

The Stealing of the Devotion of Jesus

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala emphasizes the importance of prioritizing devotion to the Lord above all else, and shares stories from his life to illustrate the benefits and challenges of maintaining a strong relationship with God.

Duration: 45:22

Scripture: Isaiah 40:31, John 10:10, Acts 20:21, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 12:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 5:16, Revelation 2:4

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Restoration Ministry"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the theme of God recovering stolen property, highlighting how Satan tries to steal our first love, boldness, calling, and even our children, but God is able to restore what has been taken. Through personal testimonies and biblical insights, the speaker encourages humility, deep prayer, and a return to God's calling and devotion.

Transcript

It's great to be in the work of the Lord, isn't it? Listen, I was reading about one of my heroes, one of those Wesleyan pioneer ministers from the Methodist church. I'll think of his name as we're talking. I was reading his biography.

He's not the first one that Wesley sent over, but to spread the gospel in America, which was the first one came. We were not a country yet. But the next one that was there, he said something that I put in my Bible and it's so true.

And I wanna just suggest it to all of you. He was speaking to all of these young Methodist ministers who are riding on horseback and going who knows where to spread the gospel with all kinds of negative circumstances that we're not used to. And he said, listen, gentlemen, though there's trouble on every side, and though the devil fights you in a thousand ways, you will never be happier than when you're doing the work of the Lord.

When God's call is on your life, we need vacations, we need all that stuff. But I'm telling you, remember this. When God's call is on your life, though the devil battles you, and though there's difficulties and financial shortages, you are never more alive, you are never more revived, you are never happier than when you're doing the work of the Lord.

So I honor all of you, I esteem all of you highly for the calling and the work that God has given you. And now I just wanna read a little sentence to you from the word of God. David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives.

Nothing was missing, young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else that they had taken. David brought everything back. He took all the flocks and the herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, this is David's plunder.

Now there's a unusual story that takes up two whole chapters in the Old Testament, the end of First Samuel, First Samuel 29 and 30, and it's too long for me to read, but that's the end of the story, and I wanna tell you about it. David understood the new covenant before the new covenant came. Like some of the prophets in the Psalms, he was talking about things that Moses didn't seem to have a clue about.

You know, how blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, against whom the Lord will not count his iniquities. That's grace, that's out there. And he wrote a lot of those Psalms, especially the ones when he was in trouble, when he was on the run.

He shouldn't have been on the run because of what he did. As a young warrior, you all know, he started as shepherd, psalmist. He's one of those rare people that would fight and also write a song.

Most people who fight don't write songs, and most people who write songs aren't militaristic, but David was this unique person. And he slew Goliath, and that made him the toast of the town. And all of Israel sang his praises.

He even led much older soldiers out with him on forays representing King Saul, the first king of Israel. And unfortunately, he was so successful, somebody wrote a song that was like some of these beautiful songs they were singing. They're a newer song, they're older songs.

They had a new one there, and it went like this. Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands. It was a big hit back then, but Saul didn't like it.

Saul heard it and got taken up with the lowest, one of the lowest forms of emotion any of us can have, which is jealousy. When you're jealous of another pastor, you're jealous of another church, just remember Jesus was crucified because of jealousy. Pilate was a very hip guy, and he knew the minute they brought Jesus to him, they knew this guy's innocent, but he knew that out of envy they had delivered him up.

The religious establishment was jealous of Jesus, and that's what got infected into that. And you know, somebody can blow up on you, and wrath is terrible, and so is anger, but the Bible says no one can stand against envy. Jealousy, when it gets in you, it'll eat your lunch.

It'll put you on the sideline. You can go through the motions, but it'll just poison your spirit, and that's what happened to Saul. In fact, he went mad in the end.

He went crazy. So he turned on David and started chasing David all over the place. David had to put his mom and dad in safekeeping.

He had to say goodbye to his wife, Michael, because he didn't know what God would do. He knew God would do something, but that's an interesting sentence for us. He said, take care of them until I see what the Lord will do.

That's how ministry is a lot of times. Forget the five-year plan and the one-year plan and all of that stuff. That's not the way the spirit works.

He blows like a breeze. And you know God's gonna do something, but you have to wait to find out what is he gonna do. Am I, do I get an amen here? You're not sure what he's gonna do, so you don't have to put, you can't put God in a box.

Corporations can do that, but that's not for us. We're not corporate America. We're the church of the living God that's founded on Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Always remember that. Peter, Paul, James, and John, if you would've gone to them and said, what's your one-year plan, five-year plan, they wouldn't even know what you're talking about. They would say, when he moves, we move.

How long are you staying in the Capernaum, Peter? I don't know, when he goes, we go. When he stays, we stay. We're not in charge of the itinerary, he is.

Oh, we need to get back to that. How many say, how many lift your hand and say amen? We need to get back to that. We've been invaded, as I said this morning, by smart, slick, corporate types who have invaded the church, like the idolatry of Canaan invaded the religion of Yahweh in the Old Testament.

We have to be pure in our devotion to the Holy Spirit leading us. But anyway, so David was being chased. Caves, hills, grassland, and that's where he wrote a lot of the Psalms.

Some of them are very time-sensitive. Have you ever noticed? Lord, hurry, quick, come quickly and help me. You know, time's running out because Saul was so close.

So now imagine how you feel. Saul and the entire Israeli army is chasing the guy who used to be their hero. I mean, you can't make that up, but it's in the Bible.

So this strange story encompasses this odd incident that not too many people know about, but it's meant a lot to me. The Bible tells us that David ended up seeking refuge, you can't believe this, with the Philistines, as in Goliath of the Philistines. He went to his former enemies and King Achish took him in.

And now David and his men, he had about 600 by this time, who were rejects and hated by Saul, and they came, as they say in New York, they were his posse or his militia or whatever, and he's rolling around with them, and they end up in a town that King Achish gives them called Ziklag, and that's where they're living. With their herds, their sheep, their children, their wives, everybody, David's there, and he's under the protection of the Philistines. But life has some strange turns, doesn't it? And now war is declared between the Philistines and Israel.

And David's now on the other side. And since he's a warrior and loyal, and since he appreciates what King Achish did for him, he goes out with his men as they line up for battle in a place called Aphek, and they're lined up to fight, and suddenly some of the generals run over to King Achish and go, yo, time out. If you think we're going to battle with David on our side, you know, you're tripping, King, you gotta come back to earth.

Because this is David as in Saul has slain his thousands, and David has slain his tens of thousands, and some of those tens of thousands were us. He'll turn against us in the battle. You can't let him fight with us.

King Achish says, no, he's been loyal. He's like an angel of God, it says, before me. They said, we're not fighting with him.

So he gives David the bad news, says they won't fight. Why, I wanna fight, you've been helping me. No, no, you can't fight with us.

Go back to your town. So David and his 600 guys go back to where they've left everything. And as they're out in the distance, they see some spirals of smoke.

So they pick up their pace a little bit, and as they get closer, they see it's a lot of smoke. So now they go into a jog, and they get there, and they go totally wacko, because Ziklag has been burned to the ground. Everyone is missing.

Every wife, every son, every daughter, all the sheep, all the cattle, and whatever other goods they had. What they don't know at that time is that the Amalekites, who in the Old Testament are God's perpetual enemy, they have been raiding, and they knocked off Ziklag, and they kidnapped and stole every wife, every daughter, every son, all the cattle, et cetera. But David doesn't know that.

He just sees the town burned down. His men, who are tough guys, they break down and start crying. You know, grief can do a lot of things.

Any pastor knows that, who tries to counsel people who have suffered loss. This grief drives them crazy. They cry until there's no more tears, and then, this is typical, they have to vent their sorrow and their misery, so they talk about taking David out and killing David.

Like, what were we doing out there with the king? Why weren't we watching our families? What do you have us doing, anyway? And David's in the soup. David doesn't know what to do. And imagine, these were the big, bad old days.

If you got a 14-year-old daughter, and she's gone, and someone kidnapped her, what are you thinking? Or a young boy, or a wife, or a pregnant wife. Just think what would be rolling through your mind. And they're all gone.

So, the Bible says, under this extreme stress, David found strength in the Lord his God. He somehow got alone. Oh, brothers and sisters, that's a good thing to do.

I've been stressed out so many times. Broke down, tired, worn out, empty, traveling too much. As I shared this morning, don't just worn out physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

You gotta get alone with God. God gives strength to the weak. How many say amen? You gotta spend time with him.

There's a lot of instant stuff in life, but there's no instant God giving you strength. It takes time. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

Time with the Lord, time alone with his word. Oh no, that's old school. No, that's Bible, that's Bible.

That's not old school. That's not new school. There is no new school.

Don't ever believe anybody there's a contemporary church, old-fashioned church. There's just the church of Jesus Christ. He wants us to, wait, wait.

He wants us to bear fruit. And any place where fruit is being born and people are getting saved and baptized and praying and loving people of all colors and all backgrounds, that's the sign of the true church. If it's all one color, it ain't the church of Jesus Christ because God is no respecter of persons.

So God has nothing to do with racist tendencies, obviously. So where that's happening, I don't care what they sing. I don't care if they have PowerPoints, no PowerPoints, smoke mirrors, camels, cannons.

What does it matter what they have? Only God can save souls. How many say amen? Amen. The desire to pray and a prayer meeting, coming to people, coming to seek the Lord, only God can do that.

No pastor can teach that. That's a joke. That's God working.

Acts 2, they continued in the apostle's doctrine and in the breaking of bread and fellowship and in prayers. That's the first picture of the church God gave us and it is, remember, his church. No one here in this room has a right to change his church.

No one. No one. I challenge you.

Did you die on a cross? Did you raise from the dead? Jesus said, I will build my church. And he gave us in this word and we're all gonna be judged by it. Listen up, pastors.

You're all gonna be judged by the quality of your work, not the quantity, not what your peers think, not what headquarters think. You're gonna be judged, Carol and I are gonna stand and what we do, the quality of it is gonna be judged by this word. Whether we're following Peter, Paul, James and John and the book of Acts and the epistles or whether we're following some American thing or some black thing or white thing or whatever thing, Baptist thing, Pentecostal thing.

We gotta do a Bible thing, a New Testament thing. Come on, let's all put our hands together. Say amen to that.

So, so, now David waits on the Lord. He doesn't know what to do. When you don't know what to do, you wait on the Lord.

Didn't God promise both Old and New Testament to guide us in the way we should go? So, not going into the details, he grabs the priest. The priest, using the ephod, he inquires of the Lord. Whenever David is at his best, he's inquiring of the Lord as in, I don't know what to do, help me.

That's a very good place to be in. The worst place to be in it, I don't need you because I got this thing together. Now you're heading to major trouble.

Might not happen immediately, but it'll happen. So, he asks the Lord two questions. Should I go after these people? And if I go after them, will I find them? And God gives an affirmative to both.

Go after them and you'll find them, I'll lead you. So David now takes off with his men, going who knows where, led by God. When you humble yourself, when we humble and ask God for direction, he'll give us direction, of course, what's he gonna do, leave us empty? No, he'll lead us.

So he's leading, they're going, and they're in a desert area and there's a guy half dead in the sand. David says, stop. They pull the guy out of the sand and they talk to him.

They say, who are you? I'm an Egyptian servant. What are you doing here? Well, I was working, I was being captured by the Amalekites and we've been roaming around here in this area of the land and we've been knocking off towns and I was working with them. We hit this town, that town, and we took down Ziklag.

And David goes, is that right, you took down Ziklag? He goes, yeah. David says, give him some food. He says, can you guide me to where the Amalekites are who took everything? He said, yes, but swear to me you won't kill me.

He's a very smart servant. And David said, you're on. So now we have David going with this Egyptian servant.

Servant leads them, I'm getting done here to this part, leads them to the top of a hill. You won't believe this. On the top of the hill, they look down in the valley.

In the valley are all the Amalekites with every wife, every daughter, every son, all the sheep, all the cattle. They're having a big party, high-fiving, doing the bump, everything. They're celebrating the Amalekites because they won.

They captured everybody. And then the Bible says that God led David down the hill that day, and he fought for the next 12 hours or more. And that's the first time David found out that God recovers stolen property.

It's the first time in his life that he found out that God recovers stolen property. He not only brought back everything that had been taken, listen, he ripped them off of their stuff. And it came back saying, that's David's spoil.

Beyond, like the Bible says, he has made us conquerors, or what, no, what does it say? More than conquerors. Now, Jesus said in John 10.10, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. Speaking of the devil.

Listen, the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly. Notice, before the thief kills and destroys, the first thing he does is steal.

Now, anyone like me was born and raised in Brooklyn and lives in New York, unless you've been robbed, you're not truly a New Yorker. That's how we look at it. One time on Sunday years ago, I actually did a survey.

I said, okay, everybody in the building was packed with people. Everybody in the building, if you have had your pocket picked, someone broken your house, broken your car, broken something, how many have been robbed, hustled, conned, whatever, living here in New York City? Almost like every hand went up. That makes you a true New Yorker.

That's how we look at it. I don't know, do they have much theft here? I don't know, Oklahoma is probably a lot nicer and safer than where I live, but we're familiar with theft. Right now, because of living close to the church for the last five years, for the first time in our life in New York, my wife and I, neither of us have a

car.

We don't own a car. But it's good, because we walk, we take Uber, we have subways and we've got people taking us to the airports and all that. But I used to have many cars in succession, and one time I had a car parked at a certain place about 20 years ago, 15 years ago.

Went to the car, boom. I see the glass broken in the front. Guy came in, drug addict, and stole my airbag.

Just my airbag. That's all he was interested. Because in a chop shop in New York, where drug addicts go, they can take an airbag and turn it into at least 30, 40, \$50.

And this was back in the day of crack and not these Oxycontin horrible epidemic we have now with these opioids. But crack addict will tell you, listen, pastor, it has a voice. And when it calls, you're coming.

No, no, no, you're coming. It's just a matter of how you're gonna get the money, but you're coming. You're not saying no to the voice.

So I helped this man answer the voice, I guess. And he broke in, stole my airbag. I didn't know what to do.

Reported the insurance, replaced it myself. You know, you reported the insurance, your rates can go up. I was torn between the two.

I ended up paying for it myself. 10 months later, car parked in the same spot. I'm sure it's the same guy.

Broke in the same way, another airbag, gone. We were developing like a personal relationship, he and I, and I was gonna leave like a note for him or cookies and so we could, like, let's talk. Now, Jesus said about the devil, let's be serious now here.

The thief comes only to steal. What do you think the devil would be interested in stealing? Here's my Amex card, you think he wants that? Nah, he doesn't charge. He doesn't use credit cards.

You think he wants your house? Keep it, he doesn't use houses. You got a nice car? Keep that too, he gets around fine without your car. Money? Doesn't need it.

And yet Jesus said the thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. All the things we're worried about, all the alarm systems in New York, all the locks they put on the door, some of the apartment buildings that I've been in, visiting families, they got like seven locks. And then a bar against the door on top of that, so afraid of being broken into.

Say he's not interested in any of that, keep it. Keep it, you got an acre and a half and a nice house? Keep it, he doesn't care, not interested in that. But he is a thief.

So what would he steal? Well, how about this? When he steals, he doesn't tell you he's stealing. Sometimes you don't even know you've been ripped off. That's how subtle he is.

He diverts, he distracts, blinds your eyes for a second, and the next thing you know, you've been ripped off, but you don't even know it. Pastors have stuff stolen from them. Christians, veteran Christians, new Christians, maybe people here.

For example, one of the things he loves to steal is our first love. Remember when Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus and in Revelation chapter two, the first of seven churches? And by the way, can I just

say something, because I won't see you again, I'm leaving in the morning. Pastors, listen, don't believe anyone who says this is what God is saying to the church.

Never believe that. God is saying five million things to the church. Depends what church you're in.

Those seven letters to the seven churches, you can't replace those, you can't switch those messages. You can't take the letter to Ephesus, I have this against you, you lost your first love. You can't send that to Thyatira or Pergamon, doesn't fit.

He has a message for each church. He has a message for the Brooklyn Tabernacle, has a message for your church, possibly this district and state. Don't you think it would behoove us to get before God and say, God, how do you look at our church? How in the world would I know how to preach if I don't know how Jesus looks at my church? Where are we weak, where are we strong, where did God give us some grace, where do we need shoring up? Because in the end of the day, that's who's gonna be judging our work for him.

So, I just suggest to all of you, when people say this pseudo-prophetically, God is angry, get along with God. Don't go by what someone else is hearing. Hear for God yourself.

You have your own personality, you have your own church. What God was saying to me when we had 18 people on Sunday morning and two people on Tuesday night is different than what he's saying now, okay? And then gets inside of my kitchen and shows me where I'm failing. And just hear from God.

Brothers and sisters, hear from God. Don't copy people. Don't copy leadership, don't copy people.

Don't go by paradigms and seven steps to a bigger church. That's nonsense. There's nowhere found in the New Testament.

And 1 Corinthians 4, 6 said it's not wise to add to scripture. Seek the Lord, he will bless you. He'll bless you your way.

He'll bless you so that you become a model to other people, not of copy me, but look what God can do. How many wanna see God do a new thing in your church? Lift up your hand. Come on, wave it at me, wave it at me, yeah.

Whether you're small or large or whatever, we need to hear from God. So how about this? He steals our first love. How about you pastors, let me say, how about he steals your first devotion? You remember when you're coming out of Bible school and you waited before the Lord and you wept? Now people look down at that like, what's that about? We don't have time for that.

We gotta do church. Yeah, but how about your first love and the fellowship that you had with Jesus? That's the first calling on all of our lives. You're not called to preach.

You're not called to preach. You're called to be with him. And Jesus called them by name from a hill and he called them that they might be with him, that he might send them out to preach and that he would give them authority over the devil.

But what's the first calling on all of our lives? Is to be with him. And a lot of pastors start out being with him, but then they get corporate. They get to be CEO.

Now they're construction managers with hard hats and they think that's a big deal. Now you've lost your calling. Guess who stole it from you? The thief comes only to steal.

Keep your money, but he wants your devotion. He wants to rob you of that and try to justify it by saying back then I needed it, but now I'm all that. I'm a big deal now.

I'm a pastor. I know that. No, we need it more now.

Come on, do I get a witness here? We need it more now. Now that's something he'd like to steal. And if your church is gonna just be shallow and you're running numbers, but there's not much spiritual life and all of that and you keep the meetings short because everybody wants to go and watch the football game, which will take hours, he'll let you do that until the cows come home.

As long as you don't get deep into Jesus, that's what he wants to steal. He wants to steal that. How about your courage? I've had him try to rob me of my courage.

You know the boldness to proclaim the word of God. Today is so seeker-sensitive, user-friendly that people are saying, you can't say anything that might offend the people. Pastor as life coach.

Whatever happened, how did you lose your boldness? Oh, you didn't lose it. You didn't lose it. He stole it.

The thief comes only to steal. One of the leaders in the so-called church growth movement wrote a book, a guy out of Georgia, it's public, so he wrote in the book, A Cosmic Change. Nobody seems to mention this or doesn't see how wrong it is.

He said basically this. When I go in a service and I see a new person off the aisle on the fourth row and I see this is a first-time visitor, I only have one thought for the rest of the meeting. I only got one thought.

This is a guy who people flock to here. I have no idea why. They can't be reading their Bibles.

I only have one thought for that guy. The music, the lights, the whole production, the sermon, the length of the service, the whole thing. One thought and one thought only.

How do I get him back next week? Now in my mind, that's close to blasphemy. No minister in the history of the Christian church ever thought that. Finney, Moody, General Booth, Azusa Street, anyone is, God, they might not have another week.

I gotta get them to Jesus in this meeting. God, do something. Bring them to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You'll never build a big church going that route. Oh, phooey. Yes, you can.

The fastest growing churches in the world right now are in mainland China. And you think they're fooling around? They are not. I've been to Hong Kong with my friend Rabbi Zacharias and on my own a couple times.

And those people, they have nothing. They have no material advantages, no buildings they can meet in like this beautiful building. They have Jesus, the word of God, prayer, the Holy Spirit.

And they're making converts. And imagine, you're a real convert when you get saved in China knowing you could end up in the slammer. That's a real, now that's a convert.

You know what I'm saying? So we can, Satan could rob your boldness to proclaim the whole counsel of God. Remember what Paul said to the Ephesian elders, Acts 20, 21? He said, listen, Acts 20, he said, remember, you watched me here the whole three years I was here plus, here, and you remember how I never held anything back that you needed to hear. Not what you wanna hear.

Pastors, what are you gonna do if you tell people what they wanna hear when you face Jesus? What in the world were you doing telling people what they wanna hear? What do they determine the message now? Or do we tell people what they need to hear in love? No going to China shop, no meanness. No meanness, no making fun and mocking people whose lifestyle we think is wrong. It is wrong, but we gotta love them into the kingdom.

But you don't tell people what they want to hear. You tell people what they need to hear. When you go to a doctor and the doctor examines you and then he says, yo, you got some problems.

You got, your cholesterol, it's like sky high. And you're 25 pounds overweight, and this and that. Who, what patient would say to their doctor, yo, doctor, you think I paid this money to hear this kind of stuff from you? No, like, what are you talking about? I'm spending good money, just tell me what pill I can take.

I didn't come here to hear this kind of negativity. I want a positive vibe in my life. I don't want to hear this negative stuff.

Would anybody ever say that? The doctor would say, hey listen, I swore an oath. I have to do what's right for you, what's best for you. What's gonna happen to ministers who are gonna have to face Jesus and they were talking smack to people? Tell them what they want to hear.

Can you imagine that day? Can you imagine that horrible day when we didn't tell people the whole counsel of God? Tell them about Jesus. We need to tell them about Jesus. So let me close.

When these things disappear, they don't evaporate. They're robbed. Satan has robbed things from me.

But I want to declare to you, Jesus recovers stolen property. You can have it back tonight. It can start back tonight.

Of course, you have to admit that it's stolen. That takes humility. Otherwise, we can live in denial.

Because everything's cool. Don't rock my boat. How about this finally? He can rob the very children you dedicated to the Lord.

Our first daughter was born 11 months after we were married. I was still in the business world, working for an airline, still playing basketball, serious basketball, because I played in the NCAA tournament, representing the college I went to, and we beat UConn in a playoff, went to the big dance, as they say, when there are a lot less teams there in it. Now I'm working in the business world, we get a daughter.

We dedicated her to the Lord. And on that Sunday when we dedicated her, the pastor took her, man of God, and there was an utterance given in tongues. And he begins to prophesy over my daughter, who's like three months old.

You don't think my wife and I shed a few tears of joy here that the Lord had plans for her life to use her? Then I get called in the ministry, way I never imagined. My wife, who's extremely shy, has perfect pitch and an amazing ear, but can't read or write music. She starts doing music.

One thing leads to another. Church expands. We start starting other churches.

We're renting Radio City Music Hall, Madison Square Garden. We've got a lot of stuff going, trying to reach people. Overseas, sending out missionaries to Israel, and here, the Philippines, whatever.

But our girl gets away from us. In her late teenage years, a wall goes up between her and us, and between her and God. And I had another daughter after that and a son, but my first girl is like my right hand, my right arm.

Right in the church it happened. And some guy came in, when you're in the inner city, the doors are open to everyone. That's what we're supposed to do.

But then other kind of people come in who are up to no good. And he hooked up and got her attention, and now she gets worse and worse, and I am just teetering between how am I gonna make it through? She gets harder, more rebellious. I try to use money, manipulation, emotions, screaming, crying.

Hey, it's your daughter, you're gonna fight for her. She's getting worse, no matter what I do. She gets worse.

Now she's out of the house. I sent her away to a Bible school. She didn't even make it two months.

They tossed her out. This guy is meeting her wherever she is. My wife has female surgery.

Her estrogen levels go whacked out, and she now starts talking about taking her life. Doesn't want to live anymore. Between her feeling, the hormonal deficiency, and then with Chrissy, and it's like, it's not even the woman I married.

She's talking about like, I don't want to live anymore. I can't go on. So I'm praying.

I thought I knew about prayer. I've written, you know, preached about prayer, but boy, now I'm in prayer post-graduate work with prayer. And I'm learning, and God suddenly, you know, just speaks to me.

No more talking. This is a two and a half year long nightmare. No more talking to anyone about Chrissy.

I wasn't talking to too many people anyway. Just talk to me. Just you and me.

And when I do what I do, wherever I send you around the world, when I remind you, you tell them what happened, which is happening right now. Chrissy gets pregnant, has a baby. I can't even make it to church.

I start up the car, my house in Queens then, 20, 25 minute ride on a Sunday. I'm crying so violently that I'm just trying to stay on the road. I gotta go now and do two services, three services, at one time for six years, I did four services.

Nine, 12, three, and six. Two hours each long for six years. That's why I look so old.

I'm 34 years old on my last birthday. So I'm crying, I'm going to church, and I'm telling God, God, I wanna be a blessing to people. I can't make it about me.

I can't stand when pastors are in the limelight and make it about them. It's about the people. Jesus washed the disciples' feet.

He didn't tell them to wash his feet. We're supposed to be servants, not stars. Oh, pastors as superstars.

Now that's, you wanna talk about a horrible omen. So I'm just holding it together. How I preach sometimes, I don't even know how.

But you know what, in our weakness, his strength is made perfect. Pastor, somebody listen to me now. When you're most broken and you don't think you can go on, he can make you the best then that you've ever been.

That's the way he works. Is that not biblical? When I am weak, then I'm strong. And when you think you're strong, that's when you become weak.

So we're praying, we're praying, because it was dawning on me, God recovers stolen property. Your first love, your boldness, your calling. Maybe there's some lay people here.

You're not even in the ministry, but God called you to sing and use your voice or work with children or do short-term mission trips. And you're just sitting at home watching television. What happened to that calling you once felt? You don't think it evaporated? Satan stole it from you.

The thief comes only to steal. He'll rob us of everything he can. That's how Ephesus lost their first love.

One night on a prayer meeting in February, I hadn't talked to Chrissy in five months, four and a half, five months. A woman sends up a note as the prayer meeting is going on. And the note says, I think we're supposed to pray for Chrissy tonight.

She happened to be in the city, and I think we had a vague idea who she was staying with, a woman we knew was a Christian, but she was out there. She totally just thought up was down, down was up. I get the note, I ask the Lord, Lord, what am I supposed to do with this? Should we stop here at an appropriate pause and pray? I felt peace about doing it.

So I told the church, listen, I'm not gonna pray myself, but I want you to pray for my daughter. Someone just sent a note up here. And my daughter's, I know you haven't seen her, because she's totally out of it.

She thinks up is down, down is up. She's totally confused, deceived. Hard as a rock.

So a pastor, associate, led in prayer, and out of nowhere, brothers and sisters, my sister would come and just play something. The church becomes like a labor room. You know where Paul says, I travail like a mother giving birth till Christ be formed in you? You know that verse? Hello, do you know that verse? You know that's a true verse.

That's a true verse. I travail like a mother giving birth. I know in a lot of churches today, we say, please take the lady out, take the man out.

That's like, that's old school. It's not old school, it's Bible. The Holy Spirit can move on you where you travail.

If you have never experienced that, I'm not gonna argue with you or try to state the obvious. They started to pray for my daughter, like, come on, are you kidding me? The intensity of it. You ever been in a labor room, gentlemen? They're not whistling Dixie in there, I can tell you that right now.

But what is produced, oh, what is produced. Am I correct? You don't even have to say words to God. A groan, we know not how we ought to pray, but the Spirit helps us.

In a moment, we're gonna pray. You don't have to say a lot of words to God. He knows everything.

Say what you need to say, because we're supposed to bring our petition. But a tear, a groan, the deepest kind of thing, praying in the Spirit, whatever, that's how powerful prayer can be. So they pray for her.

I came home that night. I can't tell you what went on, the intensity of it. I came home and I told my wife, she was drinking coffee at the kitchen table.

I can see her now in her bathrobe, and I said, it's over, Carol. She said, what's over? I said, it's over. Chrissy's coming back.

She says, how do you know? I said, if there's a God in heaven, she's coming back. I told her what happened. It was about the next morning, I'm shaving.

She bursts in the bathroom, my wife, and says, you won't believe this. Chrissy's downstairs. I'll hold the baby.

It's you she needs to talk to. Wait. Carol takes the baby, my beautiful first granddaughter.

I go down and she's on the kitchen floor. The floor was just like this floor, that color, and she's on the floor on her hands and knees, weeping convulsively, and I get near her. She pulls on my pants, pulls on my pants, and I lift her up.

I took one look at her and I knew God had done something. It was the face of the girl that I had raised, not this other face. She said, Daddy, I've sinned against you.

I've sinned against God. More importantly, I've sinned against Mommy. I've sinned against myself.

But oh God, Daddy, you don't know what God has done. Daddy, who was praying for me last night? Who did you have praying? Who did you have praying? I said, well, it just so happened we were praying. I said, what happened? She's in the middle of the night.

He gave me a vision, a dream, and here I was going 1,000 miles an hour toward an abyss, a hole, and just before I was gonna go over the tip, he caught me, and he put his arms around me, and he didn't yell at me. He told me he loves me and still has plans for my life. Daddy, could that be true? Is that real? Within four months or five months, most amazing things happened.

We're now Assembly of God School that's up in Massachusetts. It was still in Rhode Island then, and they called her and said, we want you to come up and run the music and direct the choir. And Christy said, no, I can't do it.

I only know she has her mother's gifting. I don't know music technically. I just know how to do it the way my mother does it.

And they said, you come up here. We feel you're supposed to do it. And then when she was there, they took her, the administrator, into the office of the president who put his arms around her because he was the same man who prophesied over her when she was three months old.

God recovers stolen property. Do you believe that? Come on, God recovers stolen property. Thank you.

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