

Overcoming Barriers to Spiritual Awakening in the Church

by Don Currin

To experience spiritual awakening, one must overcome barriers such as prayerlessness, being out of God's will, and honoring others, including in-laws, and be willing to wrestle with Christ to receive God's fullness and best in life.

Duration: 36:14

Scripture: Genesis 32:29, Isaiah 61:1, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 18:21-22, John 13:34-35, Romans 12:18, Ephesians 4:3

Topics: "Spiritual Awakening"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a story about Billy Sunday, an American evangelist, who held a crusade in a town in the Midwest. Despite preaching the gospel from Isaiah 61-1, no one responded to the invitation all week. It was later discovered that there were many lost people present, but they did not respond due to the resentment and ill feelings between two pastors supporting the crusade. After the pastors embraced and asked for forgiveness, over 100 people received Christ as Savior. The sermon emphasizes the importance of personal holiness and unity in the body of Christ, and highlights the need to overcome traditions that hinder revival.

Transcript

The following message was given at the Canadian Revival Fellowship Conference held at the Bayview Glen Church in Thornhill, Ontario, February 1989. For additional copies of this message or for other messages available, please contact the Canadian Revival Fellowship, Box 584, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4P 3A3. I would, or should I say this afternoon, turn your Bibles please to Genesis in chapter 33.

Pardon me, that's Genesis chapter 32. Genesis in chapter 32, beginning in verse number 24. If you would follow with me in your Bible.

And Jacob was left alone. And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh.

And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And he said, let me go for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me.

And he said unto him, what is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel. For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

And Jacob asked him and said, tell me, I pray thee thy name. And he said, wherefore is it that thou doest ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

And as he passed over Penuel, the sun rose upon him and he halted or he limped upon his thigh. Therefore, the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh unto this day, because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and the sinew that shrank. I've been given the title this afternoon of overcoming barriers in spiritual awakening.

I want us to look at the life of Jacob and how he encountered the Lord. And I would say if we're going to look at this matter of spiritual awakening, just to give you a very simplistic definition of this reality, it's nothing more than encountering the Lord Jesus Christ in a very fresh and vital way. All of a sudden, things become real and spiritual reality begins to take its course.

I find there are three things in Jacob's life that he gave attention to in order to prepare himself for the blessing. Encountering the Lord. Possibly you know this, but for those of you that don't, we believe that this person that Jacob wrestled with was none other than the Lord Jesus himself.

It's what theologians refer to as a Christophany or a pre-incarnate state of Jesus Christ. You recall Jesus said, before Abraham was, I am. We believe that the angel of the Lord here that Jacob was wrestling with was none other than the Lord Jesus himself.

One of the reasons I believe that is because no one had the authority to be able to bestow the caliber of blessing upon a man than the Lord Jesus. Three preparations. First of all, you'll notice in the preceding verses and even the chapters here in Genesis, there before Genesis chapter 32, that the desire of Jacob's heart was to make things right with his brother Esau.

Now, he was motivated by fear, but in spite of the fact that fear was his motivation, God honored that. And let me just stop right there and say that you'll never be right with God unless you're right with your fellow man. It is impossible to have a proper relationship with God unless you have the right relationship with others.

Now, I'm finding this to be one of the barriers to spiritual awakening these days. For many people for years, they have confessed things that happened in their past that involve others. They have no rest in their spirit and they continue to go on and justify their not taking the responsibility of going back by saying, well, it's all under the blood.

But God will not give you rest and God will not give you a sense of his presence. And certainly he'll not give you the faith to expect spiritual awakening in the future until first of all, you cleanse yourself by walking in the light of putting things right with other people. Dr. Peter Lord says that God is after two things these days.

Number one is personal holiness. And number two is unity in the body of Christ. Like some years ago in Billy Sunday's heyday, the American evangelist, Billy was in the Midwest.

He went to a town and held a eight-day crusade. Night after night, he would preach a very simple gospel. If you are aware of Billy's ministry at all, you'll know that he began from Isaiah 61 in verse 1 and he used that as a springboard and would take off from there and share the gospel of Christ.

Well, no one responded all week. And he inquired of some of the pastors that were supporting the crusade. Are there any lost people here? The place was packed.

The pastor says, oh, yes, there are many, many lost people present in the services. Well, he could not understand why they did not respond to the invitation. So on the ninth day, he was contemplating before the Lord.

Should I continue the meeting or should I go on to my next location? The Lord did not give him any direction one way or the other, and he had an appointment that morning for lunch. He met with one of the pastors that had endorsed the meeting with his presence in his church. As they were walking down the street together and conversing, Billy looked across the street and up the other side became a rather tall, distinguished looking man.

And he looked at the pastor who was with him and he said, I believe I know that man. I believe I've seen him at the crusade, have I not? And the pastor that was with Billy said, oh, yes. As a matter of fact, he's a pastor himself.

Do you know the man? Oh, yes, I know him maybe a bit too well. Well, what does that mean? The pastor who was with him looked at him and said, he doesn't believe exactly the way we do theologically. And said, we've had our rounds at times in our own relationship here in the community.

And Billy says, well, he must believe to some degree the way we do theologically or he wouldn't keep coming back to the meeting. And so he left the man standing there, he hustled across the street and walked into the presence of this other pastor and introduced himself. And the man began to commend him and tell him how much he thanked God for his ministry there in their community.

Well, after five minutes, this other fellow is on the other side of the street that he left. And he walks very sheepishly across the street in the presence of Mr. Sunday, as well as this other pastor. The spirit of God comes upon that three-member meeting with such intensity that what begins to surface is ill feelings and resentment and yet even a hostile bitterness in their relationship one toward another.

These men asked one another to forgive each other. They embraced there in a spirit of unity. Billy took that as a confirmation from the Lord that God's intention was to extend the crusade.

That night he stepped to the pulpit. And once again, he started from Isaiah 61, 1, gave a very simple declaration of the gospel, gave the invitation and over 100 people received Christ as Savior. Billy was convinced that the reason that God had been hindered to redeem the loss was because of the resentment, the ill feelings that existed between these two men.

I'm convinced that restitution is a must and could it be that this is hindering, this is a barrier in many people's lives these days. Things that have occurred in our past, maybe our not so distant past, and then again, maybe many, many years ago, that we're too spiritually proud to deal with. Do you know Martin Luther regretted ever being in on the beginning of the Reformation movement because of the tremendous disunity it caused in the church.

You say, how could he regret such a thing? He had such a sensitivity to the needs of people. He loved people and he hated to see people at odds with one another, but that was a price he had to pay. Restitution is a must.

Paul said, and herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense between my God and all men. Maybe that's one of the reasons that the Spirit of God would record that he could say that I am pure from the blood of all men. Brother Dale Faisenfeld will be here in probably the next 24 hours.

Brother Dale says that while contending for the faith, we have become contentious with the faithful. I tell you brethren, these days my philosophy is if they're good enough for Jesus, they're good enough for me. And whether we agree or not on some minor issues, if the brethren, if they believe the cardinal doctrines of the faith, I tell you, I accept them as my brethren in Christ.

I approve of them and they have my blessing. Well, we find that Jacob's desire was to put things right with his brother Esau. But then secondly, I want you to notice something else in verse 24.

And Jacob was left alone, alone with God. Do you know the effectiveness of your ministry outwardly is determined by the effectiveness of your ministry privately before the Lord? And can I ask you today, do you have a consistent time alone with God? There is no substitute for that. John Bunyan said, if thou art not a praying person, thou art not even a Christian.

Adam Clark, the old Methodist preacher, maybe you've seen his commentaries, the Adam Clark commentaries. If you knew this man and you approached him in just a casual interaction, the very first words that came from his lips were not, how's it going? How's the family? How are you today? But the very first words that came from Adam Clark's lips when anyone approached him was, do I find thee praying? Do I find thee praying? May I ask you this afternoon, do I find thee praying? Is your heart in tune with God? Do I find thee praying? Like some years ago in our Bible school, Dr. Peter Lord came and spoke in chapel. He spoke on the prayer life of Paul.

And during the course of the message, he said, you know, and he spoke in that old English bro. He said, I can't understand. He says, we have all these classes in Bible college and seminary.

He said, we have classes on hermeneutics and homiletics and theology. All kinds of classes provided on how we can better serve the Lord. Why is it that we don't have a class on prayer? And he paused for a moment and then he said this, he said, maybe it's because we don't have anybody qualified enough to teach it.

Jacob was left alone. The prerequisite for knowing God in one's life and experiencing the spiritual reality that comes from having one's life impacted with Christ. To receive the blessing means that we must give diligence brethren to pray, to pray.

He was left alone. And could it be this morning that prayerlessness is one of the greatest barriers to spiritual awakening? You know, it's my conviction that before there is a revival of holiness, before there's a revival in the church, there must be a revival of prayer. And the enemy fears prayer more than anything else.

He's doing everything he can to throw at our efforts of prayer. But I believe there must be times of systematic prayer. And I believe there must be times of spontaneous prayer as God so orders.

But thirdly, I want you to notice something else in verse 24. First of all, we find the first preparation was he desired to put things right with this brother. Secondly, he was left alone, secret prayer.

But then thirdly, you'll notice this verse 24. And Jacob was left alone. And the Bible says, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

Notice that little word there, and there. Now, let me ask you a question. Do you believe that every word in God's inspired volume is from God? You really believe that? Do you believe that God places certain words in his Bible for the sake of making it more readable? Or does every word carry with it eternal weight and importance? I believe everything has a purpose in God's word.

His recorded word, every word has eternal weight in it. And the word there is no exception. And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

You say, Brother Don, what does the word there denote? I believe the word there denotes being in the perfect will of God. God knew that the desire of his heart was to put things right with this brother, which you find in the following chapters, that that's exactly what he did. He was a man that recognized his own weakness.

And here he is at a place along with God. And the Bible says, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. Now, I want to ask you a question in passing this afternoon.

Are you there? Are you? You say, what do you mean, Brother Don? Are you walking in the light that God has given you? Are you there? Every bit of light at this present moment. Husbands, if you don't love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. You're not there.

Wives, if you don't submit yourself unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. You're not there. If we do not honor those that God has so chosen to bring into our lives as stewards of us, gay, even our own parents.

You're not there. Can I go a step further? If you're not honoring your in-laws, you're not there. Something that was interesting to me the other day, as I went through the scripture, I found, first of all, that Abraham sought the counsel and the blessing of his father-in-law before, or excuse me, Moses did before he went to fulfill the purpose of God in his life.

He sought Jethro's counsel and blessing. I find where two lost girls, Moab damsels, honored their mother-in-law, Naomi, looking after her own interest before they sought to fulfill their own desires. And yet they were lost.

Have we so soon forgotten who it was that Peter accommodated in his own home when she was sick? His mother-in-law. May I suggest to you this afternoon that your relationship with God cannot be right unless your relationship with your in-laws is right. I just saw my father-in-law come to know Christ as his Savior last year in May.

And you know where it all began? When I finally chose to quit alienating myself from him, when I was with him in my body, in presence, my spirit was many miles away. I had no respect, seemingly, for him. I projected that kind of an attitude because of his lifestyle.

But finally, when I began to say, look, I'm going to spend time with him, I'm going to listen to him, I'm going to do some of the things that he enjoys. He came to our crusade in Lynchburg, Virginia in May. He came

Tuesday night just to pay a casual visit because it's the least I can do is to come to one of my son-in-law's services.

But he came back Wednesday night. He came back Thursday night. He came back Friday night.

He came back Saturday night. He came back Sunday morning. And then I went down the road to another church and he came back to that same church Sunday night, came back to Wednesday night prayer service, and that night he gave his life to Christ.

You know what his testimony was? Thursday, that week of the crusade, he normally goes to the Lions Club there in Lynchburg. And he's got nine of the buddies and they play poker. And he said, I waited for all the men to get there.

And he said, I was sitting there with my soda. And he said, finally, when the last guy arrived, he said, I set it aside, walked up to the counter to buy my chips. And he said, I couldn't buy my chips.

He said, I had to leave the place and go home. Honoring your in-laws. If you're not honoring them, you're not there.

Can I ask you this afternoon, are you there? This could be a barrier. There's a multiplicity of barriers that may be keeping you from God's best in your life, being in the place to receive the blessing that God has. But you'll notice something else in verse 24.

And Jacob was left alone and there, notice the word, wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. Approximately six times the word wrestled is mentioned in the King James. It means basically what we would think it would mean, and that is hand-to-hand combat.

They struggle, they wrestle with one another. He wrestled with the Lord. You know what I'm finding these days? The reason a lot of people are not wrestling with Christ to receive the blessing, the reason they can't wrestle in fervent prayer, wrestling before the Lord, is because they are so bound and so involved in wrestling with other things.

Such as peer pressure. I don't know how many parents say, well, I'll tell you what's wrong with these young people these days. It's that peer pressure, preacher.

Well, let me ask you something, adults. What's our problem? Exactly. What is it that keeps you from obeying God, honoring the Spirit? Is it peer pressure? Afraid of what people might think or say? I tell you, my friend, when you've been to the cross, you could care less what people are going to think or say.

But you see, one of the features, one of the characteristics of the cross is that when the cross begins to take effect in your life, the fruit of that is transparency. And you've got your eyes so fixed on the Lord, you're not intimidated by people's reaction to what you have to say about where you've been spiritually. There's another thing that I'm finding many people wrestling with, and that is the tradition of men.

You know, Jesus says you can't put new wine in old wineskins. First of all, the wineskins must be changed. And then they can accommodate the new wine.

But someone else has put it that the last seven words of the church is we never did it that way before. You know, when revival came to the people's church here in Toronto, Oswald Smith was pastoring. They met with quite a bit of opposition initially, and then God began to move on the scene, and many of the

problems were dissolved by the presence of the Lord.

Man, people begin to come, you know. People really want to come to be in on God's glory. They don't understand it all, but they know there's something refreshingly different about the atmosphere.

And man, they couldn't accommodate the people that came, and they were having so many people converted. One of the things that hindered them from reaching more people for Christ was they had halfway around the auditorium a huge pipe organ. My, how that plays on the traditional element in many Christians.

That's been in the church for years. But of all things, the board got together. And they approached the pastor, and they said, Preacher, let's rip out that old pipe organ and put pews up there so more people can come and hear about Jesus.

That's revival. Overcoming the traditions of men. Tradition, many times, is something that we wrestle with.

Then you'll notice as we continue on in verse number 25, and when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh. And the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. May I say this afternoon that when you really desire to have God's fullness and best in your life, when you're really willing to pay the price, friend, there is a very painful price in doing that.

And you're going to meet with opposition, and sometimes it may mean even physical affliction, emotional hardship. But even if it means standing alone, isn't it well worth it to receive all that God would have you receive so that you might be a very vital part of anticipating God to bring about the spiritual awakening that the Spirit of God witnesses with our spirit to long for? The Scripture goes on to say, you'll notice in verse number 26, and he said, Let me go, turn me loose, for the day breaketh. He said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me.

Let me ask you a question. Is Jesus Christ God? Amen. He's deity, is he not? Do you believe as I do that this man that Jacob wrestled with that he received the blessing from was the Lord Jesus? Well, with that in mind, did not Jesus have the same unlimited power that God the Father possessed? Why would he look at Jacob and say, Let me go, turn me loose.

Did he not possess the power to free himself? Yes, he did. But he chose to allow this heel snatcher, this deceiver, to embrace him because he enjoyed Jacob embracing him. And my friend, that tells me that our Lord loves to be embraced by faith.

He loves to be cuddled. He enjoys our intimate fellowship with him. He tries to discourage Jacob with a word.

He tries to discourage him with affliction. But Jacob said, I will not turn loose until you bless me. I remember one day we were in our home there in Goldsboro.

We were living in the city there at the time. And I know yesterday I mentioned how impatient I was toward my wife. And I've oftentimes given my wife a very difficult time.

But God is sanctifying. And God is allowing us to be the blessed heirs of the grace of life. And we're beginning to learn how to glorify God in our marriage.

And especially me, I'm learning to minister to the needs of my wife in a very selfless way through the assistance of the Spirit. But I remember on one occasion that I had hurt her very deeply. And I went back into the kitchen to put things right.

And you know, before restitution ever occurs, somebody always has to take the position of death. One party at least always has to take the position of death before you can make things right. And so I remember, you know, it's my fault.

And I went into the kitchen there and I walked over to my wife. And I said, honey, I said, I want you to know a little while ago what I said was just totally out of order. And I said it in the flesh.

And I said, please forgive me. And she told me, she said, well, I forgive you. And she just kept working away there.

And I said, honey, I said, just a minute. I said, could you look at me? I said, I want you to know how much I love you and appreciate you. I said, please forgive me.

And she said, Don, she said, I forgive you, but it's just going to take me a little while to get over this. You can relate, man. Well, I grabbed her by the shoulders and I turned her around.

And I tried to look her in the eye, but she kept her head down like that. And then I put my hands around her face and I tilted her face toward mine. I said, honey, look at me.

She looked at me and I said, I want you to know I really love you. And I said, you will forgive me, won't you? And she said, yes, I forgive you. That moment, I put my arms around her and I embraced her very firmly.

I said, I really love you. And my wife, you have to understand, because of the severity of the offense, my wife just kind of stiffened up momentarily. She didn't respond at all.

She just stiffened up. But through all that stiffness and all that resistance momentarily. And then she said these words, she said, Don, she said, just just turn me loose right now.

Just let me go. It's going to take me a while to get over this. While she said that with a word.

I could tell that she was enjoying every minute of it. She was enjoying my embracement. And I think this is the picture of Christ here.

While he said, turn me loose, let me go. I believe he was enjoying it. Being cuddled, being embraced by Jacob.

He was loving every minute of it because indeed he had the power to free himself. The scripture goes on in verse 27. And he said unto him, what is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

The Hebrew, it means trickster, deceiver. And he said, thy name shall be called no more Jacob. But Israel.

For as a prince has thou power with God and with men. And has prevailed. The late Dr. John R. Rice used to say.

When he would address preachers, men, you will never prevail with me. And until first you have prevailed with God. May I suggest to you people this afternoon, we will never prevail with those in our church.

That seemingly are not open to revival at all. You'll never prevail with family members regardless of how hard hearted they are. You'll never prevail in your neighborhood, in your relationship with neighbors.

That are very obstinate until first of all, you have prevailed with God. Well, you'll find it was much like Joshua's experience. You'll never overtake the walls of Jericho until first of all.

You fall, those walls will never fall in your relationship with others until first of all, you fall and you bow in total submission before the Lord. And I tell you what I'm praying for these days. I'm asking God, God, give me the grace to respond impulsively.

Now, the songwriter put it responding at the very impulse of his love. And when he breathes on my spirit, all he has to do is just breathe on it. May I respond accordingly, readily.

In obedience to him, the scripture tells us in verse twenty nine. Jacob asked him and said, tell me, I pray thee thy name. And he said, wherefore, is it that thou doest ask after my name? And then you'll notice this little phrase.

And he blessed him. Where? Where? There. Where is the place of blessing? There.

My pastor back in Goldsboro told me one day. He said, you know, Brother Don, he said, I hear these reports of revival around the globe. He said, I can't relate to that.

He said, I'd like to see something like that. But he said, here in America, it's almost as if God has removed the blessing totally. He said, there is a place of blessing.

There is a place of spiritual reality. But he said, I've never known that before. He said, you know what I'm convinced of, Brother Don? I said, what's that, brother? He said, I'm convinced of what's happened is we have stepped out from underneath the cloud.

There is a place called there. A place where God can bless. But what we've done is we have removed ourself from it.

And until we step back in it by faith, we'll not receive all the fullness of God's blessing. Jacob encountered the Lord and God blessed him. There.

I close this afternoon by asking you the question, are you there? You don't have to sit there today and say, well, you know, I hope to be there. Or, you know, in my heart, I really would like to be there. But I really wonder what it is that I need to confess and put right.

Friend, if you stay open before the Lord, God will show you. But in the meantime, keep your focus fixed on him. Let him speak to you.

And when he speaks, immediately respond. You know, the sad thing is that a revival conference like this, there are a few that possibly you have no intention of being there regardless of what God tells you to do. Listen carefully.

You're present here today. God has dealt with you and you say, I want to be there. I'm determined to be there.

I wanted to do whatever God would have me do. And I think that's a pretty good indication that you've passed from death into life. But if you're here today and you have no intention of being there and you could care less whether you get there or not.

Friend, you're probably lost. You need to be converted. Shall we pray together? Father, thank you for your word.

Thank you, Lord, that it's worthy to be heard and obeyed. I pray, Holy Spirit, that you might take this truth and graft it to our very spirits. May we be determined as Jacob was.

I will not let thee go. Except you bless me. Lord Jesus, I pray that we might be enriched in these days.

As your spirit gives us the grace to walk in the life that you give us. If we're not there, Lord, I pray that you might show us what it is in our lives that is keeping us from being there. And may we obey accordingly.

In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.

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