

There Is a Place With Me

by Michael L. Brown

Maintaining intimacy with God is the most essential and important thing in our lives, and we must prioritize our relationship with Him to avoid self-defeat and ineffectiveness.

Duration: 59:22

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Jeremiah 2:5, Matthew 6:33, Revelation 2:1-5, Revelation 2:7, Revelation 2:16

Topics: "Personal Repentance", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the book of Jeremiah and God's sense of pain and shock at the actions of His people. The speaker emphasizes the need for personal reflection and repentance, urging the audience to remember the passion and hunger they had for God in the past. The speaker highlights that sin is the reason for leaving our first love and emphasizes personal responsibility for this. The sermon also references the book of Revelation, where Jesus addresses the seven congregations and emphasizes His intimate knowledge of their deeds.

Transcript

Your goodness, I thank you for this family, for your smile on us, for the fellowship that we truly have with one another and with you. Give us ears to hear what your spirit is saying through your word in Jesus name. Amen.

Turn with me to Exodus chapter 33. This is a message for us tonight as individuals. It is not so much a corporate message, but a message for us as individuals.

I ministered also on Thursday night on the essential nature of the presence and power of God in our midst, not realizing that Bob had preached on a similar theme the previous Sunday and leading the way to our time of prayer and fasting. And I also read from Exodus 33 towards the end of the message Thursday night. Where the children of Israel had sinned in the previous chapter and made a golden calf were worshipping an idol, were giving way to the flesh.

Right after God had given the Ten Commandments to his people and was giving Moses the instructions for the building of the tabernacle, this was to be a very sacred time, but the people fell into sin and God judged them quickly and then had to move out of the camp because if he stayed in the camp, his holiness would have brought judgment on the whole nation. So he went out of the camp, his presence was removed from being in the midst of the people. The whole purpose of the tabernacle was that God wanted

to dwell in the midst of his people.

The whole reason he wanted them to build a holy place for him with specific rules and specifications and guidelines is so that there could be a fit place in which he could dwell and that Israel could take the presence of God with the utmost seriousness. But now, because of their sin, he had to dwell outside the camp and Moses would go out and meet with the Lord at a tent that they set up. They call it the tent of meeting.

And if anyone wanted to meet with the Lord, they'd go out. And we read where Moses prays his own relationship with God was not enough for him because he had a burden for his people, for his nation. So he prays in verse 12 and communes with the Lord, this is what we had read, you've been telling me, leave these people, but you've not let me know whom you'll send with me.

You have said, I know you by name and you have found favor with me. If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.

So Moses is absorbed in communion with God, but deeply burdened for the welfare of his nation. We heard some of that from our internationals praying tonight, their hearts break for their people, for their nation. And Moses was concerned for the good of his people, for the glory of God to be fulfilled through the people of Israel.

The Lord replied to Moses, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest. Then Moses said to him, if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. It was a key point we made Thursday.

If God is not going to go with us as a people, as a body, as a family, as individuals, if God is not going to go with us as a community of believers, as a school, if God's not going to go with us, what else is going to separate us from everyone else? That's our life, that's our breath, his presence, his power manifest in our midst. Moses said to him, if your presence doesn't go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? This is the great distinguishing mark, the manifest presence of God in the midst of his people.

The Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked me because I am pleased with you and I know you by name. Moses' relationship with God was deep enough that because of Moses, God answered. God speaks in Jeremiah 15 about a situation that is so terrible that the nation has sinned so much and has gone so far that God tells Jeremiah, even if Moses and Samuel stood before me and prayed, even if ones who were intimate with me with a life of intercession, even if they appealed for this nation, I still wouldn't answer.

It's too late. That's the kind of reputation with God that Moses had. And because of Moses' relationship with God and God's promises to the patriarchs, Moses was able to prevail in prayer and get hold of God and save a nation.

Leonard Ravenhill used to say, it's an amazing thing when God gets hold of a man. It's an even more amazing thing when a man gets hold of God. God even tells Moses that a few times, let me go.

Let me just go and destroy these people because they're guilty. Moses holds on and gets the answer. But notice that that there's something in the heart of Moses beyond prayer for the nation.

There's something in the heart of Moses beyond the burden for the people because he's experienced something with God. He's he's been ruined, as we might say, is that words commonly used among believers. He's been ruined to ordinary life in God and to the to the relationship with God that the average person would have, or even if you could say the average prophet would have.

He had something deeper. Remember, just a few verses before earlier in this very chapter, it talks about how God's glory would come down, the cloud would come down, Moses would go outside the camp and when he'd go outside the camp at the tent of meeting, the literal presence of God would come down and everybody would in the whole nation would stand at their tents and worship. And then Moses would just talk to the Lord and the Lord to Moses as a man speaks with his friend back and forth communion conversation.

Despite that, that did not end the hunger of Moses that did not satisfy the hunger of Moses that only created deeper desire in him to experience his glory. There's something when you're touched, when God gets hold of you, when when he works in you, when you've had a certain walk with him, that you just can't live the way other people live and that there's a cry for more. So Moses is not just praying for the nation now, this is now between him and God, he's gotten his appeal for the nation.

God's not going to destroy Israel. There is mercy. So what does he do? He cries out for some desperate thing in his own life.

Now, show me your glory. He knew in a very, very real way that there was some aspect of God that was being held back from him. You've got to remember when the glory came down on Mount Sinai.

In the 19th chapter of Exodus and the 24th chapter, it describes it as well, that the glory of God looked like a consuming fire on the mountain and there's thundering going out and the sound of trumpet blasts, even a warning, even if an animal gets close to the mountain, it's going to be thrust through or stoned or pierced through. And Moses gets to go right up in the middle of it, right into the thick of the glory of God. This is the same Moses that had his first divine encounter in Exodus, the third chapter, where the Lord, through his angel, appears to him and he sees the bush burning and not consumed.

This is a man who had experienced God. In Numbers 12, it says about Moses in contrast with other prophets through whom God would speak. He didn't just speak to Moses in dreams and visions, but face to face.

And yet there's something in Moses that cries out for more of a manifestation of who God is. Then Moses said, now, show me your glory. Sometimes you can't explain the hunger in your heart to other people.

Sometimes you can't explain the longing of your heart, even when it seems you have everything you could want in God and things are going well and you're healthy and strong and blessed and your family is doing well or the ministry that God's entrusted you is doing well. And still there's this thing deep down with it. Sometimes the burden is obvious because people are sick and dying and in need and your heart is burning for them because of that.

But other times it's just it's in there and it's beyond words. But what exactly did Moses even mean? Show me your glory. The heart cry goes up to the throne.

The heart cry goes from the heart of Moses to God with whom Moses is communing face to face. And the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you. And I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in

your presence.

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I'll have compassion. But he said, you cannot see my face for no one may see me and laugh. I mean, it could have been that simple that that Moses just it just want to see the face of the one he was speaking to.

Just wanted to get that more intimate view of the real God, which Moses can only express and refer to the glory of God, whatever it is he's crying out for. God says, I'll show you more, but I still can't show you everything. It's an amazing thing.

We could be with God every day, 24 hours a day for a million years. Let's just say time continue to exist as we know it, 24 hours a day for a million years. And God could reveal more of himself to us every day to the point that it would stagger us and that we'd be on our face overwhelmed.

And after a million years, he's only shown us a fraction of who he is. You cannot see my face for no one may see me and live. Then look at this.

Then the Lord said. There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. Hebrews, very, very simple.

Behold, there's a place with. You may stand on a rock where my glory passes by, I'll put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I pass by, then I will remove my hand and you will see my back. But my face must not be seen.

I mean, this is extraordinary. This is one of the most amazing accounts in all of Scripture. And then the 34th chapter goes on in detail.

As I drove up to the. Meeting tonight, just praying. Having spent time before the Lord in the afternoon and just asking him, father, what's on your heart for your people tonight? We're not together often in the setting on a Sunday night.

What have you put within me for them tonight? These words just rose up in me. There's a place near me. There's a place with me.

Talk about it. I want to make this as personal and individual as I can. And even some other texts that we'll look at in a little while that that are corporate texts, I want us to apply them as much as we can individually.

And I'm not necessarily saying that this is the literal explanation of what the text is talking about, but I'm doing what I believe God wants me to do by focusing in on these few words here and talking to you and speaking to myself as well, speaking to us as individuals about this place with God. There's nothing more important in your life, nothing, not your physical health, not your emotional well-being, not your relationships, not your surroundings, not your finances. Nothing is as important on any level.

Nothing is as important as maintaining this place of intimate relationship with God. And there was something about this in the literal account where where there was a literal place in the rock where Moses could just get in there. And then God was going to cover him and then at the right moment allow him to see his back.

And then as God passed by, there would be a revelation that Moses received that would be deeper than what he had. And it would be a manifestation of the glory of God. There was that literal place where he could get in and stand there.

You ever been in a serious windstorm of some kind and you find the place you can just step out of the wind and it's swirling all around you, but you're not being touched at all. You ever found a place where pouring rain, drenching, pouring rain, and you just thought you just step in this little thing. And because of the way the wind is and the way the buildings are around you, you're not being touched at all.

And it's a real place. Listen to me. In our individual lives in God, there is this real place that develops spiritually, a place of intimacy, a place of priority in our lives, of meeting with God, a slot, whether it's in a time of day, whether it's in a physical location is not the issue.

There is something real that we take hold of that becomes a special thing in our lives with us and God. Again, I'm not so much talking about a time, although it may be tied in with that. I'm not so much talking about a room in the house, although it may be tied in with that.

I'm talking about a spiritual thing. And to the extent the devil can successfully pull us out of that place, to the extent that our own life circumstances can pull out of that place, to the extent that the busyness of life and ministry can pull us out of that place, to that extent, we become self defeating. To that extent, we become ineffective.

To that extent, we become aimless. To that extent, we begin to drift. To that extent, we have lost our fundamental foundation.

I just read a quote today in a book I was reading about some things going on in the 60s, as I often read about this and understand. Climate of the day just happened to be a quote from Napoleon may have been a well known quote, but I'd never seen it before. It said something to this effect, never distract the enemy when you see that he's in the process of destroying himself.

And for many of us, if we're just allowed to go the way we go, absorbed and caught up with this world, with life, with working for God, with doing this, with good things, etc., etc., the devil can just kind of let us go. He doesn't even have to send unusual temptation. The world doesn't have to come up with new techniques, because if you just let us go, we will gradually self destruct because that which is the most essential, important thing, the presence of God in our own lives, intimacy with God in our own lives, relationship with him coming first and foremost above everything.

That is the thing that is the most easily challenged. And especially in a group like us with ministry mentality and with a heart to go with a heart to do something for Jesus, we don't just want to be, quote, pew sitters. We don't just want to be attending church services.

We want our lives to count for God. There is the great danger that in all of our desire to recover all kinds of other things and do all kinds of other things, we'll miss that which is the foundation of it all. There is a place.

There are times in our lives spiritually where we are locked into God. There are times in our lives spiritually where we live for his presence and communion with him. There are times in our lives where our time in the word is so consistent and rich and our time in prayer is so consistent and rich and to go without communing with God is absolutely unthinkable to us.

There is that place. And it's something that must be guarded and it's something when lost that must be covered. Go with me to Ephesians, excuse me, Revelation, the second chapter where Jesus addresses the church of Ephesus.

Revelation, chapter two, sometimes we go so many months and so many years away from our first love, so many months, so many years away from a certain excitement in the Lord. So much time goes by while we are in good services and doing good ministry and having good devotions with our family and witnessing on our jobs and seeking to be lights in our community, doing all those good things. That so much time can go by that the reality of who God is, the reality of what we once have, the reality of what it is to have Jesus as our best friend can be lost and we don't even realize it.

Revelation, too, is a very striking passage and in many ways is very disturbing. You'll see why in a moment to the angel of the church, the congregation in Ephesus, right? These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. This is how Jesus describes himself before each of the seven congregations that he addresses.

He describes himself in a way that is especially relevant for them. And he's telling Ephesus, I'm the one that walks in the midst of the seven congregation and the leaders are in my hand. I'm the one that is intimately involved.

I'm right on the inside. I know your deeds. Stop there.

That's how he addresses five of the congregations. He tells them, I know your deeds. Sometimes that's good news, sometimes that's bad news.

Sometimes when the Lord says, I've been watching you, your heart rejoices because you know you've been sacrificing and doing the right thing for the Lord and refusing to compromise and honoring Jesus. And when and you've been wondering, Lord, have you even been paying attention? It says, I've been watching other times. He says, I've been watching you and you start to tremble.

Because he's seen the things that nobody else sees. What does he say to Ephesus? This is a congregation. This is a work that Paul was deeply involved with.

What does he say to Ephesus? I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. Wow. They were going for it, they were diligent.

How many congregations can you say that to? I've been watching you. I know your deeds. I know all about you.

You're working hard and you're persevering. And Jesus is not impressed by hype. Jesus doesn't believe the press report of someone else.

This is reality. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false.

This was an extraordinary group of people. They found out who was real and who was not. In Acts 20, Paul warned them again and reminded them.

He met with the elders of the church of Ephesus, the church of that city. And he reminded them for three years, day and night, I've warned you with tears. And I've told you that savage wolves are going to rise up from your own midst, drawing disciples after themselves.

And they won't spare the flock. And maybe these are some of the very people about whom Paul spoke and warned. And the Ephesian believers got it right.

They couldn't tolerate wicked men. There's something special about this group of people. Those claimed to be apostles with their false doctrine, their false miracles, their false whatever, they're not, they got exposed at Ephesus.

All of Paul's tears paid off. You have persevered. He says it twice.

He said they've worked hard and they've persevered. These people didn't cave in when the going got rough. These people didn't back down when persecution arose.

These people had a witness and a testimony. It's extraordinary. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name.

How many congregations in a city could Jesus say this to, not to most of the others? And then look at what he says. And you've not grown weary. Surely these people were on fire.

Surely these people would be examples. Surely the Lord would just have words of encouragement only for a hard working, pure hearted, devoted group of people persevering, suffering for Jesus, not backing down, not caving in, not quitting, not giving way, not even growing weary. Yet, he says, I hold this against you.

Come on, Jesus, are you just nitpicking with us? You're trying to find some little fault. Look at us. We're working hard.

Look at us. We're at early morning prayer. Look at us.

We're fasting one day a week. Look at us. We're doing outreach.

Look at us. We're establishing godly principles in the home. Look at us.

We've got missionaries around the world. Look at us. We're worshiping by the hour.

Look at all the good stuff we're doing. What are you going to find fault with? Some little thing, Jesus, or you're going to just find one little doctrinal thing that needs adjustment or or or some little thing where one day we forgot to feed a poor person? No, not at all. Not at all.

That's what's so disturbing about this text. Yet I hold this against you. You're forsaking your first love.

Think of it. You could be hard working for Jesus. You could be persevering and not growing weary and enduring hardship for the Savior and exposing false people and false teaching.

And still backsliding. And if you can do it as a congregation, you and I can do it as individuals. You can have a thriving ministry.

Your tapes can be going everywhere and impacting people. Your worship songs can be translated into 100 languages. You can have a congregation of 10,000.

You can be considered the godliest person in your community. You can have a good family and still be backsliding. And beyond all the other things that God looks at, this is the thing he singles out the most.

Beyond all the other things he's pointing out and commending, the thing that hurts him the most, if he had to choose one or the other, he'd choose this because everything is going to flow out of that relationship. Everything's going to flow out of intimacy with God. You've forsaken your first love.

You know, we commonly quote it. We lost our first love. I lost my first love.

But it doesn't say lost, it says left, forsaken. Some people might think, well, is that how it's translated in the King James? You've lost your first love. No, the King James says left.

It's just a misquotation of ours. I lost some, I can't find it. The worst thing to lose, by the way, is your glasses.

Especially if you really need your glasses, because when you lose your glasses, you can't find your glasses. Some of you know, I used to have much bigger glasses. They were easier to find, even though there wasn't a lot of substance on them, it was mainly the glasses.

They were much bigger. So when you put them down somewhere, they're easier to find. But then all of my dear friends and colleagues and co-workers convinced me that I need these cool glasses, these little glasses.

Not only are they little glasses, this is the first pair of bifocals I had. So I don't know which is the focal and which is the bifocal. But listen to me, these are too small for proper bifocals, by the way.

I lose these glasses, you can't find them anywhere. Oh, it's tough. You know, you put these things down, I lost them.

Where did you put them? It wasn't forethought, it wasn't like years of bad habits. I just put them where I put them down. I found that phone job.

Just a personal thing here. Where did you put the thing down somewhere? And I can't find it. I lost it.

Where are your keys? Keys? You have the keys now? I can't believe I lost the keys. You park in some massive parking lot somewhere and you forget where your vehicle is and it's a rental car, so you don't even remember what the thing looked like. You're going like 10 different cars.

Sorry, sorry, I didn't know that was yours. I'm trying to remember which was my car. I can't believe I lost it.

I don't remember what it looks like, what model. I don't know, I just got in, drove, it was late at night. I just thought I was over here.

I don't know if this happens to you, how many times I get picked up at airports. You know, you've been traveling for a day and a half. You got your luggage a little worn out.

They go, we're just parked right over, I thought we were over here. Well, I can't believe how many airports in the world have been changed. Everywhere I go, oh, well, they just changed the airport.

It's not that I parked the car in the wrong place. They just changed the airports. I don't know if this airport's been there nine million years, though.

Everything's old. Yeah, I think they just changed the airport. I've been up and down.

You get in the elevator, up and down because I lost, can't find the car. I just lost it somewhere. Just misplaced it.

I mean, you could be at a gathering, you know, a park with your friends playing and you're playing with your kids and the kids go off and you're holding them one kid's hand and you get distracted for a minute, little kids going to play with the other little kids and where, where'd he go? Where'd she go? And you got to take men in the final because they're with the other kids in the other part of the park. And listen to me, you don't do that with your relationship with Jesus and first love, you don't lose it. What a point was, we were like really close to Jesus and we were, it was like special, we had this wonderful relationship and we're intimate and there was this place I had in God and I was different.

There was a fire, there was a passion, there was something in me. There was a hatred of sin. By the way, I didn't just get very choked up and emotional.

I just got choked up in the natural air for a second. It was something I had, I know it may have sounded like that in context, but this happened. I mean, I had this very special thing with the Lord and this hatred of sin and uncleanness, this love for holiness and this burden for souls and I just had love to worship and just seek his face.

And I was kind of like a prayer animal, you know, I just couldn't get enough prayer and just had to be with God. I just kind of lost it. No, we don't lose it and they feel like it because we become dull, we become dull and we lose sight of it.

It may feel like that, but in fact, we forsake it. We make lifestyle choices, we make daily decisions, we go in certain directions, and then as it goes on a week, a month, a year, five, ten. We can be so busy for Jesus and so active for the Lord and doing so many commendable things and even still keeping our lives basically pure.

Well, all the while we have been gradually backsliding from intimacy, backsliding from devotion, backsliding to closeness with the master. I always tell folks as we're training them for the work of ministry, that the most difficult place to keep your intimacy, the most difficult circumstances in which you find constant battles and challenges to your time alone with God. It's when you are, quote, in full time ministry.

It's not just because your daily responsibilities don't end and it can literally be 24-7 that there's a need, that there's a demand, that there's something that you have to address and touch and help, but it can be you're reading the word. Why? Because you have to preach next week. You're reading the word.

Why? Because you've got to do a discipleship series. So you're reading the word, you're learning, you're growing, but it's primarily for others. Oh, you're praying, you're seeking God, but why? Oh God, touch the flock.

Oh God, touch the congregation. Oh God, someone's in need. That's all important.

That's all part of our prayer, but you can neglect just the personal, just the relationship, just the enjoyment of God. I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love.

This is not Jesus being a legalist. Please hear me. This is not Jesus trying to find fault with a devoted group of people.

Maybe you come from a legalistic church background and you are very used to a fault finding kind of mentality that nothing you do is enough. No service is good enough. No efforts are strong enough.

There's always something wrong and some spiritual leader is going to point it out and this is wrong and this is wrong to always tear down. No, this is not what our Savior is doing. This is someone speaking out of deep heart relationship, almost like a wife saying to her husband, OK, fine.

It's true. You've always worked hard and you put food on the table for the family and now you put aside funds so our kids can get a college education. It's true.

It's true. You're devoted in so many different ways and you try to be a good example. But what's happened to our relationship? What's happened to the enjoyment of husband and wife together as one? What's happened to the love and the romance of it's just a good working partnership.

There's a desire in God, there's something in God, the whole reason he created us in the first place. It was not just so we worked for him, but so that we'd be his friends and his family. It's so impossible for us to conceive.

Really, there's nothing in our humanity that can fully understand this, how God, who was God complete in himself, lacking nothing, needing nothing, somehow had a need within himself to create us for fellowship. He didn't have to. Do you understand that? It's not that he was compelled to because he had read the Bible and saw it was going to happen.

It's not that he just had this thing set in motion and it was some inevitability. It was something that he desired. We've got to remember that in the midst of everything we're doing to seek to please him.

Listen, you know, you've heard from me for years, themes of revival, themes of Jesus revolution, radicality for God. And you hear from our different leaders that cry for something authentic and New Testament church and being priestly and apostolic and these different things. And we talk about community and we talk about all these.

It's all important, but it's all totally secondary to intimacy with him. All of that flows out of intimacy with him. All the vision, all the purpose, all the drive has to ultimately flow out of the fact that Jesus, you're everything to us.

And we want to bring glory to you and please the father. Many of you know, these last few years, I've been working on a commentary on the book of Jeremiah now, by God's grace, the next two years is as the most major project I'll be involved with. And one of the one of the things that first struck me a few years back when I started just reading through the text more carefully and thinking about how it more, for example, in the second chapter, in the early parts of the third chapters is God's sense of just pain and shock at what his people are doing.

And he even asked him, what have I done wrong? What what fault did your father's finding me? Why did you forsake me? I mean, he asked these penetrating questions, not just you forsaken me, you're guilty, but what did I do wrong that you forsook me? He calls heaven to witness, just look at this heavens and be astonished at someone's who else can God ask to look at this? They forsaken me and they're going after all kinds of other lovers, wearing themselves out on the mountain, here's here's the bride of the Lord, he talks early in the second chapter of Jeremiah, how they used to enjoy honeymoon love together. And God says, I remember that I think back and I remember these things about you and in our early days and how you followed me in the wilderness and how we enjoy. Early days of romance and marriage together, and now you're just fornicating with all kinds of other men and you're you're out wearing your your feet out,

you're out barefoot, just looking for lovers on the hills and thinking, what is this? Ezekiel 16, there's the very graphic chapter where God finds baby Israel kicking in its own blood in the wilderness and about to die.

And God brings in this little baby girl and cares for her, nurtures her, and then as she grows up and matures, she's ready for marriage. God beautifully adorns her and then some other guys start touching her and having her. The other nations, she starts worshipping idols.

The fundamental thing that brought the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people in Jeremiah's day was idolatry. Straying from God in relationship with God and following other gods, and it was spiritual adultery. This is how God expresses himself here with a with a broken heart of a jealous lover.

I hold this against you forsaking your first love. What's the good of all the other stuff? Oh, it's not you throw it out, you quit doing it, but there's the call to put first things first and recover that place in God. That special place, remember the height from which you fall.

Remember what it was like, maybe some of you never had that intimate, close relationship with Jesus, maybe some of you never had a walk with the Lord where you could point back to it, the reality of it, the wonder of it. Maybe you've known the Lord, but somehow there hasn't been that deeper breakthrough. I tell you, the heart of God is identical for you and he's calling you to experience heights in him you've not known.

There are certain things, of course, that are going to be unique and one time only, maybe one season in your life only. And they're not to be repeated over and over again. But the reality of the wonder of the relationship with him and something that we could rightly call first love is something that, by God's grace, can be walked in and lived in and recovered when lost.

It's a shame if we have to keep thinking back to the old days. It's a shame if we have to keep thinking back to prior examples. I remember Nancy and I were hearing someone teach over a period of time, someone that was anointed with a healing ministry, but but she said something to me.

She said, you know, it's disturbing. It's probably in the mid to late 80s. She said every example he gives of a major healing miracle in his life comes from the 50s.

He just started to think of it. It almost seemed that the glory days were past. I know there are seasons that will not always be repeated.

Intense spiritual moves, unusual times of God working, speaking to people, speaking, acting. I understand that I'm talking more than anything about relationship. First love, that place in God.

I found in my own life certain patterns, walking with the Lord now just about 31 years, you observe certain things, I journal a lot. I noticed. In the early 90s in particular, I went back and looked, I had these.

World Youth with a Mission Daytime is they're just real simple, but they had some neat quotes in them and in the front, you had the whole year laid out. So when I'd be away preaching different places, I just marked that. And then whenever I fast, I just mark those days.

So at one glance, I could see what my fasting over a year. And I saw that that after we had lost a close friend after two and a half year battle for healing of brain cancer, after we lost it, I noticed that in the subsequent years, my time and fasting just dropped. I didn't realize it for years, but I look back and thought there was something aggressive in me.

There was something just going after it. The more I hear someone sick, someone's done. I just want to throw myself in and see God heal.

And although I thought in my mind I was still the same, there was a certain aggression that was taken away. I don't mean a fleshly aggression. I mean, just going after God and fasting and prayer for a breakthrough and some of the wind got taken out of myself.

I've noticed something else that I can hear God about corporate things. That he can move on me with burdens to write and to preach. And that in the midst of that, I can go periods of time without hearing from him on a personal level.

And you don't even realize it because he's speaking about these other things. Oh, God, what are you saying to us about fire? Father, what's your birth? Lord, what's the message you're giving me for young people? Lord, are you telling us to establish a work in New York? Lord, what's your answer to the financial pressure? And you're crying out for those community wide things or worldwide things. And God's speaking and burdening you and you're meeting with him and he's touching you.

And it's wonderful. And yet there's something where we're not just corporate beings. We're not just family beings.

We're not just part of the worldwide Jesus movement. We're individuals with individual relations. And there's a place in God that's so sacred, so precious, and we need to do what we know how to do to recover.

And there's a spiritual reality to it. I remember. About nine years ago, right around Thanksgiving, right before Thanksgiving, I was in New York City for several days.

I was just doing some research to fill in some end notes on a scholarly book that was going to be published and just going through some of that. And then was doing a Jewish outreach and. I met some people and taking down some names and people were going to contact and.

And then at the end of it all, I was going to preach in the Lower East Side of New York City in a real bad area. I spent a few days alone that I was going to preach there, and I had this thing in my mind. If you go in the building.

Don't have your computer and the information, the disks that I had, the work that I had done, don't have them in the same place. Put the disk in your pocket. If you leave the computer in the trunk of the car.

I remember just thinking this and I thought, you know, I'm going to bring the whole thing and just it was on my mind. And I had my journal, which at that point was not on my computer, handwritten for the whole year and all my contact information didn't have in some little palm thing or PDA or in my cell phone. I didn't have, you know, just was all written out.

And then all the people I had met that I was going to send literature, that was written out. And then there was a manuscript I had been going through by hand and making notes in the margins, and that was in the trunk of the car. And I had the disks in the laptop computer.

I thought, I'm just going to bring the bags in with me. And then at the end of the meeting, someone went out, got my garment bag. I changed into casual clothes because I was going to drive back four hours to Maryland where we live and went out with the pastor and his wife just to get a couple of slices of pizza, went and put my stuff back in the trunk of the car and drove home.

I put my stuff in the car first, then had pizza with these folks right across the street from where the car was, drove home, got home about two in the morning, opened the trunk of my car and it was empty. I closed it again. I worship the Lord a little bit.

I thought, okay, this is not really happening. I opened it, computer's gone, data's gone, all the work of those days is gone. I couldn't believe it.

I got down on my knees at two in the morning on our driveway in Maryland just to worship God and say, I'm going to worship you anyway, Father, you're still just as good, just as faithful. I went inside, woke Nancy up and I said, I can't believe it. I said, you know, the thing was stolen out of the trunk of the car.

And she said, well, what about your other stuff? And I thought, and I ran back down the journal, everything for the whole year. It's close to December now. It's past mid-November, so the whole year and all the everything I had.

And I'd just gone to Korean preach prior to that. And the Koreans took me to this place where they made these suits for me just as a gift, like these custom suits, which I didn't know were really expensive, the garment bag, everything was gone. I couldn't believe, I just felt so disoriented.

And then it's Thanksgiving. And I remember calling John on the phone, John Cobb, as we were friends and co-workers in Maryland. I did.

You ever lose stuff like that? You just feel kind of disoriented. It's got all your information. And so I just, I remember I called friends in New York City.

I called Dave Wilkerson's assistant because I was preaching there all the time and his administrative assistant. And I said, I said, Barb, I said, I can't believe it. I, you know, I put this stuff in the trunk and I lied.

And she just said, she even batted an eye last. She just said, you never put it in the trunk in the sight of other people. She said, if you do that, then you get in the car, drive it and park it somewhere else.

This gave me a little lesson for New York. Of course, she was caring, but it was, it was just funny. Just very matter of fact, that was your error that you went in and out of the trunk in the sight of other people.

So someone picked the lock and took your stuff. In broad New York nightlife. And I remember I just felt disoriented.

I felt kind of aimless because all the data and all the stuff and the journaling and the contacts and so much of your life order is stored up in these things. I was just talking to John after Thanksgiving that Thursday night. And he said, hey, you want me to just come over and pray with you? Because I just was aimless, just trying to break through.

I was so annoyed and bothered that I'd lost all the stuff and had to just get back focused and on track and recover some of the things that may seem minor. It wasn't, you know, a death or something, but still just something was funny. And he said, you want me to come over and pray? I said, you serious now? Night of Thanksgiving? He said, yeah, I'll come over.

He said, let me just finish up with family. And it was late, maybe midnight or something. And I was in the basement of our house praying.

And I just like I couldn't break through. And the moment he came in the room and we agreed, it's just this joy hit. I knew everything would be fine.

Amazing. You know, and in computer days, if you lose a computer one day and insurance pays for the next and you buy one the next day, I ended up getting everything recovered with insurance plus a better computer. But the thing that was more important and the reason I told this was just there was something that happened spiritually when the two of us came together.

It was almost like the place was there again, the access, the openness, the reality, the something was different spiritually. And just in the midst of that encouragement came instantly and faith rose instantly. And I wasn't disoriented anymore because I was plugged back rightly in with God and all the other stuff was secondary.

And strangely, that example came to mind today, just as I was thinking about this driving up that reality of a spiritual place, almost like a spiritual bubble in which you can live. And I believe that most of us here tonight, just in the course of normal life, the majority this is not by word of revelation or wisdom. This is just spiritual common sense.

The majority of us here tonight would fit in with the category of those who have forsaken their first love and who have somehow left that place. No, you can't live 24 hours a day in perfect communion with God. And yes, there are times when you're just caught up in worship and Jesus, you're wonderful.

And all of a sudden from the next room, you and the reality is you're going to have to break that. You may not carry that communion out with you. You know, as you as you change the poor little baby that's suffering from severe diarrhea for the 98th time that day, you may not just go, oh, praise the Lord.

Jesus is here. Little one, don't cry. Hallelujah.

That may not happen. May that happen that you're having a miserable day with your coworkers on the job and they're just nasty and unclean and foul and unappreciative and ungrateful. You just had an awesome time in the word that morning.

You're you're praising God as you're driving in the car and punching it. It may be that that gets challenged in the real world. All of you who have a burden for Israel and love the Jewish people.

Sometimes that bubble gets burst and that bird disappears the moment you actually try to reach out to some Jews in New York or Israel. Oh, we can be so idealistic and I'm not talking about living in some bubble like that. Time to get up.

Hallelujah. Time to get up. Glory.

Just tell them I'm doing the king's business. Tell Burger King I found another king. You can't you can't live like that.

OK, we understand that you can't have the perfect atmosphere in the room at all time. Honey, you broke the atmosphere when you came home. I feel the world on you.

Well, I work out in the world. Sorry, the guys at the auto mechanic place don't don't like the same praise music that you like. I'm not talking about being artificial or superficial or unrealistic.

Have you recovered your first love? May I tell you about my savior? It may not always be like that, but there is something very real and very undeniable and very precious that most of us leave behind, often because of ministry, often because of godly principles, often just because of the pressures of life and sometimes because of outright temptation and sin and yielding and compromise. But there is a place. There's something we must take hold of.

There's something we must grow into. There's a place to which God is calling us. I know it.

You say, well, maybe you're preaching for your own life and your own heart. You bet I am. And I know it's not just for me.

Remember the height from which you have fallen. Think back. Think back.

You know, sometimes our perceptions change and our view of reality changes and we have to jar ourselves. I've told other people in ministry, get a tape of yourself preaching with passion and fire and hunger in the early days and see if it convicts you. If it convicts you, you think, man, I've become professional.

I'm slick. I know how to do it now. Or look at some of the words you wrote in your journal, some of the entries.

Like, man, I was really kind of like crazy eyed for Jesus. Now, now I've grown up. Remember the height from which you've fallen.

Now, look at this. We're almost done. Repent and do the things you did at first.

Wow. Repent. It's because of sin that we leave that place.

It's because of sin that we leave our first love. It's not anybody's fault. It's not life's fault.

It's my fault. It's your fault. So you don't know what I've been through.

I'm not being unsympathetic. I'm not saying that we just kind of drift our way through life carefree for Jesus. I'm not saying some of you haven't been battered and attacked and gone through extraordinary pressure at certain times.

I have as well. And maybe some of you could share things. If we heard it, we'd be amazed.

You're still in the faith. And yet, ultimately, God is sufficient for us. And if I forsake my first love, it's not my church's fault.

My friends fault, leaders fault, family's fault, co-workers fault, roommates fault, spouses fault, children's fault, parents fault. It's my fault. The good news is God calls us back.

Remember the height from which you've fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I'll come to you and remove your land stand from its place.

In other words, to a church, to a congregation. You won't be anymore, is what he's saying. But you have this in your favor.

You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. I think he was so intimate with Ephesus that he was not just going to let them be a group without him at the foundation. He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church, is to him who overcomes, I'll give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Here's the best news of it all. Do the things you did at first. In other words, there can be simple methods, or you could say simple actions that can recover and restore.

Here's a family where kids are drifting. Seems that the respect they had for mom and dad, the love they had for mom and dad is not there, and parents get away, step back and think and say, wait a second, these kids used to be everything to them. Spending time with them used to be our priority.

Getting away, doing things with them used to be number one. Now it's kind of, we've been the last three years just so busy with all the things that we thought were important, we've neglected our kids. Do what you did at first.

It's an amazing thing. Spend the time. Make the effort.

Water the flower that's wilting, and something happens. Husband and wife ready to walk out on each other, knowing it's sin to divorce, but on the edge of it, hey, what was it that brought you together in the first place? What was it like in the early days? You didn't have to put it in your day timer, call home at noon and say hi. You didn't have to have an alarm go off and remind you that it was an anniversary or a birthday or a special day.

You look for excuses to find time together. Do the things you did at first. I was talking in the natural, now in the spiritual.

Be as ruthless with your schedule now as you were back then. Look at everything else that would get in the way. I remember years ago challenging myself with a question.

Why is it I have to answer the emails? Why is it I have to keep my appointments with people and yet I neglect my appointment with God? Why is it that all the other things that are pulling in the calls and responsibilities and I'm not just talking about daily work where you have to be at your job or taking care of kids in the house and you have to do certain things? I'm talking about things that we choose to do even beyond that or extra work we choose to do for extra money, for extra lifestyle, whatever it is. Why is it that all those things, the knock at the door, the ring of the phone, those can come first and that which matters the most gets neglected? We need to change our priorities. We need above everything, above everything to be people who are deeply in love with Jesus.

People who really have God as their best friend. And I assure you on the authority of His word, if you'll do the things you did at first, if you'll prioritize your time with Him, if you'll obey His voice with gladness the way you used to, if you'll shut out the other voices and make His voice preeminent, you will see change come. There is a place, there's a deep desperation in my own heart rising more to get back into that place to the dimensions I've left it and to recover aspects of first love that have been gone.

Oh sure, there's a deepening through the years and you grow in wisdom and God puts a lot of other things in you and you're serious for Him in so many ways. I'm not trying to balance and juggle everything at once and think it all has to be equal, you know, total faith, total love, total passion, total joy, total wholeness, total radicality, total sacrifice, total revolution, revival, authentic community, and get it all at once. That's not going to happen.

I'm talking about the fundamental. I'm talking about putting first things first. I believe the Spirit is calling us to recover our first love, to dive into a relationship with Jesus deeper than we have perhaps in many years.

Stand to your feet with me. May it be that as we spend time in prayer and fasting, that above all that we deepen our own relationship with the Lord. I'm going to pray and if this is relevant, if God's speaking to you, feel free to spend some time in the presence of the Lord at these altars.

It's just good to step away from other things and go after the Lord. If you want to have conversations, please, please, please, I urge you be respectful of those around you that are going after the Lord. And if you want to talk and hang out, we've got the whole hall around the building just to spend time doing that.

Father, we love you and honor you. May your word hit home. May we not lose sight of what you're saying.

May I, may each of us take it to heart in Jesus name. If God's speaking to you and you want to spend some time before him, go ahead and do it. God bless you.

I just want to remind you that he will answer, that he will answer. I just remind you that for many of us, the telltale sign that we've forsaken our first love is that things that used to convict us don't convict us anymore. Things that used to burden us don't burden us anymore.

If that's you, come up and receive mercy from the hand of God, but be honest with him so he can do a deep work. Amen.

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