life, even as a pastor, and you had been able to read my thoughts and you had been able to see my motives and you had been able to overhear my conversations and you'd been able to look at the decisions that I made, and you could have kind of followed me around and saw what I did, what you would have probably concluded is "You now what? I think Lance thinks that souls are overrated."

What I want to remind all of us today and it's really important in light of where we are in this moment in history, is that your soul, that internal part of you, the invisible part of you is actually the real you. I mean you could walk out of here today and you could get in your car and be in an accident and they rush you to the emergency room and even if they had to amputate an arm or a leg, you'd still be you. You could check into the hospital and get a kidney transplant and you could actually have somebody else's organ functioning in your body, but it doesn't change who you are because you're not defined by a body part.

The Bible says that the essence of who you are is not what we can see in this temporal thing called a body, but the essence of who you are really is that you are a soul. And someday, that body that carries around your soul is going to get a disease or it's going to get old and wear out and it's going to take it's

last breath and your heart is going to beat for the last time and they are going to pronounce you dead and they are going to stick your body in the ground. I've got good news for you. That is not the end of you. In fact, you have an eternal soul that will live on somewhere forever. The Bible says that if you are a follower of Jesus, when your body dies and they put in the ground, that is really nothing more than the transitioning moment where your soul actually goes to heaven. The real you ends up in heaven.

So, think about this for moment. Think about how much time you spend taking care of that temporal thing you call your body. You primp, clean, groom, shampoo, wash, wax, manicure, comb, tuck, exercise, feed, and clothe, all before you came to church this morning. All for a body that's going to wear out and die. Doesn't it make sense that you and I would learn how to put energy and time and focus on managing the internal part of our life, the soul part of our us, as much as we do the external part of us?

Here's an illustration all us will get. Your soul is like the operating system for your life. Just like your smart phone and your computer have an operating system that runs in the background, you have a thing called a soul that runs in the background. On your computer, you mostly interface with all the apps and programs on your screen, but tying all of those together and allowing all of those to function is the thing called the operating system. When the operating system goes down, everything else goes down. And when the operating system of your soul gets toxic, gets disease, it's not working well, it impacts everything else in your life.

So, I want to talk to you about what would it look like in the moment like we're living in now to actually have a healthy soul? Because while there are a lot of things you don't control, one thing you do control is the health of your own soul.

Here's what Proverbs 19 says. Solomon says, ***8 The one who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers.***

I want to go to God's Word and get some wisdom about this thing called my soul. Now, when I was growing up... and I grew up in church and I heard hundreds of sermons and we believed the Word of God and we believed in the gospel and salvation, but no one taught me much about my soul. Even as a pastor, for many years, I would have known theologically that I had a soul. I would have believed that Jesus died for my soul. I would have known that my soul was on it's way to heaven, but it would not really have been relevant to me to think that I ought to actually pay attention to my soul and that my soul actually needs to be nurtured and that the health of my soul would actually determine the health of a lot of other things in my life.

By the way, this is very consistent with the teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught us that the Christian life goes inside to outside; that's the direction. In fact, in Matthew 12, Jesus would say, ***For whatever is in your heart...*** That inner, invisible part of your life, ***determines what you say.*** You have thoughts and you think things in your spirit and in your soul before you ever say them out loud.

Jesus would say in John 15, ***"I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit."*** Life flows from the vine into the branches and that produces fruit. It always goes from the root to fruit. It always goes from the invisible to the visible.

Listen to what Proverbs says in Chapter 4. Solomon said, ***23 Above all else...*** Wow! Think about those three words. ***...guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*** One translation says, "It is the wellspring of life." Everything you do, everything you say, all your external actions flow from the inside to the outside. But it's hard because everything in the world in which live really doesn't teach us to do that. It teaches us just to focus on the externals and the behaviors.

I want to take you to a passage of scripture that has become one of my favorites. In Deuteronomy 30, the Lord offers to the nation of Israel this amazing life of blessing. He says things like if you'll return to me, I'll increase your numbers. I'll prosper you. You will have bumper crops. I'll protect you from your enemies. I'll delight in you and you'll delight in me. We'll have a great relationship if you would just return to me." Then as sort of the response to that or God goes on to talk about that, he gives us some insight into how to have a healthy soul even in a time like we're living now.

I want to share with you four pillars of a healthy soul that come out of this Deuteronomy 30.

### **1. Take personal responsibility** (don't play the victim card)

Dallas Willard said, "Our soul is like a stream of water which gives strength, direction, and harmony to every other area of life." He says it's like the operating system, right? He says, "You didn't create the stream. God gave it to you at the moment that you were conceived." But here's the punch line. You are the keeper of the stream of your soul.

As Henry Cloud says and I love this quote, "You are ridiculously in charge of your life." You and I are ridiculously in charge of the health of our souls. So, if you go back to Deuteronomy 30, beginning in Verse 11, it gets really interesting because here's what God says. ***11 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. 12 It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" He's saying, "This offer of this amazing. Abundant life, it's not like it's up in heaven and someone has to get on a ladder and go get it." 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" 14 No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.***

Here's what God is saying. "The abundant life, even during a pandemic, it's available to you." It actually is accessible to you. It is yours for the taking. It is near you and it doesn't depend on your circumstances or where you live or how much money you make. And one of the best days of your life is the day that you take responsibility for the health of your own soul. It's not up to your spouse. It's not up to your pastor, not up to your boss. It's up to you, and God has already given you everything you need.

In 2 Peter 1, Peter says, **3 By God's divine power, He has given us everything we need for life in godliness.** Not just godliness, not just to be a spiritual person, but he says God has given you every resource you need to live this life the way that he wants you to live, to live that abundant life.

The truth is, sometimes we play the victim, right. I'd say even in my ministry for years I sort of played the victim. When I was on staff at Saddleback... and it was an amazing rocket ride of influence being in a church that size. Rick Warren wrote the book Purpose Driven Life, but I often look back at that season and say, "Those were seven of the most amazing years I never want to live again."

I wasn't leading myself well. I was a workaholic, the pressure, the chaos, the pace of my life was out of control. Often where it played out the ugliest was at home. My wife was generally a good sport but occasionally, she would just be fed up and we'd have one of those "come to Jesus" meetings. Have you ever had one of those? By the way, she was Jesus in those conversations.

We had the conversation over and over. She'd say, "You're never here. I don't get to see you. The kids don't get time with you. And even when you're here, you're not really here. All you do is work all the time. You're always on your computer. You're always on the phone... that's all you do."

I would pull out my victim card and say something like, "Hey, that's just how it is in ministry. And when we get on the other side of this campaign or Easter or Christmas services or I hire that next staff member, it's going to get better. It's just for a season."

Sometimes she would be so frustrated when it'd say that she would just stop me in mid-sentence. One of the worse fights we ever had, she looked at me one day with frustration and tears in her eyes and said, "There's always a reason or a season why you can't be who you're supposed to be." She was right. I was who I was because of choices that I had made. I am the keeper of the stream of my soul.

In recent years, I've been trying to learn this principle that I didn't understand for a long time and here it is. **Self-care is not selfish; it's good stewardship.** You leading yourself well with the one and only life you have is not selfish; it's actually good stewardship.

In Deuteronomy 30, the Lord sort of throws down the gauntlet and he says, **19 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.** Then he gives them these three words – it's a challenge: **Now choose life...** It's your choice. You get to decide. **...so that you and your children may live...** He's saying that if you'll choose life the way he has designed it, not only will you live, but also your children. And there is great promise in that verse that not only will you have not just a longer life, but a quality of life that you really want. I'm convinced that there are some of us who are watching this service and in this service today that really what you long for is not a different place to live, not a different car, or even a different job, but really a different kind of life. God says, "I'm offering that." It is actually accessible to you today.

## 2. Pursue Jesus First

Then he goes on in Verse 20. After he kind of throws down the gauntlet and he says... He gives us three phrases that I kind of want to camp on because they are our three next pillars beyond taking personal responsibility, the next one is pursue Jesus first (instead of your smart phone). What I mean by that is when you get up in the morning, let it be your first priority be to connect with Jesus, to spend time with Jesus. Rather than jumping on social media, looking at the news, that you would actually connect first with Christ. You won't have a healthy soul without having a real, ongoing, meaningful connection to Jesus.

Remember, when someone asked Jesus, "What's the most important teaching in all the Bible," he summarized the entire Bible in this phrase "Love God with everything that's in your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Your highest calling, highest priority is to make sure that you are connected to Jesus, not just that you're saved and on your way to heaven, but that you have an ongoing, personal connection to Jesus. That's why in Deuteronomy 30: 20, he says, here's what I want for you... **20 ...and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.** Notice that first phrase "that you would love the Lord your the God..." You won't do that unless you are regularly engaging God in his Word.

Now I grew up in a church and I knew that the Bible was important. We believed the Bible, cover to cover. We believed the Bible was inspired. I was taught to read the Bible, but I have to tell you, as a young Christian and even as a more maturing Christian, I really read the Bible informationally. I went to the Bible to learn it's truths, to understand its stories, to grasp sort of the character of God. But it's only been in recent years – and this would kind of be my challenge to you – I began to learn how to read the Bible relationally. I want to encourage you to learn to do the same.

Now I understand more and more that when I go to scripture, it's not just to read information on a page, but it's actually to connect with a heavenly Father, to actually be in relationship with a person. I'm trying to get in the habit of before I get into the word, I sort of stop for a moment and go, "Okay, God, as I read scripture today, I'm not just reading stories, I'm not just reading verses, I'm actually understanding you and your heart."

Let me illustrate it this way. Way back in the day, before my wife and I were married, when we first started dating, we lived 600 miles apart. Now, for some of you, this is impossible for you to even grasp: this was before the days of cell phones, before the days of Twitter, Facebook, Tic Tok, Snapchat, any of that kind of stuff. In fact, even in those days, you didn't have unlimited minutes; you got charged by the minute.

So, we were poor college students. All we could do is afford to call each other once a week. She called me for 30 minutes and I'd call her for 30 minutes. Then we would try to figure out some way that we could get together every month or two. Listen, in between all of that, every day for over a year, I wrote Connie a love letter. Every day for over a year, she wrote me a love letter. When I would go down stairs in my college dorm and open up my mail box and pull out that letter that I knew was going to be there waiting for me and I opened that letter and I read those sentences and I read those pages, I want to tell

you, I did not read them informationally, I read them relationally. I never did a Greek or Hebrew study on the words that she used. I never went back and looked up the historical context of the city where she lived. What drove me was I knew that behind those pages was a person who loved me.

Part of what will help you sustain through this pandemic is that you are engaging in God's Word, that you are connecting with Jesus, that you make it the first priority of the day, that you would connect with him. Just because you go to God's Word, it doesn't mean you are going to understand everything that's happening in the world today. I'm confused by it just like you are. I don't know all that God is up to, but here's a spiritual principle that will serve you well. **It's our nature to look for reasons; it's God's nature to offer relationship.** We always want to ask why, and God always wants to point us to who. And God would say to us, "Just trust me. I'm good, I've not forgotten you. I've not abandoned you, and you have to learn how to actually just be with me." Here's my challenge. **We must learn to do life with God, not just for him.** And that means being in a relationship with him.

### 3. Listen to His voice.

So, let me move on to the next pillar. So, first off is personal responsibility; you have to own it for yourself. Secondly, you've got to choose to pursue Jesus, to stay meaningfully connected to him to sustain yourself through this time. Thirdly, I would say to you, you must listen to his voice. That includes both shutting off and shutting up. Now, let me explain what I mean by that.

First off, it means that you must create space in your life. This has been such a big deal for me. My entire life, I've always been a hurrier. Always compulsively busy, don't know how to relax, overfilling my schedule, taking on more commitments than I should have, filling every second of my day. Often, I was exhausted, and I would have this love/hate relationship with my life.

I would hate the busyness and the overcrowded schedule that I was living, but also loved being in demand. I think under all my busyness was this lie that I believed which is this: Busy people are important people. From my earliest days, I got a script in my head and that script was work hard, be responsible, achieve, and that's how you succeed and that how you get loved. When that's the story that you constantly tell yourself, you're only as good as your latest achievement. I didn't understand that my limits were a gift from God. I didn't understand the importance of rest. I didn't understand the importance of a healthy rhythm of life, one that created speed.

I've come to know and believe, with great conviction, that **you can't live life at warped speed without warping your soul.** You must learn how to live a healthy rhythm of life. Jesus modeled this for us so well.

I love this one passage in Mark 1. Jesus is the guest speaker at the Synagogue that morning. The Bible says that while he's preaching, he gets confronted with demons. Now, I don't know about you, but that feels pretty intense to me. Then the Bible says he heals people. And then after church, he goes to Peter's house for lunch and he heals Peter's mother in law, and then the Bible says that evening, they brought everybody in town who was sick and demon possessed to his door. Oh my gosh! Jesus heals more people, casts out more demons, falls asleep.

And then the very next verse says, **35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left...** Now, if I stop right there, I think that makes sense to me. He's the son of God; he probably should get up earlier than the rest of us. He's only got three years to do his public ministry so he needs to be out there pressing the flesh, preaching to the crowds, saving as many people as possible, but notice what it says, He left **...the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.** What Jesus did systematically throughout his ministry is he would heal and minister to the masses, he would train the 12, and then he would make sure that he got time alone with his Father. He created space in his life that also included rest. You and have to do the same. Very early in the morning, he went to that quiet place.

I want to give you a practical strategy for slowing down and creating space. It has been a game changer for me in the last 15 years. To get into the practice of a weekly sabbath, which is what God recommends. In fact, he puts it in the Ten Commandments. This command is that you and I would have a rhythm of one in seven, that one day out of seven would be about rest and replenishing our soul and being quiet and enjoying our family, not about being productive and not about working. It has been a game changer in my life to make that a regular practice.

So, we have to create space, but also you have to **turn down the noise.** What I mean by that is you have to sometimes get rid of some of the stuff that's a constant distraction in your life. The number one thing for me is I have to learn how to manage my phone. It is not healthy for my soul to constantly be in the news, to constantly be in on social media, to constantly not be able to have a thought without being distracted by my phone. For a lot of us, it's really about turning down the noise of an over scheduled life of always being plugged in. What would it look like for you to, in a healthy way, not just create a healthy rhythm, but also to manage distraction in your life? That's why God says, "Listen to my voice." I'm convinced that one of the things that keeps me from hearing God's voice in my life is constant noise and constant busy.

#### **4. Hold fast to Him (no matter what!).**

So, you have to own the health of your soul, make it a commitment that you will connect meaningfully with Jesus every single day, that you will listen to God's voice, that you will develop a healthy rhythm of life and turn down the distraction, and then, finally, I would say to you that you have to hold fast to God (no matter what!). In fact, that's exactly the phrase that's used in Deuteronomy 30: 20 because just like in this year, you never know what life is going to throw at you, right? Rewind the clock and go back to February. None of us could have or would have predicted that we would be where we are in our culture now, six months later. What if life doesn't turn out like you thought? What if you do get the diagnosis that you'd feared? What if you do lose that job? What do you do then? What can you hold onto when you feel like you have spiritual vertigo? I think the answer is you cling to God's character and to go God's faithfulness.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible comes in the book of Job. You guys remember that story of Job where God and Satan are having this conversation and Satan says, "The only reason Job serves you and loves you is because he's got it made. He's living the dream." God says, "I'll tell you what, you can do anything to Job but take his life."

Now, remember, Job is completely unaware of the conversation that took place in heaven. And in the next days that followed, Job loses all of his wealth. His livestock are killed, all of his herds, his slaves, his servants are all murdered. Ten of his kids are killed in a freak windstorm. He loses his health. The Bible says he's covered from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head with all kinds of sores and boils. His wife is whispering in his ear, "Just curse God and die. Just end this thing." Job is on this roller coaster of his emotions, some days declaring his trust for God, some days wondering why he had ever been born, and some days demanding that God answer him. The book of Job is silent for 38 chapters God never says a word. By the way, as an aside, even when God does respond, he never gives Job an answer.

Here's my favorite verse in the Book of Job. In the midst of his own personal pandemic, he says, in Job 13: 15, "Even though he slayed me, yet will I trust him." Even when nothing in his world made sense, Job said, "I am choosing to trust God and hold onto him." And that, my friend, is what I'm encouraging you to do.

Here's a key verse in Deuteronomy 30: 20. He says, ...**hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life...** He is the stake in the ground that's the one thing we can hold onto that gives us stability. Jesus is your life.

So, if you are in a season right now where you're struggling, where you're discouraged, where life seems out of control, where you cannot seem to get your balance, I just want you to know God has not forgotten you. You are not hidden from him. Allow this season to not discourage you but rather to deepen you.

I just leave you with this final thought. It happens in the Book of John 6. Jesus has just done the miracle of the fishes and the loaves and he's fed 5,000 men, not counting women and children. It's the only miracle outside of the resurrection that is recorded in every one of the gospels. Of course, everyone is enamored with this miracle working Jesus. The Bible says that the crowds came back in the next day and they said, "Man, do that again. Feed us again. Give us another free meal."

Now Jesus knows they are not really interested in being disciples; they're just interested in being consumers and sort of getting whatever good blessing God might have for them. The Bible says Jesus begins to deliver kind of a hard teaching. He reminds them that life is so much more than food and meals. He delivers this hard teaching and then in John 6: 66, we read these words: **From this time, many of those who followed him turned back and stopped following him.** Wow. I just have this scene in my mind of Jesus standing there and these big crowds, who were so eager to follow him the day before, are now walking away.

Jesus turns to his 12 disciples and he says, "So, what about you guys? Are you going to leave too?" Sometimes, when Peter is quick to speak, he puts his foot in his mouth, right? But I love what Peter says this time. Listen to what he says: "Where else would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the holy One of God."

I think this is a great time for those of us who claim name the name of Jesus to put a stake in the ground and to say boldly and humbly, "I am casting my lot with Jesus. I am holding onto him. I don't

understand everything that's going on. I don't know where this is all going to end, but I am declaring my trust in God."

I pray today that you will let Peter's words kind of just reverberate in your soul and that today they would become your own personal declaration of dependence. That you, with Peter, would say, "Lord, where else would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. We believe them and know that you are the holy One of God." I think if that can be true of us, we'll find our way through this. We can still have that amazing, abundant life that God offers to us if we will learn how to have a healthy soul in the process.

Let's pray together. I'm going to ask us all to bow and I'm going to ask you right now maybe to just ask this question: "Lord, how are you coming to me right now? What are you saying to me in this moment?"

Father, in the quietness of this moment, I ask that your spirit would speak strongly and clearly and loudly to the people who are watching this service and participating in this service, that you would help us to own the health of our own soul, that you would help us to commit to pursuing Jesus first, that we would learn what it looks like to create space and turn down the noise and to listen to your voice, and that we would declare our dependence on you and we will hold fast because we believe that you are who you said you are, we believe that you are good, and when all the world seems out of control, you are in control and you've given us everything we need for life and godliness. May we walk that out this week. We pray in Jesus name... Amen.