

Overcoming Heartache

By J. P. Moreland

[Musical Introduction]

"Forever" by Chris Tomlin, "Blessed Be Your Name" by Matt Redman, "You Are Beautiful My Sweet Sweet Song" by Third Day

Announcer:

As she sang, God is so good and He heals the broken-hearted. For those of you that are coming in, there's more space up here in the front. You can come and sit around here. Just keep coming in.

Let's begin the morning in prayer. Dear gracious Heavenly Father, we exalt You and praise Your holy name. We ask that You inhabit the praises of your people this morning. As Your word reminds us, in Psalm 46, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear. The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Come, behold the works of the Lord. 'Cease striving, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!' The Lord of Hosts is with us." Today, Lord, we ask that You will cleanse us of all our sins; help us to cease striving; settle our hearts and minds on You, laying aside all worries, our cares or insecurities as we focus on You and You alone for our sufficiency right now. Thank You that we have this time to understand more of who You are. Lord, we ask that You would bless Dr. Moreland today for his faithfulness to follow Your call on his life. I pray that You would illuminate Your truth as he speaks and teach our hearts and minds this morning. In Jesus' matchless name we pray, Amen.

Welcome. My name's Kathy Verhoeven, the university chaplain assistant, and it is my pleasure to welcome you on Thursday mornings to Thursday Chapel. Thursdays are one of the favorite days for a number of reasons, one of them being that the students request certain speakers and we try to fit them into this venue. And so what you hear on Thursdays here are the people's choice, the students' favorite, and most of them are professors from Biola and Talbot. The nice thing is that you get to come and learn from them, even if you don't get the privilege of sitting under their discipline.

It's a pleasure today that we have one of the students' favorite, Dr. J.P. Moreland. And even though he is a world renown philosopher, author, and speaker, in fact, he will be speaking at the Great Doctrines of the Bible seminar that will be in a local church. You can pick up a brochure on your way in or out. Dr. Moland- Moreland is married to Hope Moreland. He has two beautiful daughters, Ali and Ashley Moreland. Ashley is not Ashley Moreland anymore. Last month she became Ashley Brady; married Bo Brady from Biola. And she had something interesting to say about her father, as well as Ali, who's a senior here. You know, you can tell the most about a man by what is said by his family. And although I could list a number of his accolades, accomplishments, the books he's written, the places he's been and spoken, the things that his dear sweet daughters have said about him are probably the most revealing.

I want to tell you what Ali said. She said, "Something I admire and respect about my father is his commitment and consistency in humbling himself." She said, "even though he's such a smart man, he continues to humble himself to learn." And then she went on to say, "it wasn't until I got

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

to Biola that I realized what a man of great stature my father is because he's so humble around the home." And then his daughter Ashley said, "What I really admire and respect about my father is his simple love of Jesus." She said, "I know he is known for his tremendous intellect and intellectual pursuit of the Lord. But what I see in his life is a simple love of Jesus." So I'd like you to help me welcome a man who humbly and simply loves Jesus, Dr. J.P. Moreland.

J. P. Moreland:

I don't think that was the best way to introduce me here this morning (audience laughing). Wow. Thank you so much, Kathy. You have a special place in your heart for your daughters, and um, somebody needs to tell a joke right now hahaha. I guess the joke's on me, isn't it? Kathy, you and John have become such sweet friends. My girls both know their daughters, and they- they roomed together at Biola and will this next year. It's just been such a joy to see our families intertwined. Thank you for the work that you do in the chapel. You have served this community tremendously. And I want to personally thank you for that.

It's hard to believe the new school year's here, isn't it? And as I look out at you, I know that some of you are excited to be back. But I know that there are some of you here that have a great deal of hurt in your hearts. You're back at school, and in all honesty, you feel like you might not make it till this weekend, much less till Christmas break. Some of you may have parents that are in the middle of a divorce. Some of you may have just broken up with a boyfriend or girlfriend. You're here and you feel tremendously lonely. You may be here as a freshman or a sophomore and you wonder in all honesty, if you can cut college, if you can really hack it. Some of you are struggling with very deep personal emotional issues and perhaps sinful habits in your life. And

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

sometimes you just think is it worth it? You want to throw in the towel. There's an awful lot of heartache in this world.

The adults here will understand that the pressures of work, financial concerns, fears about your own children and their well-being, these can be very, very difficult. And I want to share with you some things that I hope will be of help to you this morning in this regard. I, myself, know what it's like to be hurting inside. This last spring, I have been through a very deep hurtful time in my own life, where I've been working through some issues. And I'm not through with it yet. I'm still trying to make progress and working through some things that are in my own life that I'm working on. I say that because your professors understand when you go through something. We're not wooden figures that have- God had made. Now, hopefully we're further down the road than you are, but we understand your hurts and your pains because we experience them as well.

I'd like to give you three tips that I hope will help you if you're going through something hard right now. If you're not, cheer up. You probably will be down the road (audience laughing). So maybe- maybe these will encourage you as- as- as best they can. This is going to be a topical message. I'm not going to go through a passage in the New Testament like I typically do, but my hope is that these will be of encouragement to you.

First thing I want to tell you is this, if you're going through a hard time, don't spend all your time focusing on yourself, and try to be happy. Don't spend all of your time focusing on yourself, and try to be happy. One of the worst things that can happen to you if you're going through something hard is to start worrying about the fact that you're worried. You know what I'm talking

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

about? You start worrying and you're and you're- you say to yourself, "you know what? I'm just not very happy right now." What that does is it causes you to have unhappiness about the fact that you're not happy. And then you spend all of your time actually being sadder because you're not happy!

Now, have you ever noticed today that happiness is something that you can't gain by trying to have it? This is called, in philosophy, the paradox of hedonism, and it's- it's the following paradox. If you want to be happy, the worst way to be happy is to make happiness your goal. Now think of it like this. If you want friends, the worst thing you can do to try to get friends is to try to go into social situations and to convince everybody how cool you are. Guys, if I may just say a word to you, one of the complaints I hear from our dear sisters on a regular basis is that college men can't focus on girls and ask them questions, and instead they spend all of their time talking about themselves. And I understand that insecurity, but it doesn't work because if you- if you're out with a sister or you're in a group and you're- you're spending all your time talking about yourself because you want people to think well of you, it backfires. You know, the best way to gain friends is what? It's learn to be a friend. And so, you can't be happy by being happy.

Now, I want to give you an al- an alternative to focus on. Would you turn very quickly to Matthew chapter 16; Matthew chapter 16. I want to read two verses to you. I'd like to speak on these verses because they're constant sources of encouragement to me. And I hope that they'll encourage you as well. Jesus is describing what it means to follow Him, and He is giving us now a core statement about how life works. Now I want you to notice this is not a command that He gives us. He is not commanding us to do anything. He is describing the way reality is. It would

be like this: You will not learn math if you don't practice fractions. Now, that's not a command to go practice fractions. You can choose not to do it. That's just a description of the way math is. Do you understand that? You won't be healthy if you don't eat right and drink water. That's just a description of reality. And what He's gonna give us is a description of how we were made to function.

And He says in verse 24 and 25, "if anybody wants to be My disciple, let him deny himself-" and Luke says "every day" so this is a habit we have to form; it's a practice. "Let him deny himself each day, and take up his cross-" That basically means to live for other people for Christ's sake. So if you take up your cross, essentially, that means that you set your own rights aside and you spend your time trying to live for others. You focus on your gifts and your talents. You say, "what are my gifts and talents? How can I develop these gifts and talents so I can serve non-Christians and help them? And so I can serve my wife and children or my friends or my brothers and sisters. How can I learn to give myself away for other people?"

So He says if you want to be His disciple, practice every day forgetting about yourself and giving yourself to others for His namesake. And then verse 25, He says this unbelievably odd principle but it's just all gonna- it's the truth. When He says, "if you want to save your life," He's not talking about going to Hell here. He's talking about if you want to gain a sense of character and Christ-likeness is what He's really talking about. He's talking about eternal life but that's not living in heaven forever. Eternal life in the New Testament is a quality of life that WILL be in heaven forever but it's a quality, it's becoming like Jesus Himself, and it's having a life where your neighbors and your friends say to you "I want to be like you," for this reason. And we're

never going to be perfect. But it's to have a character of life. And Jesus says if you want a GAIN that, if you want to become a certain kind of person, the only one way to do that, and that's to lose your life for others.

And He goes on and says the other principle, "for he who loses his life for My sake will find it." If you try to save your life, you lose it. You come to Biola and your goal is to- is to become popular and to be a success and make everybody like you. Now, if you do that, where's your focus going to be on? Right here every day, right? And you're going to be taking your temperature every day - Am I happy? Do people like me? Am I attractive? What you need to do instead is to say to the Lord as best I can, "would You help me today to be good for other people I meet throughout the day? Would You help me do my homework well, not so I can be a success, but so I can learn to be effective for You when I get older.

And so the first thing I want to insist on is if you're going through a hard time, don't spend all of your time worrying about whether you're happy, because if you try to gain your own life, you're going to lose yourself. Instead, try to give yourself away for other people. And I have a classic example of this. Last year, I had a assist- a student come to me with a counselling issue. And she said, I'm going with a guy. And to be honest with you, I feel a need for him to tell me he loves me just about every day. I just- I get insecure. If I haven't heard from him that he loves me for two or three days, I begin to think maybe there's something wrong with me and he's getting interested in other girls and he's just- he's gonna leave me.

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

And I said- and I understood that concern and I said, well, have you ever focused on the question not how I can get him to love me, but what you can do each day to express love to him and serve him? Now, I mean, in all honesty, she- she'd never thought of that. And it sounds obvious, but it's so easy, you know, when you're feeling insecure, it's so easy to try to get, isn't it? And what she did is she began to try to-, when she was with him, to spend time learning how to focus on his- his needs and to minister to him. She came back and saw me about a month later and she told me what an unbelievable shift in her heart had taken place. And so remember, no matter what's happening to you do the best you can. We're all flawed people but do the best you can to give yourself away each day, to love the other people in this room and that you meet on campus. That's number one.

Now number two is very important if you're going to do number one, because number one's risky. After all, if you do this, you might get run over. Hehe Right? And so there's a little fear here. And I want you to turn very briefly to the end of Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 28. Now, I want to remind you of something that's- that you know, but I want to remind you of it because you need to know this is true. You know, the Great Commission where Jesus at the very end of Matthew's Gospel says in verse 18 that "all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." And He says to baptize and teach them, to observe what I've taught. And the last verse, you know. But He says, and remember this, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age. I will never leave you or forsake you."

And I want to remind you that if you're discouraged and lonely and fearful, you can still give yourself to other people because the Lord Jesus Christ is with you and He is still doing things in

the world today, folks. A week and a half ago, Joe Henderson, who teaches in the Torrey program, sent me an email. I don't know if you've heard this story. There were two Biola students that went to Mongolia. And they went in to the prostitution district. They were on a mission trip this summer. They went in to the prostitution district in this town and they found two little girls about, I think elementary school age, selling eggs from 8:00 in the morning until late at night because their father had died and their mother had been- was sick in bed. And they were exposed to pimps and people stealing their eggs and all kinds of things. And these two Biola students met with these little girls, prayed with them and left them, but couldn't get them off their minds.

Five or six days later, they went back in to that district, and they were able to find those girls again. They prayed, bought all of their eggs so that they wouldn't have to be selling them any longer and gave them some money, apparently, so they could go to a church camp. The little girl said, would you come back and meet our mommy back in our shack? They went back to the shack. The girl's mother, according to this e-mail that Joe Henderson received, she had been in bed for six months. Her stomach was swollen like she looked pregnant. It was so distended. She was so sick. These Biola students led this lady to Jesus Christ and then prayed that God would heal her physically and left. And they sent Joe an e-mail saying how excited they were. They had the privilege of leading this woman to Christ.

A couple of days later, Joe got another e-mail from the missionary lady that these Biola students were staying with, because the Biola students didn't know what had happened. They had asked her to go back to this house to follow up with this lady and invite her to church, and so she went

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

back the next day and this woman had been completely healed. She was in her garden, fixing her garden. Her stomach was flat. And Jesus Christ, in answer to these Biola students' prayers, who probably didn't know what they were doing, I sure wouldn't have, they probably, you know, didn't- didn't- didn't necessarily even believe in what would happen. But unbeknownst to them, the Lord Jesus healed this woman in answer to these students' prayers. God is still very, very much alive in the world.

I want to tell you two other stories to encourage you. Two years ago, I got an email from Bill Bright's assistant, who sent an email out around the country saying that they were receiving reports that thousands of Muslims were coming to Jesus Christ through dreams and visions where Christ Himself was appearing to Muslims. Now I read that, and Bill Bright is a credible source. Um he's not a wild eyed fanatic of any sort. But I was- I didn't know what to make of it. Earlier this summer, I had an appointment with Dallas Willard. Dallas Willard teaches at the University of Southern California. And again, he's a- he's- he's the godliest man I've ever met in my life. I asked him about this. He had never heard of this.

So he said "Oh JP," he said, "I must tell you." He said, "I have talked to the heads of five or six mission agencies; Charismatic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methyl-Bapterian (hehe). He said, "there are thousands of Muslims coming to Jesus Christ without the Gospel being preached to them because Jesus Christ is appearing to people in dreams. Communicate- There are people in villages and Muslim countries who are waking up and 10 or 15, 20 have had the same vision. They get up and they share what happened last night and they've all had the Gospel communicated to them.

Last week, I meet every week and have for 15 years with a Christian therapist, friend of mine, who went to Dallas Seminary and he finished at Rosemead. He teaches at Loma Linda. This guy's a dear brother. And we meet and we pray for each other, we read spiritual formation books. I shared this with him last week. He does therapeutic work for MAF, Missionary Aviation Fellowship. He said JP, he said, you're not going to believe this. Three days ago, I was interviewing a missionary from Indonesia that works among Muslim peoples. And he told me that he has had on four or five occasions people come up to him, in fact, one recently, a man walked UP to him in the marketplace, a MUSLIM who said last night I had a vision that I was to come up to a- someone in a blue suit and ask him to talk to me about Christianity. Would you talk-? He had a blue suit on! Hehe. that- I hopeful that goes with stuff (laughter). And he led this guy to Jesus Christ. Now, this is- doesn't mean we shouldn't send missionaries. I'm just saying something is going on. Something- God is still alive.

Now I want to tell you a story a little closer to home. First week of June, I was just very needy, and I really needed to know the Lord was with me. So I decided that I would get up and jog in the morning. So I was jogging, I asked the Lord if- if that day He would give me some phone calls from some people that would encourage me. And I got phone calls- two phone calls that day that were tremendously encouraging. While I was jogging and I mean this with all sincerity, I had the thought "what else would you like for me to do to you- do for you?" And I didn't know if it was my own mind or the Lord asking me and I to this-, at that point, I don't know. But the thought came into me "why don't you ask me to give you five thousand dollars today?" Because I was facing a real need and I- I- it- it was just- I needed some help with something. So I said,

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

"Lord Jesus, I don't know if this is You, but I need to know You're here. I need to know You're with me. Would You be kind enough to give me \$5000 today?"

And then I began to figure out a way that I could help Him answer the prayer hehe (laughter). (inaudible) believing me, you know. And I said, well bring it- bring it through the mail maybe so-and-so, you know. Well, the mail came and went; nothing. 5:30 that evening, out of a totally unexpected source, I received five thousand dollars. And I will tell you, it wasn't the money, although that was helpful in the situation I needed, it was just tremendous. The next day I did the same thing. I said "Lord that was so wonderful." I was jogging again in the morning. I'm going to start doing this more often. I usually jog (inaudible) (audience laughing). I said "Lord, I just need to know You're real. And I would like to hear today a firsthand report of a miracle from somebody who's had a miracle happen to them."

Now I will tell you honestly, I can go through a full three hundred and sixty five day year and I can hear reports of miracles happening elsewhere, but to hear someone say I had a miracle happen is unusual. I got back and it was about 9:00 in the morning and I started having coffee. And my daughter Ali was sitting-, got up and she was sitting there. And I had shared with her about the five thousand dollars the day before. And this is 30 minutes after I was back from jogging and she said, "Dad, you're not going to believe what happened to me yesterday." She said "I've on three or four times my car has run out of gas," and that's another issue, I keep saying keep the thing filled! Don't-! (audience laughing) You know you're a girl, you don't want to get stuck with your car without gas, OK.

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

So she said- she said "Dad, every time that's happened, it makes a noise and it locks up and it won't start." She says, "I've had to- I've had to have people push me off the road three or four times." She said "last night, on Imperial Highway in Yorba Linda Boulevard, it's a four lane street" she said "my car ran out of gas right at the stoplight. And there were cars all over." And she said "I said Jesus, please start my car and let me make it to the filling station." And she said "dad, when the light turned green, and this has never happened before with my car, I turned and it cranked over. I was able to get to the filling station. And Dad, when I pulled up to the pump, it ran out of gas and stopped again right when I pulled up to the pump."

Now, listen, I want you to listen. You could explain that away on the basis of the fact that sometimes there's still a little bit of gas in the car so maybe this was a natural phenomenon. Do you understand that? It's still pro- could very well have been an answer to prayer. But you could explain that away. What you can't explain away is the fact that that event happened and she was reporting it to me 30 minutes after I had asked to hear something that I could go a whole year without hearing. I tell you, folks, God heard my prayer. Now, does He answer all my prayers? No, thank heavens. Hehe. (I) Ask Him for a lot of things that I think it's better off if he doesn't answer, I'm sure. But may I say to you that I shared this with you because I'm an ordinary person like you. There's nothing special about any one of us that's more special than the other. And I say these things to you to remind you when he said "I am with you always, even to the end of the age", He's alive. He really is alive. And He loves you. He knows you and He will not leave you.

So folks, give yourself away to other people. And remember, Christ is here. Talk to Him about your issues. He really is. May I say one more thing? The third thing I would encourage you to do

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

is to develop close personal friends. Guys, especially men in this culture, tend to be relatively friendless. And may I say to you, instead of spending all of your time worrying about, oh, the dating situation, may I urge you to- to focus hard on finding people that are safe and that will be honest with you? Can I tell you two traits of a friend? The first one is they won't let you get away with your stuff. They'll tell you-, if you ask him for help, they'll tell you the truth when you want to hear it or not. And secondly, they're safe. They won't condemn you.

I want to tell you, I've known Walt Russell for thirty four years. I've known Clow Sisler for twenty six years. I've known a professor called Scott Ray for twenty five years. I could go on and on. I've known Gary, Louise, (inaudible), Horner, other guys on the faculty for- for a quarter of a century. This lady right here, Beth Essler. This lady is one of the dearest friends that I have. Right now, I know stuff about her life where she's hurting emotionally and other ways because she shared it with me recently and she knows things about me. And this lady has been in my face. Hehehehe. She won't let me get away with stuff Beth! Hehehe. And I have returned the favor and so is my wife. I had to get on Walt Russell about something last year and he said to get on me. But the beauty of it is it's not harsh. It's helpful. And you want to know something? These are friends that I feel like I can really be vulnerable with and they will sustain and love and support me. And those friendships have meant so much to us that we've been jealous to guard them for a quarter of a century. Now, you may be I mean, some of you aren't that old. So you're thinking, man I- what am I supposed to do? Well, you're out of luck, I guess. No. (audience laughing)

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

What you want to do is don't spend all your time on your stinking computer. Get rid of your computer games. I'm sorry. Please, just- just get rid of them. Don't talk to people all the time on the computer. By the way, folks, if you're into pornography, may I just say it will destroy your life. Get some help if you're into that sort of thing. May I just say a word? Don't be ashamed, but stop it and get help because it will eat you alive. It will eat you alive. Stay away from it. Now, I want you to try to get- get off that computer and (inaudible) down in your little room all by yourself and get out and hang out with some people, go study together, get coffee together. You know, do your homework too. I tell people my daughters loved Biola, it was reading in class they didn't like. But uh- just kidding. Just kidding. But you want to develop friends.

So I want to say, I want to say in closing to you, life has hard times and good times, that's just, I guess, a part of the deal. Everyone in this room has had both. I certainly have, and I know you have. But remember, if you're going through a difficult time, don't spend all of your time worrying about whether you're happy. Try as best you can to give yourself to other people for Christ's sake and learn to focus on serving other people. Secondly, don't forget, Jesus Christ still answers prayer and He is still performing miracles. And He's still very much alive and He has not left you. Continue to place your problems in His hands. And if you don't see answers, keep asking or ask the Lord to help you learn why. Maybe your prayers need to go in a different direction. And third, don't journey simply alone. But form some very close dear friends so that you can- you can have people that will be honest with you about where you need to grow and where you don't. But they'll do it in a way that's warm and affirming and loving and safe so that you can open your heart up and you won't have to shoulder your burdens alone.

Moreland: Overcoming Heartache

Folks, thank you for choosing Biola University to go to school. Thank you so much. And I hope you have a good year. May I lead us in- May I lead us in a word of prayer?

Lord Jesus, life doesn't make a whole lot of sense without You. And we are so honored and privileged to be called Christian. We would like our puny little lives to make a difference before we pass away. And would You please help us? Would You please help some of the students that really, really feel desperate right now, who are scared and lonely and anxious and worried. Oh, Lord, please. Do something very special for them this day so they'll know that You're with them, You haven't forgotten them and abandoned them. In Jesus' name, Amen. Blessings on your folks.