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Desperate for an Anchor

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Psalm 121

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Speaking of the Emmys...J. Desperate Housewives received 6.

Why is it that it doesn't take much for our home sweet home household to become the desperate household?

Looking down on Wisteria Lane, we find perfect homes in the loveliest of suburbs. But it is plain that things are not always what they seem. Whether it is Susan, the divorcee and single mom who will go to extraordinary lengths for love, or Lynette, the ex-career woman who traded the boardroom for boredom, the lives they lead are much different than a surface glance might reveal.

Why is Desperate Housewives the hit show of the year? Is it because we can relate? We watch Gabrielle, the ex-model with everything she's ever wanted—a rich husband, a big house—always searching for more, never getting enough. And Bree, a sort of Martha Stewart on steroids, whose family is unraveling around her. Somehow the “till death do us part” got tough when her husband was unfaithful.

Desperate Households, life, love and marriage. Beneath the surface, the desperation of every one of these women (and their men) is raw, raw desperation. I believe—beneath the surface, the desperation of every one of *us* is raw. The struggles that every person faces...with communication, sex, lack of margin in your life, and raising kids—all while living in the midst of our desperation, forms the backdrop of our sermon series this season.

The residents of Wisteria Lane might not look like philosophers and theologians, but that's what they are. When Susan Meyer realized her marriage was in trouble, philosophy was ultimately to blame. Paraphrasing Henry David Thoreau, her ex-husband told her that most men lead lives of quiet desperation. The premise upon which the hit television series Desperate Housewives is built is that it's not just the men who lead desperate lives. So, too, do most women. Or, as Susan puts it: "Really, do most women lead lives of noisy fulfillment?"

The residents of Wisteria Lane, the most desperate place in America and the setting for ABC's hit drama series, might not look like theologians, with their gym-toned bodies and designer underwear, but that's exactly what they are.

First, family is a theological concept. Adam and Eve were *not* the first family. The first family is found in the nature of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, 1 God revealed in 3 ways, 3 in 1, complete. Each person of the God-head is focused on the others. God the Father gives us the Son and Holy Spirit. The Son is the face of the Father and opens the door for the Spirit to come into the hearts of the disciples. And the Holy Spirit guides and glorifies God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Son. That is our framework for family: unconditional, others-centered living. When the others-centered love is missing, children become desperate to replace it. Many spend the rest of their lives trying to find that unconditional love and find whatever they can to deaden the pain of growing up without it. (That's what makes for such an interesting show on TV and such a sad reality in the broken lives all around us).

The fact is, every human family is dysfunctional. But some are painfully so. And as we live and grow with and conditional, self-seeking love, two things happen: we lose any sense of security and self esteem, and we begin to drift. We form desperate households with no direction with no anchor. We experience:

1. A Loss of welcome—even from the womb a child needs to know they are welcomed! But if we don't have time for them, they get the message.
2. A Loss of protection—Parents are the God-ordained protectors. The word husband literally means “house-binder.” We fail to protect either by abuse or busyness.
3. A Loss of childhood—growing up before your time. When we treat children like little adults, their security dissipates way before its time.
4. Loss of communication—as we deal with life, we hurt but don't heal. We repress our pain because it doesn't fit our lifestyle. As parents and spouses, something happens and we react—rather than respond.
5. Loss of parental approval—It's like the boy who prayed “Make my face the shape of a TV and then my dad will look at me.”
6. Shame—If our parents break our self-esteem, shame becomes our best friend, impacting every other interaction we have with people.
7. Lack of encouragement and hope—like there is no better way. Life gets reduced to the French existentialist Albert Camus' view of human existence. Based on the Greek myth of Sisyphus, the man who offended the gods, whose punishment was to roll a huge rock up a hill. When he reached the top, it would roll back down, and he would have to begin all over again. It is sheer futility, with zero aim and zero fulfillment. The only answer on Wisteria Lane seems to be escape: either like Mary Alice through suicide, or like Gabrielle who begins a romantic (aka sexual) relationship with John a 17-year-old gardener.

That's what happens within desperate households. You begin to drift from one thing to the next, without an anchor of unconditional love to ground you, nourish you, and hold you when the rest of the world is still hurting in its desperate search for an anchor in *their* lives. The good news is that people can experience healing from God working through the church family “household”.

So where DO you take your desperation? How do you get help? How can you anchor your life so that you're not controlled by your desperation? By realizing the truth about God. It requires a basic shift in your thinking. By realizing there is an everlasting love that loves you unconditionally and powerfully, demonstrated by Jesus Christ. By realizing it's not about you. It's about God. Your identity and purpose exist in a relationship with Jesus Christ, not in other people, not in escape, not in your own plans, or any other thing you can do for yourself. For some of us here this morning, today is the day you decide WHO you are going to live for—yourself or God? Some of us here this morning may be just desperate enough to go for it. But some may not be ready.

You may be thinking “I can't do this myself! I need help! How do I get from here to there? The pain is still too great.” And that's where God's Word comes in: Listen to Psalm 121: *Psalm 121 I A Song of Ascents. I Will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From whence shall my help come? 2 My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. 3 He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. 4 Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade on your right hand. 6 The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. 8 The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever.*”

Do you hear those words about the Lord? He will never sleep. He will guide you. He is your keeper. He is your protection. The Lord God is and always has been desperately in love with you, even when you make terrible decisions and fall for other gods. Why? Because He so desperately cares for you.

Maybe you don't realize that you were made for God's pleasure. God actually enjoys you! For some of us who grew up in families with extremely conditional love, that may be enough to hear this morning. God loves you with an unconditional love. And because of that, your help comes from the Lord. Not only that, He's the One who made heaven and earth! And He will not let your foot slip. No other person, no evil, and not even the devil can make you fall because of one thing: the Lord will not allow it! He will neither sleep nor slumber. Then why all the pain? Why this desperation inside of me? C.S. Lewis said it best: “Pain is God's megaphone.” Your desperation is not punishment. It's a wake up call from a loving God. God's not mad at you; He's mad about you.

The root of the problem is the root of all our problems: We think God's holding back, so we hold back. Oh, some of us have learned to give God a respectable amount of our love and devotion. But God wants all of you. Anything short of 100% means there are some parts of your life you are holding outside of His love. God cannot be your anchor unless you give him your whole life, so he can bear all of your weight. Otherwise, some part of you will always drift, apart from God.

When the storms of life hit, God will honor you by not forcing Himself into those areas you've held back. In other words, no anchor through the storm.

Here's the really sad thing. The part we usually hold back from God is usually the deepest part of who we are. We think we can go through life without peeling back our deepest selves to Him. We hide, just like Adam and Eve, and we leave our desperation at the door of the church. We give God our Sunday best, rather than our all. But listen to the little phrase in this psalm again in verse 7: "*The Lord will protect you from all evil. He will keep your soul.*" He will keep your very soul, no matter how desperate you are. No matter what you've sold your soul to already. The Lord will keep it safe for you, if you'll just give it to Him.

Don't take your desperation into your own hands! Don't give your soul to anyone else. Any other pursuit will destroy it, and leave you more miserable and desperate. When we take our desperation anywhere else, we get messed up. Even when it's work, or our households, or our families, or other good causes, we miss out.

We break apart. We manipulate. We shrink back and shrivel. We become sick. We miss out. We worship stupid stuff. We become less than human. We rely on "fixes" and escapes. Our velocity in life increases. Your life goes faster and faster until you're skimming over relationships, emotions, and God moments. You wind up with a big life and a little heart. It becomes all about speed. We become less, much less, than God intends for us to be. No one else will keep your soul.

When we take our desperation elsewhere, we worship idols—and Psalm 115 says we will become like the idols we worship. When we take our desperation elsewhere, we usually end up worshipping ourselves. We diminish ourselves, like the snake that is starving and can do nothing but eat its own tail. We wind up with nothing—nothing but a desperate heart.

When we take our desperation elsewhere, our love gets distorted. Our enjoyment comes from cheap imitations. Our peace is found only when we harden ourselves to what's going on around us. But that's not peace. That's stone cold apathy, and like the TV show tells us, it leads to empty lives, no matter how good the exterior seems.

Any other relationship that is asking you for your soul will chew it up and spit it out: my job, my spouse, or girlfriend or boyfriend. Even with the best of intentions. But the Lord who made you is safe—the Lord will keep your soul. He will treasure you. And He knows how: He gave His own soul when He gave the life of His only Son, who willingly lived and died in a desperate act of love in order for you to have it!

Your anchor is God's desperate, unconditional love for you. The One whose hand made the stars is holding out his hand for you and me today, to steady you, to anchor you through it all—whatever you may be facing. In John 15:15 Jesus tells His disciples, "*I no longer call you servants...Instead, I have called you friends.*" Do you see what He's done? Friends with God! Your desperation and my desperation is nothing compared to the One who sent His only begotten Son to save you and me. Let Him end your desperate search for some other anchor. Let Him into your life. Let Him keep your very soul. Let Him into your household. And begin treating the people there in a way that they know Jesus came for them too. "*For God SO LOVED the world that whosoever believes in Him may not perish but have everlasting life.*" If that's not desperation, I don't know what is.