

Restore the Joy

by Del Fehsenfeld Jr.

The sermon emphasizes the need for a personal awakening within the heart and life of individuals, and a return to a genuine relationship with God, in order to experience spiritual growth and revival.

Duration: 59:03

Scripture: 2 Kings 6:2, 2 Kings 6:7, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Galatians 2:20

Topics: "Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher tells a story about a college student who loses a borrowed axe head in the Jordan River. The student cries out for help, and the man of God asks where it fell. He then cuts down a stick and throws it into the water, causing the iron axe head to float. The preacher uses this story to illustrate the importance of priorities and the consequences of neglecting one's family for the sake of ministry. He also shares a personal story of a pastor who realized his priorities were out of whack and confessed to neglecting his family. The sermon emphasizes the need for balance and aligning one's actions with their preaching.

Transcript

Singing, not only in special music, but as a congregation has been such a cause for rejoicing in my own spirit as I've sat here on the platform and listened to you tonight. I'm grateful and honored for the privilege to come and be a part of such a conference as this and to stand on the platform and serve together with men that I have looked up to kind of as my granddaddies, as my granddaddies in the ministry, and Bill McLeod back in the back. I tell you, I feel like a dime waiting on a dollar, really, to come into a place like this and to sense your spirit and I don't want to in any way injure what is taking place, but to cooperate with God's spirit in sharing with you what he's put on my heart.

I would turn your focus tonight to 2 Kings, the 6th chapter. 2 Kings, chapter 6. You know, back in the 17 and 1800s, there were several spiritual awakenings of a national sort that just swept the North American continents. We live in a generation where I'm told that we have now the greatest churches and the greatest programs and the greatest schools, the greatest preachers, the greatest singers, the greatest publications, the greatest ministries, the greatest crusades, the greatest buildings and buses and baptisms and budgets that the church has ever known anything about.

Do you know, with all of our greatness, we are now 89 years into the 20th century and God hasn't been impressed. With all of our bigness and all of our greatness and all the things that we've accomplished,

many of them good, the one thing that we don't have is the one thing that we desperately need and that is the visitation of the presence of the living God, divinely touching down and intervening in the affairs of men. Our programs and our churches, our buildings, our preaching, our singing and all the rest is not going to bring a spiritual awakening to North America.

The only thing that will accomplish that is the manifest visitation of the presence of the living God in all of his fullness and power and glory. I've been preaching now for 18 years in revival ministry throughout the United States and with every passing day, I'm more convinced than ever before that programs and methods and conferences in and of themselves, as right as they are, will not bring a spiritual awakening to America or to Canada. Our great, great need is to realize that spiritual awakening in a nation begins in a community and spiritual awakening in a community begins with revival in the church and revival in the church begins with a personal awakening within the heart and life of individuals.

I know I'm not telling you as a group of hungry hearted people anything that you don't already know and believe. I believe if we're going to see a spiritual awakening in North America, we must have the power and the presence of the living God on our lives. But, you know, I'm finding that the place that God's presence and power is probably most absent is in those of us as religious leaders, myself included.

I find that the greatest need in America is not in Hollywood or Washington, D.C. or San Francisco, and I'm sure it's not in your capital cities here in Canada. The greatest need is not with our politicians. It's not in the media.

It's not with our actors and actresses. It's not in a lost world. The greatest need is in the church and in the church.

The greatest need is not in the pew. The greatest need is in our hearts as leaders. God has shared with me from this passage in 2 Kings, the 6th chapter, some striking parallels and applications to the Christian life and to revival and the desperate need for revival within our lives as spiritual leaders.

So many of us have come to a place that we are performing and preaching and teaching beyond the depth and reality of our own personal life and walk with God. We're talking farther down the road than we're actually walking. We can even learn the lingo and the truths of revival, which initially upon their hearing set us free.

And revival then become nothing more than a memory in our scrapbook, something that we point back to at a time in history where we, quote, met God instead of the continuation of meeting with God on a daily basis in our lives. Several days ago, we were in a revival crusade in Oklahoma and the wife of the pastor in that church where we were conducting the crusade opened up on the third or fourth day before all the other staff wives and just announced that she would be leaving her husband as soon as her nine-year-old son had grown up. Those ladies were in shock.

They started bawling and weeping and loving and ministering and praying and really didn't know what else to do. And there sat the pastor's wife sharing her heart. She was tired of it.

She was tired of what was going on at home. She was tired of being married to the church and not to a husband. She was tired of her kids being raised in absentia.

She was tired of the ministry. She was tired of not having a husband whom she thought she had married. I'm thankful to tell you that by the grace of God, within a week, that dear lady's life was gloriously

transformed.

But the reason it made such an impression on me was because it was not the first time I had heard it. For you see, the crusade before in Houston, Texas, the pastor of that church of some 1,100 people stood before his congregation on Sunday morning and broke down and wept. And this is what he said.

My priorities are all out of whack. In essence, I've thought that if I took care of the ministry, God would take care of my family. I've been married to the church instead of my wife.

Things are miserable at home. Kids have a head for God but no heart for God. Priorities are all out of whack.

And I'm facing reality, perhaps for the first time, as a preacher. I preach against movies and television programs that are evil only to go off and even preach in conferences where I'm placed in motels. And the very things that I preach against, I watch, including filthy movies on HBO.

His wife stood and said to the church, six months ago, things became so bad in our home that I started for the first time in our married life contemplating divorce. She said, things have become so difficult, the only way I could find sleep. And she held a wrapper up before her congregation and said, I've been taking nine unisoms a night.

I'm addicted to over-the-counter drugs. Folks, I'm not talking about the exception to the rule, I'm talking about some of us in this auditorium tonight. I'm talking about people who, like the Jimmy Swigerts and Jimmy Bakers and other preachers across the country, we think are the isolated exceptions to the rule, are not the exceptions to the rule, but are merely the tip of an iceberg that is destroying the church of Jesus Christ.

I'm talking about preachers in this auditorium. I'm talking about preachers' wives in this place tonight. I'm talking about Sunday school teachers and deacons and lay people who are performing and proclaiming beyond the depth and reality of their personal relationship with Jesus Christ and their own family.

And I don't know about you, but I'm discovering in my own life that if it doesn't work at home, it's not worth preaching. If it doesn't work behind the doors of your home, you've got nothing to proclaim that's worth listening to because the moment you begin talking farther down the road, then you are actually walking and living in the reality of the laboratory of life on a daily basis, the power and presence and authority of the living God departs your life. I'd like to ask you to join with me in standing as we read the Word of God.

And I want us to discover in this passage of Scripture a little more clearly what God may be saying to us tonight. 2 Kings 6, the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too straight for us. This is EBC, Elisha Bible College.

And Elisha has got a bunch of preacher boys together and he's training them for the ministry. And enrollment is up in the dorms. The dorms are overcrowded.

And the preacher boys come to him in verse 1 and then in verse 2 and say, Boss, it's awful crowded around here. We need more space, more room. Could we build another dormitory? Give us time off.

Verse 2, Let us go, we pray, the end of the Jordan. Take thence every man a beam and let us make us a place there where we may dwell. Could we have time off from school to build another dorm? And so Elisha

says, Go ye.

And one said, Be content, I pray thee, in the English vernacular, that today in the 20th century would be a student saying to his professor, Now, boss, don't get ripped. I just got one more request I want to ask of you. Go with thy servants.

And so he answered, I will go. And he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan, they began cutting down wood.

They got out their buzz saws and axes and they started chopping down the trees to build a dorm. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head flew off into the water. Now, you talk about an embarrassing state of affairs.

You're a macho college kid trying to impress all the rest of your classmates about how strong you are and what a good tree chopper you are. And all of a sudden, your axe head flies off. And of all things, it's bad enough to lose your axe head, but he loses his axe head in the dirty Jordan River.

It's out of sight. I mean, you know, axe heads don't float like rubber duckies. And so it's gone.

And he says, what am I going to do? Well, I'll tell you what this college kid did. He did what any North American college student studying for the ministry would do. Some macho college kid trying to impress everyone.

Verse number five, it says he cried. And he said, alas, master, for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, where did it fall? He showed him the place.

And he cut down a stick and cast it in feather and the iron did swim. Can't you imagine that kid standing on the banks of the Jordan River? I imagine his eyeballs were fluttering like a loose electric light bulb. He could hardly believe what he had just seen.

This prophet tosses a stick over into the Jordan River and up comes this heavy old axe head. And he's standing there shaking his head. And the professor says, now, don't just stand there, reach out and take it.

So he reaches out his hand and he takes it. Let's bow our hearts in prayer. Father, I come to you tonight with the heaviness of heart, realizing that one of the major stumbling blocks to revival in our nations is those of us who are in leadership in our churches, who are proclaiming one message and living another day after day in the reality of our relationships with our mate, our children and others.

Lord, I just ask you in the name of Jesus and in the power of your shed blood, realizing that it is not by might nor by power, but by thy spirit, saith the Lord, that your Holy Spirit will invade our privacy and all the defenses that we've put up. Lord, tonight, I pray that they would fall and I pray that you would open our hearts. Tonight, we might understand what it is you're wanting to do in a fresh new way within our hearts and lives.

Thank you for what you're going to say. We praise you in Jesus name. Amen.

Now, I'm not going to exegete this passage. I just want to share with you several several thoughts that God has given me in relation to spiritual growth and spiritual awakening. I'd like to suggest the possibility that the axe handle in this story could be representative of you and I. All that you and I are totally apart from God.

Everything that you and I are apart from God himself, operationally working within our lives. It can represent our potential, our personality, our character, our knowledge. It could represent our intelligence, our dynamic, our character.

Everything that you and I are totally apart from God represented in that axe handle. The axe head, on the other hand, could be a picture of the power and the presence of the living God within our lives. The cutting edge of God, that which makes the difference in ministry and in life.

You say, Del, what do I need the power and presence of God for? May I say to you that the simple answer to that question is, as a believer, everything that is spiritual and everything that is of any eternal value at all. Jesus said it this way, without me operationally exchanging my life within you, without me becoming your life, all that you do, the sum total of it in light of eternity is zero. Even though it may be right, even though it may be good, the sum total of all that you and I can accomplish apart from Jesus in our life, being our life is nothing.

I don't know about you, but God has called me to a full-time ministry of revival with several of our teams and even preaching week after week after week after week, months out of the year, involved in the ministry of revival. I find in my own life that I get so busy with the work of the Lord that I forget all about the Lord of the work. Just so caught up and consumed in the mechanics of what's taking place and the responsibilities of directing a ministry and ministering to so many people, I just forget about the Lord of the work.

We lose the refreshing of His presence. We lose the resurrection power of His life. And when that happens, we get barren, we get empty on the inside, while we tend in pride to keep all of the religious motions and activity going on on the outside in order to save face.

The result is spiritual burnout. We lose our joy. We lose the desire to walk with God.

We find ourselves going through motions, enduring Christianity rather than enjoying its author, Jesus. We become so hollow and empty and barren and dry on the inside, but we become phony and pretentious and plastic on the outside. What used to be a thrilling delight has become nothing now more than just duty.

What used to be a life-giving ministry is now just mechanics. We've lost our first love. We've lost the joy of living, the thrill of that relationship, the power of God in our lives.

You know what I'm talking about. Think back to the moment that you met Jesus as your Savior and Lord. The heart was so tender.

You loved the word of God, you could hardly stand to put it down. It was, He was the focus, the center of all of your conversation. I mean, you found tears flowing freely as you heard the word of God, as God spoke to you.

You were so sensitive to the promptings of God's Spirit. You were in love with Jesus. You longed to find out something else that you could do to please God in obedience to His word.

You know, it's tragic, but probably true, that the most spiritual people in our churches today are the new converts. They come to church and they sing like God's alive, and the words mean something, and they really want to enter in and worship. They open the Bible like they can hardly wait, and they believe that God is going to speak to them.

And the pastor pours out his heart, and they're on the edge of their seats, taking notes as fast as they can. They don't want to miss anything. They're hugging everything that moves, passing out tracts, witnessing right and left, full of joy, full of life.

Tears flow freely in their faces from a broken heart. They're overwhelmed with the presence of God. You say, yeah, well, give them three or four months and they'll get over it.

You know, and it's probably true. If they sit next to some of us, they will. You say, Del, why does that happen? Why does it happen to us as believers that we lose the thrill, the joy, the power, the manifest presence of the living God in our lives? It happened to David.

He cried out in Psalm 51, having lost, if you will, the ax head, the power and the presence of God in his life. Have mercy upon me, O God. Restore to me the joy.

Lord, bring back the way it used to be in my life. Make my heart tender again. Take this heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh.

Restore to me the joy of thy salvation. Bring back the power of God in my life, in my home, in my marriage, with my kids, in my ministry. God, bring back the ax head.

I want to answer two quick questions before we leave here tonight. And they are these. Number one, what causes us to lose the ax head, the power and the presence of the living God in our lives? Number two, having lost it, how do I get it back? First, what causes us to lose the ax head of God? I suppose that there are hundreds of things that I could suggest tonight, because anytime we disobey any aspect of the truth of God's word, the ax head of God flies off.

But I want to narrow it down to three areas that I have found in my own life cost me more quickly the ax head of God than anything else. The power and the presence of the living God in my life. The first of those three is pretense.

Pretense. What do you mean, Del? I mean just putting on. Being a phony, professional, plastic, performing pretender.

Leaving a better impression of yourself than is honestly true with other people. Trying to create an image, protect a reputation and make other people believe more highly of you than is honestly true. Pretending.

It's kind of like slapping a coat of cosmetic, surface, religious, pious paint on our surface. And now that we've learned the lingo and the language, we can perform without the heart. Going through all the outward motions of what is expected by people around me rather than becoming genuine and real internally where we are inspected by God.

I heard a story about a clown who lost his job and he looked in the wan ads and found something he thought he could do. So he applied. It was at the city zoo.

He went down to the zoo and they said, we're short on monkeys. He said, I'll take the job. So they gave him this monkey costume and he got into it before they opened the gates.

He went out and he got in the monkey's cage. Monkeys see monkey do. They chattered.

He chattered. They climbed the bars. He climbed the bars.

They ate bananas. He ate bananas. They scratched.

He scratched. I mean, whatever they did, he got it down real good. So people couldn't really tell the difference.

They opened the gates and he was in his heyday performing as a monkey. Days went on and he noticed that the more daring he became, the better the crowd liked it. So one day he got this brilliant idea.

He got a rope. He brought it from home. He hooked it to the top of the monkey's cage and he started swinging on it.

And the reason that was daring was because right next to the monkey's cage was the lion's den. And the closer he swung to that lion's den, the better the crowd roared. They loved it.

It wasn't long and he became so daring. He was swinging way out over the lion's den and back into the monkey's cage. Days went on.

Weeks went by and his fame spread. And one bright Saturday afternoon, the throngs had gathered. He was in his glory.

He got up on that rope and he started swinging and he swung way out over the lion's den. And all of a sudden, that rope snapped and he fell right smack in the middle of that den of lions. And he ripped that monkey's head off and he started screaming at the top of his lung because those lions were stalking and roaring.

And he ripped that head off and he started screaming, Help! Help! Let me out of here! And one of those lions said, Hush up, you fool, or we'll all lose our jobs. Just a little humor to illustrate a point. You know what happens to a lot of us when we go to church on Sunday morning? We put our Christian costume on.

I've had team members with us as college students with besetting sins in their life that they never have problems with the night before an opening crusade. But they show up in church with their Christian costume on. We get our little Christian buddy, I'm a Christian buddy, buttons out and put them on our lapels.

And we get our big Bibles and our canned grins and all of our religious songs and phrases and our Christian clothes. And we go to church, park it in a pew on Sunday morning and tip God in the offering plate and think that's Christianity. Folks, most of us in the church today spend hours in the church pretending, putting on.

You get to the church door and people say, Hi, how are you today? Fine. What is that? The way your face is after you shaved this morning? What do you mean, fine? You know, people in our churches, their marriages are falling apart. Pastors' wives are thinking about walking out on their husbands.

Men are desperate in the ministry, not to be in the ministry. Not knowing where to turn. And we're fine.

As if everything's okay in the church and we need to pray for the world, that everybody else will get right with God. I tell you, the church is praying for the world while the world waits for the church to get right with God. Because they know we're phony.

They know we're plastic. They know we're pretenders. They know the way we live at home.

You know what I'm talking about. Sunday morning rolls around, you're a stickler for being on time. You leisurely roll out of bed.

Take a leisurely little stroll to the shower and have a leisure shower. And then you go and have leisurely a little breakfast and leisurely read your newspaper on Sunday morning in the leisure chair. And then you leisurely make your way out to the garage where you leisurely back your car down the garage, down the driveway, out onto the launching pad.

And dad is a stickler for time. We are not going to be late to that church again. So embarrassing to be late.

And so he sits out on the launching pad in his automobile. Now, mom's like a little tornado in the house. I mean, she's running all over the place trying to clean up breakfast that she had to fix and clean up the kids that got messed up with the breakfast she fixed and get all their clothes ready and fix lunch for who knows when they'll get home from church.

And all of a sudden, it's T minus 60 seconds and counting. And dad's had it. I mean, he's waited on the launch pad now for three minutes.

There's not a sign of life in that house of his. And we are not going to be late again. T minus 60 and counting.

When he reaches T minus 30 seconds and counting, he can't take any more. He leans on the horn. Beep, beep.

I mean, the average lost person in the community hopes that there are no Christians that live on their block on Sunday morning. That's the only day they can sleep in and hear all these dads out on the launching pad. Beep, beep.

Finally, T minus 10 seconds and counting. Here they come. Out the front door.

Hang on, clothes. We're going to church. They get out to the car.

All but Junior. I mean, T minus zero and dad's gone down the street. And Junior leaves his leg in the driveway.

And so he begins to explain his predicament to his dad. Dad, my leg's in the driveway. I'd luck a lot better at church today with my leg.

Can we go get it? And dad doesn't appreciate what Junior is saying. And he kind of gives him a piece of his mind. And when he gets through, mom puts on a black and white outfit called a referee's outfit, you know.

And she gets in the middle of this war zone. And it's not long and everybody's ripped and yelling and screaming and fighting with each other until they get to the church parking lot. Something really strange happens at the church parking lot.

The tires of the automobile leave the secular pavement and hit the church parking lot. And the minute it happens, the fighting stops and halos appear. And everybody gets out of the automobile and they kind of trip over into the church.

They put their Christian buddy buttons on and their canned grins and fine remarks. And they sit in a pew Sunday morning for two hours, sleep half of it. Pat the preacher on the back, tell him what a good job he's doing.

Get back in the car. Halo's still there. But you let those car wheels leave that sacred parking lot and hit that secular street again.

Boom, third world war starts all over again. You know why we're laughing and I'm laughing with you. That's right, because we've been there.

How many Sundays, how long ago? And of course, we were one of the Sunday school teachers who had to teach on the exchange life. What it means to be filled with the spirit and all the fruits of the spirit filled life, right? And we felt like a big zero. We felt like a hypocrite.

But did we tell anybody? We spent two hours pretending. And I want to tell you from my own experience that when you pretend, the ax head of God flies off. The power and the presence of the living God, it's gone.

I was out in California preaching a staff revival for an organization and about the third day of that revival, the vice president of that organization came to me and said, Del, I need to say something tonight. I said, OK. And so in the service, I called on him.

He came six foot some inch frame of a guy. And he stood there before his colleagues and he burst into tears. He said, for 10 years, I've been in this ministry.

I know all the charts and the formulas and the diagrams. I do the preaching. I do the singing.

I've done the counseling. But he said, I'm standing before you today to confess that none of it's real in my life. So I feel like a big old hollow pipe with nothing more than nuts and bolts just banging around the inside.

And I can't stand anymore. If I have to pretend another day in my life, I'll die. He turned around and he put his big old frame on my shoulder and began to weep.

And he sobbed and sobbed, I think, for two or three minutes, just stood there uncontrollably. He went back to his seat and I turned and looked at that audience and I said, you know, the only difference between Tom and most of us here. Tom just got honest enough to do something about it.

And if you are tired of pretending. And you want to be real, too. I want to ask you right now in front of all the rest of the staff here to get up out of your seat.

And when you do, you're confessing that you're as empty and hollow as Tom was. And you're tired of pretending. And I want you to go to Tom's side and commit yourself to start meeting with him every morning at seven o'clock in what we will call the empties class.

And all the people who are empty can start getting real. Stop performing beyond the reality of your walk in your life. Two thirds of that staff of full-time Christian workers got up out of their seat with their wives and headed for Tom's chair.

I called Tom several weeks later. I said, Tom, how's the empties class going? He said, Dale, you don't have to call it that anymore. We're starting to get filled up with Jesus.

God is becoming a reality in our lives. And we're just proclaiming in reality to the depth of what we're living. You see the moment you talk one inch farther down the road than you're walking in reality in your life.

The axe head, the power, the presence of the living God flies off. We pretend that we're full of joy when really we're hurting. Nobody else in this conference knows yet.

Somebody's marriage here is about to fall apart. You don't think you can take another day of ministry with a husband who's married to the church instead of to you. We pretend that we're victorious when like that pastor of 1100 people, we preach against sin and then sneak off to a motel room to be involved in it.

We pretend that we're disciplined in the word of God and prayer when in reality, we're barren, disillusioned and dry. At a pastor of a large church in Dallas, Texas, tell 17 men on his staff and his staff meeting one day with a broken heart, I've just discovered that we have a church philosophy that does not allow for spiritual growth. And then he said this.

He said, fellas, I don't even know how to read the Bible to know God. I only read it to prepare messages. I don't have a feed on it.

I don't know how to build a relationship with God. And he wept and it wasn't long and men around that table began confessing the same thing. Pretending costs us the power of God, the presence of God, the ax head of God in our lives.

Second thing that so often costs me the ax head of God in my life is pride. You'd think after 18 years of ministry, I'd be able to define that, wouldn't you? But I can't. You say, well, I know what it is.

Pride is pride is thinking that you're better than somebody else. Dear friend, it's more than that. It's thinking that you're better than God knows you really are.

Pride is thinking more highly of yourself. You say, well, I've got it. I have a hard time with people who constantly talk about the work of God in their life in terms of 17 years ago.

That's a memory in a scrapbook. You know what God's teaching me? Older men tend to live in the past. Young men tend to live in the future.

But God's men that he uses live today and walk hand in hand, step by step, moment by moment in a genuine relationship with the living God. But pride in my life causes me to think that I'm really better than I really am. You know, pride causes me to be self deceived.

Isn't that what Obadiah said? The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee. We begin to think that because we're in some position of authority or because God has greatly used us in some way, we've arrived. We can shortcut the process.

We can run around the disciplines required in our lives to walk with God and we can teach everybody else how to do it, but not live that life ourself. I don't know how to define it, but I can tell you some of the symptoms that I've seen in my life. And when I see these symptoms, I know that the root is pride.

Here's one of those symptoms. Pride causes me to want to deal with the respectable rather than the real. Was the last time in your church you as a pastor or one of the men of your church got up and got honest? I mean, really honest.

You know, most testimony means if we can get an ear about something that happened 20 years ago and they're very seldom specific. I want to be a better father, a better husband, a better Christian, a better citizen. Well, who doesn't? When's the last time somebody in your church got up and said, I'm in love with me.

I'm full of anger because I claim rights. I want everything to go my way. I'm addicted to television.

I'm battling moral impurity in my life. My flesh controls me. I'm bitter.

My poor kids and my wife are suffering. I'm so in love with me and money and what it can do for me. I've lost all of my desire for God and his word and for prayer.

Folks, I'm in desperate shape. Would you pray for me? Pride causes me to deal with the respectable rather than the real. Here's another symptom.

Pride causes me to deal with generalities rather than specifics. So we go to God. God, please forgive me for all my sins.

Amen. When's the last time you said, God, I'm a liar? You say, oh, but you don't understand, I'm not a liar. I just once in a while tell a lie.

Friend, you're not a liar because you lie. You lie because you're a liar. You fornicate because you're a fornicator.

You gossip because you're a gossip. I'll tell you, revival came to Fort Worth in a church a few months ago when a CPA dared to stand up and say, I'm a CPA. I'm trusted.

But the truth of the matter is, I'm a liar and I'm a thief and I've even stolen from my own mom's estate. When one of the vice presidents or top management people of General Dynamics, one of the U.S.'s largest defense contractors, confessed, I've been manipulating paperwork at the tune of millions of dollars and turned himself in. You see, pride causes me to deal with generalities rather than specific.

Here's another one. Pride causes me to call my sin a character flaw, a weakness, a problem, a mistake. Jesus didn't die on the cross for our mistakes.

Jesus didn't shed His blood for our character flaws and our problems. Jesus shed His blood for our sin. And it's only until we come to understand that we are sinners, not just doing a little sin here and there.

It's not that I lie once in a while. God, I am a liar. I'm an adulterer.

I am a gossip. I am a thief. I am a cheat.

Pride causes me to be more conscious of what other people around me think of me than what God already knows. Pride keeps me from confessing I was wrong. Will you forgive me, please? You know, I find that the easiest place in the world for me to do that's outside my home.

It's amazing how I can tell everybody else in the world how much I love them, except my wife and my kids. Though I love them more. The pride of my heart.

It's amazing how easy it is for me to say to a staff member or a church that I've offended in the midst of a message sometime. Will you forgive me? But to look at my son or my daughter and humble myself as a father and say I was wrong. Will you forgive me, please? Pride causes me to defend and justify and excuse what I've done.

It causes me to live my life independent of God. I remember being down in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in a crusade. And the associate pastor of that church asked Judy and I, my wife, and I if we'd like to go with he and his wife down to New Orleans to have seafood.

And I love fresh seafood. And so we headed down the interstate. And he was kind of a jovial, happy-go-lucky sort of a fella.

And he was telling all kinds of jokes. And I was laughing in and in. And all of a sudden, I thought of this joke.

And I told it. And everybody laughed. But then my pride said, Del, tell another one.

So I thought me up this other joke. Now, I'm in the process of thinking up this joke. And it was a good joke, clean joke, nothing wrong with the joke.

But all of a sudden, the Holy Spirit said to me, don't tell it. That ever happen to you? Don't say that. Don't tell that.

Don't listen to that. Turn that off. God's Spirit said, don't tell it.

Now, I'm in the process of getting ready to disobey God's Spirit. My pride has got the best of me at this moment. And so I'm choosing to follow what pride is saying.

And I'm getting ready to disobey. And you know how it is when you disobey? You get guilty. And when you get guilty, you get defensive.

And when you get defensive, you have to start explaining to everybody why you're doing what you're doing. I found myself explaining why I was about to tell this joke, as if anybody needed an explanation. And in the process of giving this explanation, I exaggerated.

Which is just a polite, 20th century, sophisticated term for lying. I stretched the truth. I lied.

And I went ahead and told the joke. And everybody in the car laughed, except me. I was dying.

I felt like the axe head of God had just flown off. I felt like the manifest presence, the thrill of God's glory in my life was leaving me. Side two.

...yourself and make this right now. And my pride said, oh no, you don't. They don't know.

You don't have to say anything. I thought, well, I'll bury it under seafood. That didn't work.

I got acid indigestion. I thought, well, I'll sleep it off. So I go home that night and I tossed and turned, tossed and turned.

I was miserable. I felt like I was dying on the inside. Dear friend, I want to tell you there's only one thing I can think of that is worse than sinning and feeling like you're about to die from the conviction of the Holy Spirit over that sin.

And that is to get to the place as a Christian in your life that you can sin and it not even bother you. The next morning I had to preach. I couldn't preach.

How can I preach with this unconfessed sin in my life? So I, during the song time, went out into that auditorium and found that associate pastor and his wife and asked if I could see him. And we went down the aisle back behind the platform and I confessed to him what I've shared with you. And I said, could you find in your heart to forgive me? And they did.

And you know what God did? He reached over and took the axe head that had flown off and put it back on the handle. I tell you, I was ready to charge hell with a water pistol that morning. It's amazing the power, the authority, the conviction of the living God within your life, the joy that is yours when the axe head's on the handle.

When the power and the presence of the living God is a reality in your life. The third thing that was wrong or the third thing, rather, that cost us the axe head of God, the power and presence of God, not only pretense, not only pride. Dear friend, is there somebody here in this conference that thinks better of you and your marriage or your family or your walk with God than is true? Are you pretending? Are you putting on? You may feel good here on the mountain and wonder in three days when you get back home what happened.

The only way it's going to continue when you get back home is to learn in reality to keep the axe head on your handle. To keep walking with God in honesty and brokenness and humility and obedience and being filled with the Spirit to keep that axe head on that handle. And you will not keep it if you pretend, if you put on, if you try to leave a better impression of yourself than is honestly true.

You will not keep it if in pride you begin covering your tracks and being respectable rather than real. And the third thing that will cost you the axe head is personal disobedience. Personal disobedience.

I'm no out to do that, but I know God requires that of me, even though He doesn't require it of anyone else. But God, I'll go this far, but no farther. I know with a man in his 60s in Pennsylvania weeping one night and he said, Del, 27 years ago God called me to the ministry.

And I said, God, I'll work harder, I'll make more money, I'll support more ministers and preachers. 27 years ago the axe head flew off my life. He said, I'm losing my children and their mates, their marriages are falling apart, I have no respect in my home and I'm miserable.

Personal disobedience. You see, Samson wist not that the Spirit of the Lord had departed, that the axe head, if you will, had flown off of his life. He wist not because he had laid his lap in the lap of Delilah, he took a haircut in the devil's barbershop and it cost him the axe head of God.

It cost him the power, the strength, the inner glow, the fullness of God's glory in his life. You say, how do I get it back, Del? If people in this congregation only knew where I was and what I really was and how I really treat my children and what kind of marriage we have behind the walls of our house, if people really knew the sin that I've been involved in, I wouldn't be able to take the shame. I've lost the axe head, how do I get it back? Turn with me there to 2 Kings 6, and I would suggest to you this student had three things he

could have done.

Number one, he could quit. Say, I haven't quit, I've come to this conference. Then the second thing he could do is just pretend.

Can't you see he can fake it? The alarm clock goes off in the morning, he gets up, he grabs his axe handle. He runs out to the woods before all the other guys have even got showers and he's out there banging on the side of all of those trees. None of them fall.

The only thing that's flying is sweat and bark. He's working hard. You know, I used to believe that busyness produces spiritual barrenness.

Some of the hardest working people in the church internally are spiritually barren. You know why we have to work so hard? Have you ever tried to cut a tree down with an axe handle? No cutting edge, no power, no conviction. I mean, when we were walking with God, the mere whisper of a prayer to the throne room of heaven brought the manifest presence of God on the scene and people melted.

But now it's programs and methods and ideas and labor and hard work and hours, if not weeks, to accomplish, if we ever get it, the things that God used to do in moments. You know what we're doing? We're faking. I used to think that busyness produces spiritual barrenness, but God showed me that spiritual barrenness on the inside produces external busyness.

We try to compensate for the emptiness, the powerlessness, we try to convince everybody else of how committed we are while inwardly we are so empty and barren in our hearts and lives. He could quit. He could fake it.

And some of us just keep going on instead of getting honest and getting real. Or the third thing he could do is go back and get it. And that's what this student did.

Notice the steps that he took. Verse 5, Scripture says he cried. I believe that is a picture of brokenness, not necessarily emotions and emotionalism rather and tears, but it's a picture of brokenness, of self-effort and self-sufficiency.

There's nothing I can do. The act's head is gone. The power, the presence, the glow of God's glory has departed and no amount of conferences and no amount of programs and no amount of effort and work, nothing is going to bring it back apart from God Himself.

And he was broken before God of his own effort. He cried. Notice he cried out to his Master.

His Master was Elisha. Ours was Jesus. I wonder if there's anyone here like I was so often in my ministry years ago when I came to a point of barrenness and emptiness in my life.

I signed up for another seminar, another conference. I wanted to go. Proverbs says, Why is there a price in the hand of a fool for wisdom, seeing he has no heart for it? You know what that verse says? What I did so many years was instead of going to meet with my Master Jesus, I had to go find somebody else that he had mastered.

And when I came away, I came away with their methodology, not their heart. And until you get the heart and the act's head restored, it will not last. It says he cried and he went to his Master.

And the man of God said, Where did it fall? Perhaps a picture of the Holy Spirit saying to some of us right now in this probing moment, Where did you lose it? At what point did you say, God, you can have anything in my life but not this? I'll go to anyone but not her. I'll go anywhere and speak for you, Lord, but not to that country. I'll do anything but not this.

God, I'll get rid of any sin in my life but not my pet sin. I'll confess anything openly but not that. And the Scripture tells us that he cut down a stick and cast it in water and the iron did swim.

Step four. You say, Del, God performed a miracle that day and that's what I need. I need a miracle in my life.

I feel like I'm that heavy old axe head that's just sinking. The harder I try, the farther I go, the deeper I sink. I'm grasping now.

I desperately need a fresh touch of God in my life. Could God perform that kind of miracle on me? Dear friend, the same God who performed that miracle is still on his throne and he hasn't lost an ounce of his power. You know what this speaks to me of? Elisha cut down a stick and cast it into that river.

God the Father cut down a stick and hung his son on it, Calvary. And I want you to know the shed blood, the righteous branch Christ, the power of the cross is sufficient for every need. How long has it been since you visited Calvary? How long has it been since you've seen what Jesus did for you there? The price that he paid.

You know, a lot of us come this far, but we stop short. There's one final step. Notice verse seven, Therefore said he, take it up to thee.

So he put out his hand and he took it. Some of us here in this auditorium tonight, perhaps we're saying, boy, if God will just, if he'll just move on me, if he'll just fall upon my life, I'll respond. We wait for God to fall and he's waiting for us to fall.

You say, if God will just, just really get a hold of me, if he'll just really move me, then I'll, then I'll obey. Dear friend, if you're not as close to the heart of God tonight as you once were, if your heart isn't as tender, if you don't love the word, if the reality of Jesus is not what it used to be in your life, the tears don't flow as freely, if your spirit is not as sensitive, your conscience is clean, your love and joy and power and walking in Christ is not as great as it once was, guess who moved? He's right where he always was. And the next move is up to you and me.

Reach out and take it. Let's bow our hearts in prayer. In the quietness of these moments before one of the twins comes and as the spirit of God just quietly searches our heart, where does God find you tonight? Would you agree with what God has said to you? Would you open your heart and say, Lord, I agree with you.

I've lost the ax head. I've lost the power that I once knew. Your presence, your glory, the tenderness, the tears, the love, the desire, the life that was flowing in me.

It's not like it used to be. It's not like it used to be. The ax head's flown off in my life, Lord, and I want it back.

Whatever it costs me, whatever it takes. And dear friend, if you have agreed with God that the ax head is gone and you want God to bring it back, take those steps that that student took. If you've come out to God right now in agreement, go back to the place where you lost it.

Where you said this far, but no farther. I'll go anywhere. I'll do anything.

I'll say anything. I'll confess anything, but not that. Where pride set in.

Where you started being more conscious of what other people around you think of you than what God Almighty knows. Where'd you start pretending? Where'd you start pretending? Trying to leave a better impression of yourself than is honestly true. As the instrumentalists play an invitation hymn, and in the quietness of our hearts, unless God leads the twins otherwise, right there in your seat, I just want to ask you to do business with God.

Ask God to restore the ax head. Go back. Agree with Him.

Confess the sin. And then go back to Calvary. And let Him restore the power and the presence of God on your life.

Desire to be right with thee, and to know thy power, sense of thy presence, will be so much greater than our pride and our pretense, all the personal disobediences. To the place that we will deal with everything that thou art putting thy finger on. And I pray that in thine own way, there might be a restoration of the sense of thy presence and thy power in every one of our lives.

Don't leave anyone out. Give us that kind of judgmental power. Give us that kind of judgment day honesty.

As we go from this place, we might go consciously aware of the fact that we've not only heard from thee, but our response to thy divine truth has been so positive that it can only produce godly living in accordance with thy will. Give us that spirit of repentance. Brokenness.

And a longing for restoration of power. Oh God, may we become a part of the solution rather than continue to be the problem in regarding reviving and spiritual awakening by our obedience to the divine truth even tonight. Continue to minister to us by thy Holy Spirit.

And I pray that thou would continue to bring forth everything that is in disagreement to the will of God in our lives. Have thy way.

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