

God at Work in Revival-Journey to Forgiveness

by Eric Stanford

The speaker shares his personal journey of confession, forgiveness, and healing, highlighting the importance of taking a step of obedience and trusting in God's mercy and power.

Scripture: Psalm 32:5, Proverbs 28:13, Ephesians 4:22, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Repentance", "Revival"

Description

Eric Stanford preaches about the transformative power of clearing one's conscience and the importance of obedience to God's leading, even when it requires facing difficult truths. The sermon highlights the journey of a man who, after a revival meeting, confronts hidden sins, seeks forgiveness, and experiences miraculous restoration in his family and personal life through God's grace and mercy. It emphasizes the need for genuine repentance, transparency, and surrender to God's will for true healing and reconciliation.

Transcript

On Thursday evening, October 8, 1998, I was sitting next to Judy, my wife of 16 years, when revivalist Tim St. Clair spoke at our church on the importance of clearing one's conscience. Afterward, at home, Judy and I sat at the kitchen table over glasses of tea and began discussing how God was working in people's lives in our church. At one point Judy said, "Bill, God doesn't seem to be doing much in your life. You just sit there stoically."

"Maybe some people just know how to mask their feelings," I replied. The truth was, I had been under severe conviction of sin ever since the crusade began. I went on, "As I've processed the truths of this revival, I've realized that I haven't dealt properly with some of the things in my past. But I'm not sure that now is the time for that."

Judy encouraged me by saying, "Sometimes you have to take a step of obedience first, then let the Lord do the rest." She didn't believe I could be hiding any sins of the same magnitude as some of the issues others had addressed through the course of this crusade.

On the surface of our lives, things looked good. We had both been Christians for many years, and we were both very active in our church. The oldest of our three children, 13-year-old Krista, was a believer with a deep desire to serve the Lord. And I was a stable, respected professor of marketing at a nearby

university.

But beneath the surface, things were not so rosy. Our middle child, 11-year-old Kyle, was becoming rebellious toward us and the church. Even more important, my love for my wife had grown cold, evidenced by the fact that I hadn't worn my wedding ring for years.

Unfortunately, the reality of my life was much different from what Judy suspected.

Taking the Challenge

After Judy had challenged me to take a step of obedience, I sensed it was then or never. I began telling her things I'd never told her--about "secret sins" that I'd kept hidden from everyone.

One of the most serious sins had to do with an incident of cheating when I'd been a Ph.D. student in 1986. After six months of studying for the all-important comprehensive field exam, I panicked the night before the exam, thinking that I would surely fail. And so, under cover of darkness, I broke into the office and made a copy of the exam questions. I passed the exam and received my doctorate. But I felt so badly about what I'd done that I didn't even hang up my diploma, instead leaving it to collect dust on the floor in the corner of my office. I felt like a fraud when anyone called me Dr. Gallagher.

I had thought many times about owning up to this sin, and I believed I could do it. The worst that would happen was that my alma mater would revoke my degree and that my university would release me just before I was to receive tenure. These were no small consequences, but they paled before what I thought would happen when I confessed to my wife another sin in my life. I had been unfaithful to her--not with just one woman but with several. Nothing in this world mattered more to me than my family, yet as I confessed my adultery to my wife, it was with the realization that I would probably lose my family.

This revelation took Judy completely by surprise, but she responded with relative calm. She had been praying fervently for me, and unknown to her, the Lord had been preparing her heart to receive what I told her. She encouraged me to share my heart with Tim St. Clair the next morning, when a men's prayer meeting was scheduled.

Coming Clean

The next morning I drew Tim aside and told him what had been going on. While we were talking, Judy walked in. In Judy's presence, Tim advised me to make right the wrongs I had done, to the extent God gave me the opportunity. Knowing we were in a circumstance that could only be handled by God, Judy and I knelt and prayed with humble hearts for divine intervention and direction.

Leaving our children with a relative, Judy and I stopped by my office to pick up my Ph.D. diploma so we could return it to the university that had awarded it to me. Then we drove for ten hours, across four states, to the city where I had done my doctoral work.

On the following day, a Saturday, we met with my doctoral adviser. Over lunch, with a heavy heart and many tears, I confessed the cheating to him and handed him the diploma he had given me at graduation just a few years earlier. The professor said he saw no reason to make anything of the cheating incident; after all, seeing the exam questions only hours before taking the test obviously could not have made any appreciable difference in my performance. He explained his willingness to forgive by informing us that he, too, was a Christian, and he encouraged me to continue to follow what God was doing in my life.

After this encounter, our trip home was truly a mountaintop experience. In the two days since my confession to Judy, God had been working miracles in our lives. Not the least of these miracles was that Judy and I had discovered a love for each other that neither of us had experienced or even thought possible, given our past. It was the kind of love that only comes from doing things God's way. Our hearts were overflowing with joy as we talked incessantly about what God had done and what He was able to do in our lives now that our hearts were united and led by the Holy Spirit.

If these miracles were not enough to fill our hearts, there was one more miracle, still dearer, to come.

After driving home Saturday night, we attended the service at church the next morning. At Tim St. Clair's request, I agreed to share my testimony with the congregation. Judy and I decided to have our children attend the service, since they knew nothing about what had been going on. Confessing my sins before my children--and before 500 fellow church members who knew me as a Sunday school teacher, choir member, and praise team singer--was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do. But with the Holy Spirit guiding me (and without giving inappropriate details), I shared where God had found me during the crusade and how I had responded; then I sought forgiveness for having served the church while not rightly related to the Lord.

When the testimony was over, I went to stand by our son. Tears were streaming down the face of this tall, 11-year-old boy as a result of what he had just witnessed. In the course of the crusade, God had also been at work in Kyle's heart. His rebellious spirit had been replaced with a newfound excitement for spiritual truths. In fact, he loved Dynamite Club--the crusade's group for his age--so much that before the end of the crusade he was the one dragging the rest of us to church! I sensed in my spirit that it was the right time to ask Kyle if he wanted to go to the prayer room. Kyle replied, "Yes, sir," and minutes later I had the privilege of praying with Kyle to receive the Lord.

Continuing the Journey

It would be wrong to leave the impression that one weekend of conscience clearing fixed everything. In the days that followed, I had to speak with others who were affected by my sins. And it's not been easy for Judy to forgive me for my betrayal of her trust. But we're both committed to each other and our family, and we know that through appropriating God's Word, praying regularly, and viewing our lives from an eternal perspective, ultimate healing will come. As we continue to witness the spiritual changes in our family, we're grateful to a Lord who, by His death, extends a mercy greater than all our wrong. Today we love Him with all our hearts and desire to honor His name with our testimony. To God be the glory--great things He has done!

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