

# Distance

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[0:00] She's my Meghan Markle. It's about human romance, but human romance is designed to be an expression of the divine love for his people, which I'll just say a little bit more in a moment for that.

And then we ask the question, what use is it? And I say, I think, in this world where there's so much confusion about love and sex and gender, it's an extraordinarily useful and relevant book.

Because the song unashamedly celebrates the unmatched beauty and glory of covenanted, that's to say, to do with a promise between the two parties, a covenanted heterosexual sexual love.

But it does have another aspect, and I just remind you, don't be worried, of my dream, where I saw almost divine creatures glowing, walking hand in hand.

They seemed almost like Celeborn and Galadriel in Lord of the Rings. Then I awoke and realised that I was looking at a pensioner and his wife helping each other up the steps. And to ask, which of those two views is actually most near how God sees the significance and the beauty, and actually the intention of human marriage, which was the truer view of the reality of what it is for marriage to mirror the glorious relationship between Christ and his church.

[1:36] So we looked last time at the previous section, which I think we could honestly say was about courtship, 1.15 to 2.7.

We asked, first of all, are they sleeping together? Modern answer would be yes, of course, but the Bible answer is no, not until they're married. And then we looked at their courtship, and we noticed that they're equal, but they're not interchangeable.

So they have different words for each other. You can't readily swap them over. He calls her beautiful, and she calls him my love, which is a word quite close to the idea of being uncle.

So I think you can't escape the idea of love and family being together. They call each other equal words, but they're not quite interchangeable. They express mutual affection.

They each say of each other, your eyes are doves. And the commentator, you remember, said, what a personal thing it is to look into somebody's eyes.

[2:37] Your eyes are doves. They both say that of each other. They have a future expectation. In verse 15 and 16, no, 16 and 17 of chapter 1, they talk about our bed is verdant, and our house has got cedars, rafters of cedar, no, beams of cedar and rafters of fir.

They look forward to home together. The home has the things that home has. It has a roof. It has a door. It has a table. It has a bed. That's what they're looking forward to.

There are heartfelt affirmations. So she says, chapter 2, verse 1, I'm a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley, meaning I'm a common flower. I'm just a common flower. But he says to her, like a lily among thorns is my darling amongst the maidens.

He says, to me, you are beautiful. Whatever anybody else says, I don't care. To me, you are beautiful. You are without compare. And then she has a section, verses 3 to 7 of chapter 2, of distinctive praise of him.

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. I think we could honestly say what she's saying is this.

[3:57] You make me feel safe, and you sweeten my day. You make me feel safe, like sitting under an apple tree in the shade, and you sweeten my day.

It's always good to be together because there is a sweetness about it, which I really appreciate. So she praises him. And I'll say a little bit more about this. The importance of couples being able to praise one another.

If all couples can do is complain about one another, they've really, really lost something very, very important. And then lastly, I talked about the patient or impatient longing.

The woman says, I'm sick with love. Strengthen me with raisins. Refresh me with apples. I'm faint with love. She was lovesick. She was smitten. She couldn't help but long for the time when they were together.

So that was what we looked at last time. I just did that very, very quickly. We're going to look at 2, verse 8, to 3, verse 5. Verse 5, and Ray's prayed for us. So we come to this text asking the help of the Almighty.

[5:04] I think it's about distance. And I think it's about loss. I think those two themes are dealt with here. And I'll do my best to bring thoughts to you on those. So we'll just look at the text.

We'll just look at the story, what it says. So verse 8, NIV says, listen. Hebrew, I think, just says, the voice of my lover.

And then, behold, look, here he comes. There are a lot of verbs of motion. Coming. Several words for them. Coming, going, turning.

But here she says, here he comes. So she hears the sound of his voice. The voice of the lover.

And then she sees him coming. The sight of his approach. Behold, he comes. I put verse 3, but I think I mean verse 8. And here he is.

[6:06] Who did Lady Mary marry in the end? It wasn't Tony Gillingham, was it? Come on, homework, please. Was it?

Talbot. Yeah. There's a bit in it when he jumps into his car. Jumps into his car and Lady Mary goes, ooh. Well, here's a similarly athletic young man who leaps over the mountains and bounds over the hills.

He's leaping over the mountains and skipping over the hills. So there's the young man. And my lover, she says, is like a gazelle or a young stag.

So the things that she's noticing about him are his sort of athleticism, his nobility, his agility, and his mastery over the created world.

You know, he's not what somebody goes, oh dear, that's a bit of a tall hill. I think I'll go and have a cup of tea. He's, no, we'll go for that. We'll jump over that. We're bound over this. We'll do this. So she says, isn't he great?

[7:09] My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. And I just wish I could jump around like that because I don't think I can. Now let's see what happens next.

So verse 9, look, there he's bounded and leapt and he stands behind our wall. He comes and stands behind. Now our wall, so I presume our meaning the family home.

She's come down to visit his girlfriend and she's come to the house where she lived, mum and dad's house. And so there's a wall. And I think this wall is an important part of the story.

He stands behind our wall and he's gazing through the windows and peering through the lattice. So I put him there. He's not in the house.

He's just looking in through the window. And it doesn't say he knocks, but there is a verse in the New Testament which takes somebody else and says, behold, I stand at the door and knock.

[8:06] Do you know that one? Well, but he's there looking in. And it says twice that he's looking. He's gazing through the windows and peering through the lattice.

And then we hear him speak. And he says, arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. Time for us to, I don't know, elope maybe.

He hasn't got a ladder or anything, but he's at the window and saying, come, time, time for us to come. Arise, my darling, my yaffe, my beautiful one, and come with me.

Now's the time, he says. And he gives this wonderfully poetic description of why it's the time. He says, this is springtime. The winter is past. The rains are over and gone.

Flowers are appearing. It's like the Garden of Eden sort of springing up. And it's the season for singing. Now, whether it's the birds singing, I think perhaps it's the, he talks about the cooing of doves.

[9:12] Just everything's getting going. Can you imagine that? The spring's coming. We're in autumn now, aren't we? So it's all the other

way. But, you know, the first signs of spring.

The birdies are singing. The cooing of doves. You know, ooh, ooh, ooh. You can hear that. The leaves are coming out on the trees. The fig tree forms its early fruit.

The blossoming vines spread their fragrance. This is a sort of season of growth, new life, fertility, you might say. And he says, right, what more do we want?

What more should we? Now's the time. Come along with me. It's time for us to be together in the fullest sense. And then, he, that was her reporting what he'd said, which is why Brenda read that out, because it was her telling us what he'd said.

Now, I think we have him speaking. And he says, my dove is in the clefts of the rock in the hiding places of the mountainside. So something about her inaccessibility.

[10:23] My dove is in the clefts of the rock. The lover is the man speaking. My dove is in the clefts of the rock. You're hiding in the hiding places of the mountainside. Show me your face.

Show me your face. Let me hear your voice. For your voice is sweet. So he's saying, I want to. I want to see you. I want to hear you speak.

Don't hide away. Your face is, your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. I think he says twice your voice is sweet.

Why have I got twice there? Your voice is sweet. Perhaps there's two references. No, no, no. Yeah, it's an unusual word. It's one of the only two times it's used.

Your face is lovely. Same as verse five, chapter one, verse five, dark I am, yet lovely. He says, you have a lovely face. Your voice is sweet.

[11:21] I want to hear your voice. I want to see your face. It's the language of love, isn't it? It's the language of love. And what does she say to him?

Well, it's in verse 15. Now, I think this is her speaking. The commentators are divided. It's not exactly clear, but I think this is her speaking. And she says, there he is sort of against the wall of the house, you know, let me in, come on, come away.

So she comes up with this suggestion. Catch for us the little foxes that ruin the vineyard. Our vineyards that are in bloom. And I think we come back to that in a moment.

It's a plural catch. So it's not just you catch, but you lot catch. I don't know who she's speaking to.

Catch the little foxes. Maybe she's addressing the daughters of Jerusalem.

Maybe she's talking about her mates. We'll all go together. Catch the little foxes that spoil the vine.

So there's some little desert foxes. I've got that picture from Saudi Arabia or something from Saudi Arabia.

[12:29] And then she says in verse 16, 16, my lover is mine and I am his. He browses among the lilies.

Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn my lover. Now the word for turn is a turning away. So she says, off you go.

While it's night time, until it's morning, until the day breaks and the shadows flee, go away. Turn my lover and do your leaping about stuff on the mountains.

Go and jump around on the hills. Be like a young stag on the rugged hills. So that's the text of the first part. And I think we have a little think about what it says.

So it's night time. He is athletic and eager and inviting. The time has come. Time is right. There we are. And she says to him, off you go.

[13:26] Go and catch some foxes. She says, you're mine. He is mine and I am his. He goes and feeds. Now, browsing among the lilies, I don't know whether that means, what does it say, that verse 16.

Whether he's saying he feeds like a stag or whether he's saying he feeds his sheep. But anyway, there's some feeding going on and she says to him, but, you know, just push off for the time being. Turn away. Go away. So that's what happens in that first bit of the text. I think that's fair enough, isn't it? So let's have a little think about it.

So first question, was she right to turn him away? So he's all eager and he's come and he's knocked on the door. You know, it's 10 o'clock at night and there he is. And he's got lots of reasons for her to come along.

This is a season of singing and look at all the trees and everything. And she says, no, off you go. Was she right to turn him away? And I think yes. I think the answer is yes. Because as it is said in verse 5 of chapter 3, do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

[14:36] There's a thing about timing. And it's not the right time yet. It's not the right time yet. It seems like it, but it isn't. The time is not yet right. So I think she was correct to turn him away.

I don't know what you think. I think she was correct. I think she should say, yep, I mean, okay in principle, but not just at this moment. Off you go. Go and jump around somewhere else. And I think that's what she's saying.

But this is about distance. So there's a distance. There's a separation between them either side of this wall. And she's not about to open the door.

And now she's said, off you go. So there's now another distance. So there was a distance and this generated more distance. And I'm just going to make a few comments about distance.

Distance in a relationship needs to be overcome. Distance in a relationship needs to become, it can be distance because of something somebody said. It can be physical distance.

[15:37] It can be distance in a number of ways. And in our human relationships, we have to cope with distance. So shift work creates distance in a marriage.

So one person comes in, the other person is just about to go out. Long hours, being a workaholic, creates distance in a relationship. So he commutes off and only comes back just about time to go to bed.

They never have time to talk. Working away from home creates distance. distance. So you remember my example of, in Sri Lanka, it was not uncommon for the man to say, I can get us a much better standard of living if I go to work in Dubai for three years, send you money back, then I'll come home again.

I think that is a very unwise, I mean, economically it makes sense, in terms of relationship, I think that's a big, big problem. Working away from home creates distance. And my observation on this matter of distance, there needs to be, there needs to build in special measures to overcome distance.

You shouldn't let distance build up and accumulate in a relationship. So in olden days, people used to write letters. I don't know if you're familiar with this concept of writing a letter.

[17:02] So you get a piece of paper and you have this thing which looks like, it looks like a stylus for a computer but it's actually got coloured water inside it called ink.

And then you'd apply this to the paper and you'd make letters. Strange, isn't it? Primitive technology. You could write letters to one another and letter writing, the advantage of a letter is it takes you time to think about it.

You can have quite a long letter. It doesn't cost you any of your data. And you can think about what you're writing and it's a very personal form of communication. People used to write letters.

It's a good suggestion, isn't it? Nowadays we can do Skype. Nowadays we can make visits, have phone calls and have time together.

And I simply want, off the back of this text, to commend relationships that, in which distance needs to be tackled and not just left to do its damaging work.

[18:08] Okay. Was she right to turn him away? Yes, she was. And let me just have another little think about distance. Distance from God. My observation on this is it's never right to put ourselves at a distance from the lover of our souls.

It's never right to say to God, push off, go away, come back later. It's never right to say that to God. The text says, draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

That's the authorised version. The modern version says, come near to God and he will come near to you. I would like to put towards us, Christian people, we're not to say to God, go away.

We're to draw near to God. It's such an obvious thing to say, isn't it? I think worth saying, Christian people, let us draw near to God.

Let us approach God. Let us not have distance between us and the Lord. The Apostle Peter says, in the context of Jesus being a living stone, says, as you come to him, you are built up as living

stones into a living temple, but you come to him.

[19:28] So I want to say to us, Christian people, let's encourage one another to draw near to God, to come to Jesus Christ. And how can we do that?

Well, we can do that by praying. It's not rocket science, is it? I hope, Christian people, that we are men and women of prayer. That we wouldn't really want to get very far into the day without having talked to the Lord about it, would we?

We would pray, surely, in prayer each day. And we wouldn't want to get very far into a day, would we, without having listened to him and drawn near to him and to see what he has to say to us, which is what reading the Bible is.

Now, to somebody outside spiritual things, that might seem a bit weird, but to somebody who has faith, we know when we read the Word of God, there's something living about it.

It's not just a book of information, it is a person speaking. And as we listen to it, we are in contact with him, we're in communion with him, listening to his voice.

[20:43] And of course, there's corporate ways in which we draw near to God. We draw near to God as a community, in the assembling of God's love-one-another people, because that's Jesus' overarching command for his people.

If we love him, we love one another. It makes it inescapable that Christians have to be part of a community, because he says, if you love me, you've got to love these other people too.

Well, you could hardly say, I love them in principle, but I never go anywhere near them. That just doesn't make sense at all. To love one another means to draw near in community.

And as we draw near, as we're doing this morning, we do other times in various phases of the week, we build one another up, we come and express gratitude to God, we pray, and where we function as a family, not as lone rangers.

We come to him, we draw near to him as we assemble together. And of course, it's worth pointing out that in Christianity, Jesus has a particular invitation to come, and to come round his table.

[21:57] New Testament Christianity is fairly sparse on ritual. It's just got baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism being the prescribed method of showing that you've entered the community of God's people, and Lord's Supper being the prescribed symbol to show that you're continuing as a member of the Lord's people.

And Jesus himself, it's his table, it's a place where he gives us, in some mysterious way, he gives us himself. So we should draw near to God.

That makes sense, doesn't it? It's the thing we need to be reminded of. Draw near to God. Let's not have a distance between us and God. Now, let's just think about these little foxes.

So, the commentators go in all directions about these little foxes. I try to find out what species they are. They're not, I don't think they're little cuddly foxes.

Do you remember, do you remember seeing Mary Poppins? See, a blank sea of faces. I remember seeing Mary Poppins vividly, and there's the bit, that's pointless, this isn't it, there's the bit where they're on the carousel, and they jump off, and the carousel horses go across the field, and there's a little fox, and Dick Van Dyke says, oh, you curious little creature, get up here on my, you know, it's sort of American Cockney voice, get on the back of my horse, and the little fox has a, strangely, an Irish accent, says, thank you very much, and they've got a cute little animal, you know, you could cuddle it, take it home.

[23:37] Well, these foxes are not like that. They're sort of scavenge-y, destructive animals these are the animals that Samson, this is a weird thing, wasn't it, tied their tails together and put a firebrand between them and destroyed fields of standing corn.

I don't think I'm going to go there. Psalm 63 verse 10 says this, and this is a sort of a description of ruin, they will become, they will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.

So these are these animals, the sort of predatory, nasty, they bite you type of foxes. So what we can see is there are many of them.

Catch us for the foxes, they're small, they're little foxes, they ruin the vineyards. They ruin, they destroy, they're multiple and destructive and need to be dealt with.

And it's not just a sort of mild destruction, they ruin, I think that's quite a strong word, they ruin the vineyards. Well, I'm going to just make an observation on this.

[24:46] In terms of relationships, what sort of, no, let me just go back one step. The vineyards, I think, are sort of metaphorical. She says, my own vineyard I have not kept.

Referring to herself, really, referring to her, remember it said that she'd become dark by the sun, she'd been sent out to work in the vineyards, but up my own vineyard I've not kept.

You know, she says, I haven't been to the beauty salon every week. So the vineyard can be metaphorical. And here, there is a ruin of the vineyards.

Perhaps it's the relationship. Little destructive forces in a relationship. So for what it's worth, I made a little list of things that you could say a little bit like destructive foxes in a relationship.

Here's the list. Spite. Selfishness. Callousness. Apathy.

[25:51] Unforgiveness. Bad temper. Sharp tongue. Cruelty. Control.

Desire to control the other. In a marriage, unhelpful parental interference can be a little thing that can spoil.

Undue anxiety. Prayerlessness. In a relationship between believers. The desire to cling to individual independence instead of unlimited self-giving.

Marriage is about unlimited self-giving. I am his, he is mine. You can't enter a marriage if you're going to say, yes but, I'm going to give myself to this person but I'm not going to give this bit.

There is a sense in which there is an unlimited self-giving. I just remind married Christian people, the New Testament, when the Apostle Paul compares Christ and the church to the man and wife, he says to the man, love your wife as Christ loved the church.

[27:15] And how did Christ love the church? He gave himself up for her. he died for her. It seems to me that any Christian man who understands that verse is challenged.

It's saying Christ loved his church without limit. He gave himself up for her benefit. That's how I am to love my wife. That's how I am to love my wife.

Until I've done that, I can't sit back and say, well, I've done everything, tried my best. Can't do that. Anyway, little foxes, little destructive forces in a relationship and that's my observation on this text about the bit about distance.

Okay, let's do the next bit, shall we? The next bit. In chapter three, verse one. Now, I think we've changed scenes slightly. So, now she's asleep in bed all night or perhaps every night, all night long on my bed, I looked for the one my heart loves.

It actually says my soul, the fish. It makes it a little bit stronger actually, doesn't it? I looked for the one that my soul loves.

[28:44] him, but I did not find him. So, she says, I will get up and go about the city and through its streets and squares.

I will search for the one my heart loves. So, she's searching and looking and you can see how many times this word for look or search is there. It says in verse one, I looked for the one my soul loves. I looked for him but did not find him. And then in verse two, it's translated search. I will look for the one my soul loves.

So, I looked for him but did not find him. And then I think the same word is translated found. I hope I've got this right.

Verse three, the watchman looked for me and found me as they made their rounds in the city. Have you seen the one my soul loves? Scarcely I had passed them when I found the one my heart loves.

[29:47] So, I hope I've got that right. I'm assuming that the searching and finding word is the same. So, she's lost. Does it?

Okay, thank you very much. Thank you. She's lost something. And her reaction to this is an intense searching.

woman. And she says, all night I go about the city. So, let's put her in the city at night. And I looked. It was a bit of a thing to get up in the middle of the night, go around the city.

I couldn't find him. And I are, the watchman found me. Verse three. So, I didn't do any watchman, but presumably these are the night watchmen, the police officers patrolling the city.

and they find this woman, this distraught woman, madly going around, and they found her. And that bit of the plot doesn't seem to go any further because, lo and behold, suddenly I found him, I found

the one, verse four, I found the one my heart, my heart loves, my soul loves.

[30:58] Found him. Well, that's great. There he is. And what does she do now? Oh, she says, I'm not going to let him go now, I've found him. I held him and would not let him go.

I just wanted to say that I put there, somebody said, somebody said, seek and you will find. Who said that?

Jesus, yeah. And he also said, knock and the door will be opened. Ask and you will receive. There's something here about intensity and the continuance.

So she's seeking and looking in the same way that Jesus described. Seek, seek, seek, and you will find. Anyway, she finds. Now what does she do now?

I held him and I would not let him go. Right. I don't know whether he was bargaining for that, but there he is. So she's zooming off with him now.

[32:00] Now. And she's headed, so she's regained him. I caught hold of him. Same word for catching the foxes actually. I grabbed him.

And I wouldn't let him go this time because I told him to turn away a bit, but I'm not going to let him go. And I brought him, I brought him to my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me.

So you can see this is still thinking in terms of the intimacy of what it is to be married, to share the same bed. That's how the woman came into the world, obviously, as we all came into the world.

And she's sort of taking that a generation on, and I want to bring him into that place too, to the most intimate place of our home, where my mother conceived me.

So she's got him, she's not going to let him go now. So there we are. And then verse 5, there's a but. And the but is, ah, you know, don't arouse or awaken love until it so desires, until it is the right time.

[33:13] So I think she sort of awakes from her dream and says, you know, dreaming, that's why you know, I'd really definitely, hold on a minute, you know, the, what do you call it, the, plain light of day, I think actually, a little bit more to be considered, and it isn't the right time to be married yet.

Do you get the idea of that? I think it makes sense, doesn't it, as a sort of a dream, and the dream is displaying what she really thinks about. She's really, she was, she was dreaming about this, but she was dreaming that she'd lost him.

She was dreaming that she'd lost him, and that was such a, you know, a thing in her head. She's dreaming. And the dream indicated what she really cared about, because she really cared about what she'd lost, which was him, or thought she'd lost.

And I'll just offer a few thoughts on losing in a relationship, or rejecting within a relationship. She seeks, and to begin with, she doesn't find.

I was thinking of the, the, there's a medieval theme of song about unrequited love. I don't know, I'm not, I think, has the Bible got any examples of unrequited love?

[34:34] But in, in, in courtly, you know, the, oh dear, what's the chap who sings a ballad, what do you call him? The minstrel would sing a song of unrequited love.

And, poems will be written unrequited, meaning, I love her, she's fantastic, but she doesn't love me. And heartbreak, of course, this is in the same territory, isn't it?

Heartbreak. I love her, but she has rejected me, or vice versa, heartbreak. And all I can say, the song is sympathetic to that, because the song would say, yeah, there is a, there are a lot of stakes in love.

I don't mean that in a non-vegetarian sense, I mean that there is, there's a lot to play for in love, isn't there?

You give yourself, you have hopes, you have expectations, and to find that those are dashed is a hard thing. The nearest I could think of, and I'm open to correction on this, Jacob's wife, Leah, I think she was unloved by Jacob, and as she goes through having children, she says, at least last now my husband will love me.

[35:52] So I think there is a sympathy for that in the Bible. And I thought about bereavement, because marriage is till death has to part. So

at some point in every marriage, there's going to be a loss.

And the Bible has a number of instances of loss. Abraham lost Sarah, and it says he mourned and wept, because he loved her, and he was sad.

He was deeply, deeply sad to lose his wife, and that was a loss. And the Bible acknowledges the real intensity and pain of such loss.

And in the New Testament, Paul would say to the churches, you weep with those who weep. It's foolish to think that our life in this world is nothing but happiness and joy and peace, because pain. This is the sort of world we live in, and love sets you up for that pain, because you care about somebody, and if they're gone, it really, really hurts. So I thought about bereavement, and then I just add that the God of the Bible is a great big God.

[37:09] And the God of the Bible has great big arms, and he can envelop his people in his embrace. And he is the God of all comfort.

It says that Paul gives us that in 2 Corinthians, and of course in Isaiah, chapter 40 begins, comfort, comfort my people, says the Lord.

Lord knows what it is to find people who need comfort, and to give them comfort. One day, at some point in everybody's life, we will experience bereavement, and at that point, we all need to know that God is a God of all comfort.

He understands loss, and comforts us in it. One day, he will wipe away every tear from every eye.

Let me just say another thing about this woman seeking for her chap.

So she's so anxious about this, as she thinks about it, she gets up, I think in her head, in her imagination, she gets up, because she wants to find the one her soul loves. It's a risky thing.

[38:21] Would you do that? Would you go out in the middle of the night? I don't know whether she's still got her pajamas on, but she goes out in the middle of the night all over the city. I think that's rather dangerous, rather risky, but she did it because she cared.

She did it because she really loved. And I made me to think about the love that makes sacrifices and takes risks and puts in effort.

You know, she didn't just say, oh, I probably lost him, oh well, that's okay, I turn over and go to sleep. She said, I've got the idea of losing him, this is just intolerable to me, I need to, I'm going to get up in the middle of the night and go and look for him if that's what it takes.

I think that's surely a commendable thing, isn't it? I think it's a commendable thing, that's not put down there as something we should avoid, it's a commendable thing. And I just observe for courting couples, be ready to put in effort if you really care.

Now, who was it that said, faint heart never won fair lady? So somebody said that, is it Shakespeare? He said a lot of things, didn't he? I went to see one of his plays once, it was just a string of quotes put together.

[39:41] Anyway, it says here that this love demanded effort and love does demand effort. Married couples, don't stop putting in effort.

I remind myself, it's a good reminder, don't just coast. We have to keep investing in relationship, we have to keep putting in effort, we have to keep putting ourselves out.

and then I say to Christian believer, make every effort to find the Lord Jesus. Seek, pursue him.

Make every effort not to have a distance between us and the Lord. Make every effort not to lose his presence, but if his presence is lost, to go out and seek him and find him.

because if anybody deserves the title, the one my soul loves, it's him. Jesus, lover of my soul, let me, old version, let me to thy bosom fly, while the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high.

[40:55] Hide me, oh my saviour, hide, till the storm of life is past. Safe into the haven, guide, oh receive my soul at last. Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on thee, leave, oh leave me not alone, still support and comfort me.

Christian believer, make every effort. We remind ourselves of this, not to have a distance between us and the Lord Jesus, not to lose him, but to gain him.

And if we're talking about risks, somebody taking a risk and putting in an effort in a relationship, there's just one other thing that comes to my mind, and this is a lover who risked his life to find and save his loved one.

And he didn't just risk it, he lost his life for this. To find and save his loved one.

Prophet Hosea, the God of Israel says, when I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert. And I think he was looking and finding.

[42:17] Jesus says, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. So putting an effort to get out and find and seek and save the lost.

Christ. And Jesus, who takes to himself the Hebrew scriptures which speak of the God of Israel being the shepherd to his people and David being the shepherd of his people, and Jesus says, that's me.

I am the good shepherd. And remember how he defines being a good shepherd. It's to go out and to save the sheep, but he says, because I care about them, I lay down my life for the sheep, risk taken to its ultimate extension.

He didn't want to lose his people, and he went out and got them and gave his life in the process. That's the story of salvation. That's what being a Christian is. That, I would say, is the fulfilment of the whole story of the Bible. Someone who loved us so much to lay down his life for us.

[43:39] Christian, if that's you, what a privilege you have to be loved like that. You never deserved it, but he loved you like that. And if you're on the outside of these things, what an enviable position.

Wouldn't you like to have that? wouldn't you like to be able to say, I am his and he is mine? That's what Christ offers. Take him up on that offer.

Talked about distance. We talked about loss. We talked about regaining a relationship. friendship. We'll take that up again in three Sundays time.

Next, two Sundays, my colleague Chris Fry is going to talk about the days of the week, and particularly the use of Sunday. And we are going to conclude by singing about the amazing love, which is in song 803.

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