

## **“Some Will Fall Away”**

### **I Timothy**

**Downtown & Lexington**

**May 31, 2020**

Hey Family, it's good to be with you today. We're going to be in 1 Timothy chapter 4 - and this is going to be something of a 2-part sermon. This week is going to be a little more diagnosis, and next week we'll do the prescribing. The question I want to put out there for us today is:

#### **What would you say has the greatest potential to destroy you?**

- Maybe a relationship? Losing a relationship that you believe you can't live without. Maybe being in a bad relationship - a relationship that makes you unhappy or feeling unfulfilled?
- Maybe something unforeseen happening at work? Maybe your career doesn't go where you want it to go?
- Maybe... it's skeletons coming out of your closet. Something nobody knows about you coming out into the light?
- Maybe you think those things or others are what stands as the biggest threat to your life.

But the Bible is going to present us with a different answer today.

#### **The thing with the greatest potential to destroy you is... a lie.**

Let's look at 1 Timothy...

##### **1 Timothy 4:1**

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times [That's the Bible's phrase for any time between Jesus' resurrection and ascension and when he's coming again. So right now, what you and I are living in] some will depart from the faith

Right out of the gate, Paul says the Spirit says that some people will walk away from faith in Jesus. Some will fall away. They'll turn their back. People who once appeared to be Christians. Whose lives seemed to be marked by faith and love... will one day for one reason or another stop.

Maybe that experience is similar to your own today. Maybe you've got a friend or a family member who has fallen away - whose heart at one point seemed so warm and softened to the Gospel but now appears to have grown cold. Someone who used to be so dedicated to your LifeGroup and encouraging people who now has gone completely MIA. Someone who would once sing loudly, "take the world, but give me Jesus", but whose life now seems to declare, "give me the world... but maybe take Jesus somewhere else."

Paul says this is a reality that will happen and should be expected.

It's actually reflective of what Jesus himself teaches in Matthew 13 in the parable of the sower and the soils. If you're unfamiliar, He says the sower will sow seed (the Word of God - the gospel of the Kingdom) on all types of soils - which are a metaphor for people. Some soils or people will receive it and it will bear fruit, but others soils will receive it and for one reason or another - such as concerns for worldly things, or fear or hardship or the devil's interference - won't. There might be some signs of life

for a bit, but for some it will eventually fall away and die.

It's a pretty sobering teaching.

For the record, despite what you may think, this is actually the worst thing that could happen to you.

- The worst thing that could happen to you is not losing a relationship that means a lot to you.
- The worst thing that could happen to you isn't that something bad happens at your job.
- The worst thing that could happen to you isn't even that your deepest darkest secrets get put out on a billboard for the world to see.

The worst thing that could happen to you is that you fall away from faith in Christ and spend eternity apart from Him.

As a pastor, it's always been a hard thing for me to wrestle with. And I imagine it was for Timothy, too. I tend to think I am far more in control than I actually am. So, if I just teach good enough, if I just make the right leadership moves, if I just do what I'm supposed to do as a pastor - then this won't be anyone's story. If I do my job right, everyone will see the beauty of Jesus, their need for His salvation and the fullness of life in following Him and never turn away for other things.

But, sadly, my own experience and the Scriptures say that's not the case. Paul says, "don't count on it." He writes this to Timothy so that he won't be surprised...and subsequently, neither should we.

But the scariest part about this idea is that none of us really know who it's gonna happen to... these were people who were part of the Ephesian church... they had all the appearances of following Jesus, they were rooted in their community... and they walk away.

Now, while Paul doesn't say who it will happen to, he does pull back the curtain a bit on why it happens.

#### **I Timothy 4:1**

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons

Alright... *What?* I don't know how that strikes you, but that's it not the first place I would expect him to go here. People are gonna walk away from Jesus because of deceitful spirits and demons??? I'm like: "Okay... uhh... I think that's enough for me today guys. This just got a little weird. I'm gonna need to take a break"

Maybe I'm alone in that but, let's talk about it for a minute. There is a category that many of us do not have as modern westerners that the Bible, much of the world today, and much of human history has had - and that is the category of the supernatural.

We are the product of what is called "the Enlightenment". An intellectual and philosophical movement in the 17th and 18th centuries in the West placed a heavy emphasis on reason and rationality especially regarding what could be tangibly observed in the material world. As a byproduct, the prevailing attitude that spread and we inherited is that if you can't touch it, taste it, smell it, see it, or hear it, it probably doesn't exist.

And since, we're ingrained with this material worldview that means when it comes to the supernatural,

either we don't think the supernatural world exists at all - no demons, no devil, no angels - whatever - it's all a product of ancient imagination, or if it does exist it doesn't affect us all that much.

Maybe some people over in other countries deal with it, or maybe it's what's behind my car breaking down on the day of my big presentation at work, but it doesn't really have any effect on our day to day life.

But, the Scriptures paint a bit of a different picture. The Scriptures indicate that there is very much a supernatural reality that overlaps with the material world... and not only does it exist, but it is engulfed in a battle that we are all caught up in - no matter who we are, whether we follow Jesus or not, or even if we're aware of it.

Paul told the Ephesian church this else in Ephesians

**Ephesians 6:12**

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

He says there is more going on than what we see. Paul here is helping us pull back the layers a bit to see what's really taking place behind the scenes.

But, take a closer look at how Paul says these forces are at play:

**I Timothy 4:1-2**

Some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, *through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared*

Here's what's going on: Paul says there is a group of people. He calls them "liars" whom he says have "seared consciences." So, the Greek word here means something like "to be branded" or "burned" with a hot iron. When someone is burned the nerves no longer work. They lose sensitivity.

He's saying there are people who have lost their sensitivity to the gospel, lost their sensitivity to the truth, lost their sensitivity to Jesus because they are surrounded by false and deceptive ideas. They are so engulfed with lies, that they can't see what's true. And they spread it to others.

Do any of these people think that they are following the teachings of demons? No. Not at all. They've simply heard something that sounds good or right to them. They think they are doing what is right. They see the ways that others around them believe and live and simply following suit. They think they are thinking clearly. And Paul's point is, that in reality they are not.

In reality, they have simply bought into a lie... and the lie led them away. It's a domino effect. That began in the spiritual realm... but looks very natural when it makes it way to us.

And the reason I put this out here for us today is because I think in many respects we can be blind to the true danger that lurks around us. The real battle we face in life, the real war over our souls - the battle in front of Timothy and the Ephesian church - isn't merely a battle over how we act or behave, but primarily a battle for our minds.

At the risk of sounding crazy to you, demonic forces are at play around you... just not how you might be tempted to think. They are at play and their chief mode of operation is deceit.

In the Bible, the devil is referred to in a lot of different ways, but one of his primary characteristics or attributes is that of **a deceiver**, one who schemes and slanders and is full of untruth. In **John 8:44**, Jesus says the devil is “a liar and the father of lies.”

The Bible doesn't present him as a being whose primary mode of operation is to trip you up by, say, making your car overheat so you lash out in anger because it made you late to work or by getting that ad to pop up on your computer screen to make you succumb to your lustful thoughts.

**Rather, his chief strategy is deception and lies.** He aims to get you to think, believe, and see things that are not true... such that you turn from God to your own way.

We see this all the way back in Genesis 3 and the garden when the Devil, here in the form of a serpent has a strategy of temptation with lies, bent truth, and deception.

In **Genesis 2:17** God says - “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.”

Then, the Devil shows up as a serpent, **Genesis 3:1**, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” Eve essentially says yes... But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

“Did God really say that? Well why did he say that? Are you sure it's not because he is an oppressor and He only gets to be up there because you're down here? Sounds fishy to me.”

**Satan puts a question mark where God had put a period.**

Satan shows up, and his goal for Adam & Eve was for them to worship him and choose an allegiance to his kingdom. But he didn't just come out and say that. He doesn't just show up in the garden and say - “Hey, worship me or I'm gonna bite you.” It's much, much, much more subtle.

As Dallas Willard points out: the devil comes not with a stick but with an idea. The most poisonous thing about the serpent is not his bite, but his lies.

And the exact same strategy is employed against you and I today... “Did God really say?” “Are you sure you can trust Him on that?”

I feel this in my own soul all the time. Over the past several years, I've come to realize that I have what some people - namely my wife - would call, “control issues.” All the time - I want it. I want to be in control of my schedule, my time, my money, my future, my family, this church, all of it. Now, the Scriptures are real clear → I'm not in control. God is in control. He's sovereign over all things. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He tells the sun to rise and to set. And He uses His sovereign power to shepherd and care for His people.

But when I'm pressed? When my life actually starts to feel out of control - when money is tight, or people

don't do what I expect them to - how quickly the question marks come.

- "Can you really trust God with this?"
- "You know, Michael, it might be better if you took matters into your own hands here."
- "Do your prayers really do anything? Seems like it'd be a lot wiser for you to lose sleep trying to think up a plan... I mean, after all, doesn't God say in Proverbs "a little sleep and little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest will lead to poverty and destruction?"
- "Maybe God doesn't really care about what happens to you and you shouldn't have followed Him into this."

### **Question marks to deny God's goodness and distort God's words.**

In fact, this is what lies at the root of so much, if not all of our sin → believing in lies. We believe that something was better than God, that your way was better than His way...and that sin would give you what you really need and want while God is holding out on you. So either he's not good for withholding this, or he didn't actually mean it when he said...fill in the blank.

### **Sin begins by distorting God's goodness and denying His Words.**

Before sin is about self-control or discipline or whatever, it is first and foremost about what you believe to be true.

But, here's the thing. I don't wake up in the morning thinking, "You know what, I want to believe the devil's lies today. That sounds fun." No, of course not. It's a little idea here, or a subtle message there that distorts the Truth. It's a small concession here. I'll just take a glance. I'll just listen for a minute. It's a little grab at control there. That eventually snowballs into destruction...

Our conscience gradually gets seared towards the things of God over time. His voice becomes a little bit less loud. And our heart is a little bit less sensitive.

One commentator talked about the seared consciences in this passage like a snooze button on an alarm. One morning you press it one time. Then the next morning two times. Then three. Over and over and over again. Till eventually we just don't hear it at all or we turn it off in our sleep.

And if I can just be honest, when it comes to the Enemy's work in your life, I am not concerned about many of you holding a seance or dragging out a Ouija board. I don't lose sleep at night over the thought of you traipsing out in the woods for a bonfire to worship Satan. What I do lose sleep at night over, however, is your news feed. The podcasts you listen to. The voices you surround yourself with. The shows and movies that preach to you for countless hours each month, of how you ought to think, believe, and live in this world - and let's not kid ourselves that they aren't preaching.

What keeps me up is the stories you hear constantly about what is right and wrong, what is freedom and what's oppression, who is good and who is evil. Because there are spiritual kingdoms at war amongst those stories, and we are too often blinded to that. I lose sleep over seeing former members of our churches that I've known and loved and pastored, and now see what they post on Instagram or Facebook. Because I can't help but think of who here might be next to fall to the incredibly influential power of the devil's deception.

### **I lose sleep because lies have the potential to destroy you.**

**There are extreme examples of this that we see all the time.** One that's fresh on my mind because of the new Netflix series, is the events that happened in Waco, TX with the famous standoff between the FBI and David Koresh and his Branch Davidian cult.

Koresh had convinced about 100+ people in the middle of Texas that he was the lamb of God called to usher in the book of Revelation. It's a true story and it's just utterly baffling.

I mean here they were, 40-some odd days into a standoff with the FBI. Their power was cut off. They had no milk for their kids. Running out of food. All night the FBI would blast lights and loud music into the compound. But none of them would leave. None of them. Not a single one would leave unless David Koresh told them they could.

And I'm watching this going - JUST LEAVE. WALK OUT THE FRONT DOOR. But they were so convinced of the lie, that it had shifted and rearranged everything in their lives. In the end, 76 Branch Davidians, including 25 children died.

And while Waco might be a bit of a grandiose example or a caricature, this is happening all the time, all around us and in us. **We can become trapped and destroyed by the lies we believe.**

And here I think it's worth taking a look at the lies those in the Ephesian church were prone to believe...

### **I Timothy 4:3**

...who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

I don't know how that strikes you when you hear it, but it makes me go... "wait... they were being tempted with singleness and veganism?" This weird text just got weirder.

I mean, don't you expect these to be different? Don't you expect the lies to be licentious? Like come on demons, at least pick something tempting? But, that's not it. These lies are different.

Apparently, what you have happening in Ephesus is this group of false teachers trying to persuade people to some sort of "higher spirituality" in the form of asceticism. "You care about godliness don't you? Well, if you really care about godliness, you won't get married and you won't eat this or that..."

And Paul points out their error that denying foods and marriage aren't what makes you holy. The truth is Jesus makes you holy and as for foods and marriage and the like for everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, as **I Timothy 4:5** says: "for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."

But, to be honest, these lies... seem... innocuous... dare I say even good. Afterall, self-denial is at the core of Jesus' call to discipleship, right? These lies have an appearance of piety and religion... but are distortions to the things God has said... **they distort the truth of salvation through Christ and grace alone and transform it into something else.**

They've turned it to Jesus + something else, but Jesus + anything else = nothing.

But, there are 3 important things to glean here:

**First, the devil is just as happy to take you out with religion as he is with rebellion.** It makes no difference to him, as long as it keeps you from faith in Christ. Let me say it more clearly → The devil would be perfectly content for you to live a nice, quiet, moral life as long as it keeps you from trusting and following Christ. He'd love for your life to externally look like you're doing all the right things, but internally be cold to Christ. He's content for you to be culturally Christian in your morality and maybe how you spend your Sundays as long as it's without any of the actual substance of following Jesus.

If it means it means you're more dependent on your own holiness and less and less dependent on God's saving grace. The devil is more than happy to let you roll with it.

**Second, the best lies contain some aspect of truth.** These false teachers were taking some valid commands of God - towards self-denial and fleeing idol worship. And twisting it. Distorting it.

**Third, the lies of the devil play directly to our emotions and desires.**

The devil isn't there in the back of your ear whispering "Psst... Tupac is still alive." That has no impact on my life, so who cares? It's deceitful ideas that play to our disordered desires - things that I want or really wish were true. What the New Testament calls the flesh → the disordered desires within you that draw you away from what is good, and toward what is evil and destructive.

For the Ephesians, it was the draw to the internal desire for self-righteousness.

This is how the devil works → *Through deceitful ideas that play to disordered desires....*

And the reason this is so effective is because we can't live with cognitive dissonance. None of us can. None of us can live our lives for that long saying we believe one thing and yet living another way. And so the devil, the father of lies comes, and he gives deceitful ideas that play to our disordered desires. And he tempts us towards what our sinful hearts long for.

And then rather than repent, turn from our sin back to Jesus, we believe another lie - well my life isn't lining up with my beliefs, so I guess my beliefs were wrong and must change.

I can't tell you how many times I've interacted with someone whose story goes something like this, "I couldn't stop hooking up with my girlfriend... now, I think I've come to the conclusion God isn't real."

Obviously, that is a shortened version and there are a lot more details, but this is how it goes. I want to sleep with her, it feels good, and feels right to me... so God must be wrong. The reasoning itself is a non-sequitur, but it's powerful because it's an issue of the heart, of desire... But it's how many of us deal with our guilt.

And the warning here is that if you do that long enough it will ultimately turn you away from Jesus and destroy your soul. Don't underestimate the power of a lie over your actions, your behavior, and your life.

The lie entraps, the lie destroys... but the truth, as Jesus says in John 8... the truth sets free.

Let me just share with you a few ways I've seen this just absolutely tear people apart.

**I've watched men and women absorb the idea that in order for me to be happy or have a full life, they've got to find romantic love...**

The nugget of truth is that you were made for love and you were made for relationships.

But the distortion is that the love and relationships God provides aren't enough. God's love isn't enough. Relationships between brothers and sisters in the church isn't enough either. Long-term committed relationship with your spouse isn't enough. You need romance, you need passion or excitement.

You need a husband or wife... or perhaps different husband or wife...and once you believe that lie - that you must have a certain kind of romantic love in your life to have a full life, it's not hard for me to predict your future. You are set up for all kinds of destruction.

I've watched it lead to affairs and tearing apart families. People date or marry someone who doesn't share the fundamental foundations of their life - namely faith in Jesus and either suffer through years of internal and external conflict... or - and this what happens most often - they decide to throw in the towel on Jesus altogether. Not at all once, to be sure, but slowly, over time leaving Jesus behind just becomes that path of least resistance.

But the whole truth is - you are loved. You are loved in a way that no earthly love will ever actually fully compare. You are loved by God. To the point that He gave His life for you. You're loved by a God who will never abandon you! Never stop loving you no matter how unworthy or undeserving you are of it.

And he's given you relationship - with Himself AND his people - brothers and sisters in the renewed community of God. So you're not alone...

**That's the truth, but the lie destroys.**

**Another one, we get taught at every turn is the notion that God proves his love for you by things going well for you...**

Now, the nugget of truth is that God is a God who blesses his people and that suffering, pain and brokenness are not a part of His original design for the world.

But, the distortion becomes if my life doesn't go well, God doesn't love me. If my bank account isn't full enough, if my kids go off the rails, if my life doesn't turn out how I want it too... there is either something wrong with me or wrong with God. "God this isn't how things should be... so either I'm the problem... or you're the problem!"

And that lie can come to you in any number of ways - a parent wound, a tragic loss, the death of a dream, being from an oppressed people group, not having a body that meets the current cultural standards of beauty - Satan doesn't care how the message gets to you, just that you pick up on it.

And at best, it turns you into a bitter and angry person at God. At worst, it moves you to believe that you are worthless, unlovable - with hopelessness and despair. Who walks away from God... and sometimes walks away from life altogether.

But, the Scriptures are unequivocally clear, the whole truth is despite the fall, God takes care of his people and is always for their joy... and yes, suffering, hardship, and difficulty will happen, but they are part and parcel of life after the fall and should be expected for those who follow Jesus.

But no matter what we face in this life, He never forsakes, He never abandons. If He didn't abandon us on the cross, He won't and hasn't now.

**That's the truth... but the lie destroys.**

And honestly, I could rattle off several more examples of the lies we believe - lies about relationships, lies about money, and everything in between... but I just bring these up to help us see that this is the situation we all find ourselves in.

I mentioned earlier that Paul doesn't say who will fall away... just why they do. And I think the reason for that is simply because this is a warning to us all.

The easiest thing in the world for us to do with this sermon would be to think all of these things for someone else - for our friends, or maybe a family member, or maybe someone from our group... but this is not just a warning for them... it's a warning for you. It's a warning for me. It's a warning for all of us.

In Matthew 13, when Jesus talks about the soils. He says, they receive the word with gladness... and yet, fall away. And there are many of us here who have "received" the word with gladness... but the sad truth is we are dangerously unaware of the lies that still have sway over our souls. Or even worse we're aware of them and we've stopped caring.

- Lies about where true life and joy will be found.
- Lies about how life should be lived.
- Lies about ourselves, our relationships, our world.

And little bit by little bit our consciences have gotten seared. And we care a little less about the things of God, and then a little less, and then a little less until we don't care at all.

**Listen to me, you can stop following Jesus long before you officially stop following Jesus.**

I believe that some of us are already on the path of walking away. You may not know it, but you are. You may not believe it or want to admit it, but you are. And you've probably already had a friend who's tried to help you, but you've tried to silence them:

- You told them it's not that big of a deal.
- You told them "it's just a season. I'll be fine."
- You casually reminded them they're not so perfect either and should worry about their own stuff.
- Or maybe you've just stopped showing up to the places you know they will be... like your LifeGroup.

And you're just hardening your heart, one step at a time. One decision at a time. One action at a time. One thought at a time.

And what I want to leave you with today is the truth that none of that is benign. Behind all of that is a personal supernatural evil. All you saw was your newsfeed, and your watch list, and your friends who are really just glorified yes-men, but it was something much further below the surface. And the father of lies

got you and you're too asleep to see it.

So, what do we do? How do we guard against the deception and destruction of the lie?

**We learn to hear and obey the voice of Jesus, who is the Truth over the lies of the devil.**

And that's where we're going next week.