

Why We Need Revival (Part 2)

by Michael L. Brown

The sermon emphasizes the importance of personal revival and returning to a right relationship with God, highlighting the need to deepen our intimacy with Him and seek joy in His presence.

Duration: 54:05

Scripture: John 3:17, Revelation 2:4

Topics: "Repentance", "Revival"

Description

The video is a discussion about a book called 'End of the American Gospel Enterprise' which emphasizes the need for repentance and revival. The speaker highlights a section from the book titled 'Go Back to Bethel' which addresses the issue of losing one's connection with God. He talks about how people can become desensitized to worldly influences and urges them to examine their hearts for hardness. The speaker also encourages a return to a deep devotion to Jesus and suggests that through corporate prayer, a fresh move of the Holy Spirit can be birthed.

Transcript

Your truth, to your word, give us your eternal perspective as we walk in the midst of this world. May your holy truths be burned within us. Lord, where any backsliding has set in, personal or corporate, where any hearts have grown cold or lukewarm, where any have fallen away on any level, I pray that you would bring us back.

And that you would bring restoration and recovery and repair and a spirit of revival into our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen. I want you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 35.

If you were here two weeks ago, you can call this Why We Need Revival Part 2. If you're just here today, call it Time to Go Back to Bethel. If you'd like to combine those titles, Why We Need Revival Part 2, colon, Time to Go Back to Bethel. Genesis 35, there's something here that you could read and completely miss, but it's of tremendous significance.

Genesis 35.1, and this is after a very difficult time, as Jacob and his family, the children of Israel, have had a conflict with neighboring peoples that's ended up with a lot of bloodshed, and they've had to take off, and there's terrible reproach on them. It's like living in a neighborhood and something's gone bad with your family, and everybody's looking at you, and everybody's talking about you, and it's only by the grace of God that there's not violence against you, and they've got to get out of there. Now God says to Jacob, Go

up to Bethel and settle there and build an altar there to God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.

This is a call to go back to a place, as many of you know, Bethel, Beth-el in Hebrew, the house of God. This is a place where Jacob, in a profound way, met with God when he was fleeing for his life, and it was the beginning of a major part of his journey into another land, back to an ancestral home, and built up a family there. Now he's on a return path.

God says, Go back to Bethel. Go back to the place where you met with me. Go back to the place where you experienced me.

Go back to the place where you had a vision, and when you made a vow as to how you were going to live for me the rest of your days. Go back to Bethel. So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, Look at this.

This is Jacob, the patriarch. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Israel, the father of the nation.

The man who's already had his name changed as he wrestled with the angel a couple of chapters earlier in Genesis 32. Jacob. Look at what it says.

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and who has been with me wherever I've gone. So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had, and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak of Shechem.

Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them. So that no one pursued them. In other words, no one was out to hurt them, despite what had just happened.

There's an obvious question when you read this account. Where did the idols come from? How is it there were idols in the family of God? How is it there were idols in Jacob's household? You know, it's easy to stir our hearts to pray for revival, to pray for visitation, to pray for a move of God, by talking about how bad things are out there. You know, we can always give statistics and hear what's happening, and those things can grieve us and burden us.

And they should grieve us and burden us. And we see the spiritual condition of so many nations, and we hear the needs spoken of earlier. Our missionaries in China at least can testify to the extraordinary things that have been happening in the nation for several decades now.

But if you're laboring, say, in Japan, you can't talk about that yet. If you're laboring in Thailand, the reports are more limited. So you see the needs.

Any of us involved in Jewish ministry are constantly confronted with the needs for breakthrough. You can see the needs out there, and that can get you to pray for visitation. That can get you to pray for revival.

That can get you to seek God, because there has to be more. Because we recognize more of the same will only produce more of the same. Because we recognize a lot of what we're doing can be called merry-go-round ministry.

I mean, it's a lot of activity, and it seems like a lot of fun, and there's noise and excitement, but we're just going around in circles. It's important to look at what's happening in society and happening around the world, and for that to drive us to our knees in God and prayer. But there's something much more fundamental, which is our personal relationship with God.

Ultimately, revival is a personal thing. Ultimately, revival comes down to your relationship with God and my relationship with God. Ultimately, getting right with Him, returning, turning back, having restoration, it comes to you and Jesus alone.

It's not a matter of how bad things are out there, and therefore we pray. Yes, that's part of it, but more importantly, God is jealous for us as individuals. God is jealous for intimacy and fellowship with us.

Charles Spurgeon was commenting on Psalm 80, verse 3. King James, it says, "Turn us, O God." And Spurgeon made the comment that the psalmist didn't so much pray, "Turn our captivity." In other words, we're in bondage, we're in exile, we're in captivity, whatever the given setting is, we're in a difficult situation, so change the situation. He said, that's not what the psalmist prayed. The psalmist prayed, "Turn us, O God." Not, "Turn our captivity." And he said, when all is right with us, then all will be right with everything else.

In other words, when our hearts are changed, when we are turned, then our conditions and situations will be turned. In other words, the real issue is not our circumstances, the real issue is our relationship with God. The real issue is not how things are going, but the bottom line is our own intimate relationship with God, and that's where the real challenge is.

That's where the ultimate battle is. Whether it's in the midst of raising a family, or working a job, or going out preaching, or doing some other kind of ministry, or being in school, or whatever it is, the ultimate challenge is to keep the flame burning in our personal relationship with God. What can happen with any of us, and it happened with Jacob and his family, they had an encounter.

Jacob had an encounter with God. It was life-changing, but then life goes on. Years go by.

Daily pressures mount. Challenges, new interests, disappointments, lots of activity, things go on. We don't just live in a world where we're just constantly being moved by the breeze of the Spirit without any resistance.

Perhaps you're a visitor from another planet, but if you're an earthling, you know, life is not just like laying down on a float in a pool on a breezy day, with the sun beating down on you and just floating around. You hit one side a little and just float back over. You can actually fall asleep there.

It's just so wonderful. Oh, there is rest in the Lord, but there's a hellish battle. And life itself can be wearing.

Listen, the good things that happen in life, the excitement of life, the blessings that God gives, these things can begin to consume us and we get our eyes off Him. It doesn't particularly discourage me that periodically the Lord will speak to me or jar me and show me that I need a course adjustment. I wish it never had to happen.

I wish there was total consistency in my entire walk with God every day, every week, every month, every year, and it never varied. I wish it would be like that. Maybe yours has, but it's a precious, rare thing to have that happen.

Because over a period of years, we tend to have ups and downs. And one way or another, something begins to creep in. And next thing we know, there are idols in our midst.

There are other interests. There are other things that are pulling for us. There's something lacking and missing in our own walk with God.

So there's an invitation from the Lord to turn back. There's an invitation from the Lord to examine our own lives. There's an invitation from the Lord to search our own hearts.

Not so that He can condemn us and hurt us and prove that we're bad. No, it's out of His love and goodness for us and out of a desire to bless us that He calls us to examine our hearts. And whatever sickness there is spiritually, whatever need there is spiritually, whatever stronghold there is spiritually, the good news is the same God who calls you back has power to turn you back.

Has power to break those things off. Has power to renew the love relationship. When we draw near to Him, something really does happen.

These are not just words written on a page. You know, sometimes you get so familiar with Scripture verses, they just become like little sayings. You know, the spiritual equivalent of birds of a feather flock together.

You know, draw near to God, draw near to us. No, these are not just lovely little religious sayings or moral platitudes. We're talking about divine words.

Something really happens when we turn in our hearts. And why is it that we have a fresh desire to turn after Him? Because He's calling us. Because He's initiating something.

Because He's working. I shared with you two weeks ago that it was almost a sudden light going on in me. After a great time of blessing and may and encouragement and many good things happening in our community, in my life personally, suddenly just the beginning of June, there was a spiritual upheaval going on.

So it was like the rug was pulled out from under me and I began to just see there's a lack of love for God's Word here and a lack of passion and prayer here. And there's just lack of delight in God Himself and lack of real hatred of sin and depth of conviction in my life. And just suddenly looking at fire, it seemed, through different eyes and asking the same questions.

Something's missing. Something has to change. You can take that as condemning or bad news, but when it strikes me, I take that as good news.

I've said this before, but let me say it again. The worst thing, the worst thing that you can come and tell me is that I have reached the height of spirituality I will ever attain in this world. I have reached the deepest depth of Christ-likeness that I will ever know in this world.

I have seen the greatest moves of the Spirit that I will ever see. Man, that would be bad news. That would be tragic news.

If you came to me and said, listen, I really believe the Lord showed me you're operating at like 5% of your capacity. That's awesome. Oh, it's a little scary.

And it brings a little rebuke with it. And it brings a call to dig deeper and go after God. But that's good news.

I mean, let's say you're an athlete. And you have dreams of maybe baseball playing in the major leagues. And when you're 8 years old, on the peewee team, a prophetic word comes to you and says, you have reached your greatest height.

This is the greatest season at the highest level of play you will ever have in baseball. Man, that's bad news for an 8-year-old. But picture, say, being 30 years old and just winning your third straight World Series and fourth straight Most Valuable Player Award.

And it's spoken to you prophetically. In terms of baseball, you haven't even begun to see your potential in this game. I mean, we need to live with our own lives in God.

Not just subsisting. Not just making it. Not just, okay, I'm doing alright.

There are depths in God and heights in God and riches in God's love and goodness calling to us, inviting us. We ought not to be content just getting our toes wet as the tide comes in occasionally. We're supposed to dive out and swim and be carried on by the waves.

God's saying to many of us, go to Bethel. And suddenly we think, you know, I need to clean things up. Some things get right before I can go back to Bethel.

I got some junk that's come in my life. Maybe you're an athlete and you got out of shape and the team called you and said, hey, we need you again. It's like, okay, I'll be there in, can you give me one month? Because I'm not in shape, I'm not ready.

What if God really began to visit our lives now? What if He began to visit our congregation now? What if He began to pour out His holy fire? Would we say, Lord, come? Or would we say, you know, just give me a minute to get some things fixed? On Thursday morning, I was asked by the folks at Inspiration Network, David Cirulo, to do a few days of interviews just talking about revival. I'd been on with him a couple months earlier and then just sent him some books. I promised I would do that.

The first one he picked up was this one, End of the American Gospel Enterprise, which was written 17 years ago. But the message is still the same. Our heart is still the same.

And really the need is in many ways still the same. It's a call for repentance with a promise of revival. So it's a short, easy book to read.

And I decided just to go through it again, just to prepare my heart for these three days of interviews. And the one thing that struck me was this section on Go Back to Bethel. And it's something that struck him, he really wanted to talk about.

Let me just read something to you from there. Once you realize something's missing, once you start to think, man, I had something with God I don't have now. Something in my walk with God, my experience with God, I don't have.

You begin to see either a lack of power or a lack of intimacy or a lack of joy. You begin to recognize signs of spiritual backsliding. You hear the Lord saying, you've forsaken your first love and you're smitten by it, and it draws you back.

It's like one friend once said to me years ago, we were talking and praying and I was active and busy in ministry. And I was doing very well in many respects in the Lord. I just remember the comment he made to me, he said, you know, Jesus used to be like your best friend.

I was just smitten by that. Just a lack of intimacy, a lack of just enjoying relationship with God. I'm going to read more, share more in a minute on this point.

I was reading something about George Mueller the other day, it just happened upon this paragraph, where he said that his first obligation every day, he felt his first spiritual responsibility every day. Now remember, this is this meticulous man of prayer that covered so many areas of life daily in prayer, prayed for the orphanages and the divine provision for the kids he cared for. Halfway through his life in ministry, he had recorded 5,000 instantaneous answers to prayer.

That's how many things he prayed over and prayed for. You know what he said? You might think the first order of the day was to intercede for the needs or to cast his burdens on the Lord or the first order was just to meticulously set things forth in prayer. You know, it's not what he said.

He said his first responsibility, the most important thing he could do to start every day was to get happy in the Lord. Can you imagine that? And for him the best way to do that was by meditatively reading on the Word and that would get him focusing on God. He knew that that was the key thing, to get himself built up in the Lord and then whatever came his way through that day, it didn't matter as much, he would handle it differently.

And I was just struck in reading that, that joy comes from a person, not from circumstances. That the substance of our life is not how things are going around us or what's happening with our family or how we're doing in our physical bodies or what's happening with our finances or what neat new things have we seen happen in ministry. The substance of our lives is our relationship with a person.

And that's the thing that gets attacked and that's the thing that gets most threatened. I can almost guarantee you, I could preach at any large pastor's convention in this nation and if you had thousands of people there that were honest before God and you preached about forsaking your first love and falling away in terms of personal intimacy and personal relationship with God, these people, many of whom would be hardworking and devoted and fruitful and doing great, the great majority would be at the altar if they're honest. That's the thing that gets sapped.

That's the thing that gets attacked. That's our life source. So I ask this question.

How can we turn things around? How can we get out of the deep rut? What is the answer for those who have not grown spiritually for many months and years? What must we do to change? I remember preaching years back a message on forsaking our first love and a guy came up to me who had been a believer for several years and he said, what do you do if you never had a first love? He said, I can't relate to any of those things you were talking about losing because I never had them. Maybe you know there's something more just in terms of your walk with him. All you know for years and years is spiritual staleness and you're reading the Word and you say, something's missing somewhere.

I'm going to interject a dumb story, but it will get a point across. My sister is three and a half years older than me. Also had skipped a grade when she was in school and then because of her birthday in September she got in early.

So she was 16 when she graduated from high school and was always telling me a few years ahead of my own experience what happened in this class or what kind of things the students would do, etc. And I had been hearing for years about this event. It was in between 8th grade and 9th grade and the student body of our school in Long Island went to Pennsylvania and everybody did all these crazy things.

And those were the days before my partying days, drug use and insanity and sin before the Lord saved me. So I didn't know about that world. I just thought, well, it kind of happened automatically when everybody went away here and heard stories about the students going out and getting drunk with the faculty and all this carousing and wild stuff happening.

And each night we sat in our room at the hotel wondering when does it happen. We were a bunch of kids, Jewish kids from my neighborhood that none of us were into that kind of lifestyle at that point, the carousing wild lifestyle. And we just sat there every night kind of wondering when does it happen.

We concluded that it was just one of those trips where it didn't happen. It was just one of those trips where it was very tame, only to find out that it was all happening by the people who were doing it out there. The highlight of the trip, the highlight in terms of our story that we had to tell was when the gym teacher, Mr. Levi, came to check our bags to make sure we weren't taking anything and he walked into our room stone cold drunk into our hotel room.

And I mean, he was drunk. And he kind of staggered out of the room and closed the door behind him and one of the guys yelled out, not thinking the door was closed, he wasn't trying to get the teacher's attention. He just said, wow, Mr. Levi's drunk.

And this guy who was drunk, man, his senses were still sharp, the door wasn't quite closed. He swung the door open like a cat. And he said, what did you say? And I said, Mr. Levi just checked my trunk.

He said, okay, and walked away. And we were like, that was our story. That was the big thing that happened.

That was it. Now, why did I tell that dumb story? It's a dumb story in terms of the story itself is fairly stupid. But the illustration is what I'm after.

Some of you lived your whole lives in God knowing that you hear all the stories. I'm not talking about bad stories, dumb stories, carousing, drunken stories. I'm talking about you've read the Word and then you talk to other believers and you heard about all this stuff and you're kind of wondering, when does it happen? Or when do I experience this? When does this actually become real to me? And you have to be honest and say, okay, I know something happened to me and yes, my sins are forgiven and I believe if I died right now I'd be in the presence of God.

But what I'm having in my own walk in life with God is certainly not what's written. And certainly not what so many other people talk about. And I couldn't imagine this sustaining me in times of trouble or persecution or difficulty.

Listen, it's not bad to say something's missing. It's certainly not an insult to God. It's an insult to God to go on empty as if we're full.

If you were a fine cook and one day didn't have any time to cook and threw in the cheapest microwave dinner that existed, you know, gourmet spam or something and you threw that out on the table and

everyone said, wow, boy, this is terrific. Wow, you are a terrific cook. That would be an insult to you.

That would be a mockery of your abilities. Even for those who like microwave gourmet spam. If someone says, man, I go to services and I get bored, you think that's a personal insult to me or the fire leadership as if our goal is to entertain you? Oh no, they're getting bored.

What are we going to do? We're going to have to go with multimedia presence. We're going to have to blow up our faces big. We'll be over in the corner, but it'll just be our big face talking and we'll have like stand-up comedian routines too and then get the best Christian rock band.

Our goal is not to entertain anybody. If you say I'm coming hungry and thirsty, I get along with God and something's missing. I come to service, something's missing.

That doesn't insult us. Hey, let's go after God together. Let's seek Him for His promises together.

We're not talking about being feeling and emotionally oriented. We're not talking about being experience oriented. We're talking about a depth of relationship.

We're talking about the reality of what's written being lived out in our lives. So I ask the question, what do we do to change? We must desire God more than anything else. We must seek Him and cry out to Him and long for Him.

We must make an absolute determination that nothing will separate us from Him. We must be utterly ruthless with ourselves and cut away everything that offends. It's time to put away our idols.

Listen, serious, lasting change will not come easily. If it comes easily, you can lose it easily. There's a reason that we get stuck in ruts sometimes.

There's a reason you see a car on the side of the road and there's six people trying to push it out and they can't because it's stuck in a rut. There's a reason it takes greater effort. The good news is this is not a matter of good works.

This is not a matter of if we try hard enough, we win a prize. This is a matter of working together with God. This is a matter of making determinations in a quality way by the prompting of God's Spirit that we'll receive quality answers from Heaven.

Remember, in every area of life, it's true, we reap what we sow. And some of us have been very conscientious and diligent to give the first fruits of our income to the Lord and we're sowing in faith our finances to the Lord and we're seeing a return. But just as we may be faithful in that area, we may be unfaithful in spiritual areas.

And what we sow is very superficial. What we sow is kind of the end of the day. What we sow is the leftover.

What we sow is what doesn't fit in somewhere else. And of course, we don't receive the fullness of the blessing. And of course, there's something terribly lacking in our relationship with God.

Again, I don't say that to condemn. God did not send His Son to condemn the world. He didn't send His Son here to condemn us, but to give us life.

This is an invitation from God saying, draw near. This is an invitation for those who are away to come home. This is an invitation for recovery and repair.

Some years ago, I preached a message, have you forsaken your first love, and it ultimately made its way as part of a chapter in the book Go and Sin No More. And I laid out some symptoms, some areas to examine ourselves to see have we in fact forsaken our first love. It's just a few simple questions to ask.

And those of you that have walked with the Lord for a number of years, you know that conviction is a very sacred thing. You know that the Lord really putting His finger on something is a sign of nearness. You know it's different than the enemy who points out our faults to make us feel miserable and to drive us away.

The conviction of God is saying, this is wrong, now draw near so I can fix it. It may be painful when you go to the doctor and he identifies something and says, okay, the reason you've been feeling run down out of it and not functioning well all these months, it's this. However, you're going to have to completely alter your diet and lifestyle and go through serious surgery.

But we can fix this and you can be healthy the rest of your life. It may not be good news, but the good news is it can be fixed and turned. It can be fixed and turned.

And the amazing thing is, in a very short period of time, we begin to experience the loving restoration of God. In a moment of time, we can experience deep turning. And as we cry out corporately, as we seek His face corporately, He begins to pour His Spirit out and that's what we call revival.

A time of unusual divine visitation where it seems in a moment of time, stuff that normally takes years, it just happens. In a moment of time, things that wouldn't seem to break, wouldn't seem to yield, no matter what the pressure, boom, suddenly they break and yield. Perhaps together with other brothers and sisters in this region, we can help birth through prayer a fresh move of the Spirit.

Just a few questions to ask yourselves. Number one, has my personal devotion to Jesus decreased? Has my personal devotion to Jesus decreased? I mean, we can be very busy in spiritual activity. The fire community in many ways is busy and active.

But in the midst of all of it, I'm not just talking about some tiny little thing to tweak here and there. I'm talking about in a marked way, my devotion to Jesus. Some people have been married for a period of years and one of them just begins to get interested in so many other things, they neglect their spouse.

The joy that they experience together and the intimacy they experience together and the sense of romance they experience together and the union they had together. Come on, when things are wonderful in a relationship like that, outer circumstances are really somewhat secondary. You know, when you meet the person you're going to spend the rest of your life with and there's that deep love that's been formed between your hearts over a period of time, you don't care if it's raining today.

You go walking, holding hands, walking out in the rain. You don't care. And conversely, if the person that you're going to spend the rest of your life with has told you that's it, they've got no interest in you and they walk away from you, you don't care if the sun is shining and the birds are chirping.

It's a sad day. It may be beautiful outside, but it's raining in my heart. For new students here, I know you met the person of your dreams here yesterday and today they didn't seem as interested in you.

Just give a little time, all right? Give a little time. Same thing with the Lord. You know, He's not just this robotic God that responds to religious formulas.

And when you do it like this, He responds like this. I always differed with people who would use the expression, I've got the Word working for me, as if it was a formula. And as if God simply rubber-stamped that formula.

Do it like this and you'll be blessed. May be true, but more importantly, there's relationship. There's walking together.

There's enjoying life together in God. Has your personal devotion to Jesus decreased? It would always amaze me when I would see somebody worshipping God in a setting where the language was different, the culture was different. You know, they didn't understand the words of the psalm.

Everything was different. But they just realized Jesus was being worshipped and they were just so happy in the Lord. Because it wasn't the flow of the music that got them.

I really can't enter in. It's a different style of music. So I really can't enter into loving the Lord today.

As PA is a little loud, I really can't worship. I just need the right setting. Yeah, I'll be honest.

I feel more anointing when it's air-conditioned than when it's not. Or at least it feels like that. Sometimes it's easier to admit it.

Hey, that's just the flesh. Has your personal devotion to Jesus decreased? I said before, I've said it many times, it's as easy to deceive ourselves as it is to deceive anyone else. And sometimes we forget where we were a month ago, a year ago, two years ago, five years ago.

Sometimes you have to go back to a journal and see things you've written out before the Lord out of love for Him and intimacy with Him and desire for Him, or convictions that you wrote out to holy living and things like that. And you go back to it years later and you, that was me? That was me? Just talking to some young people we know whose lives we've been involved with through the years that live in another area where the husband's just messed up terribly, committed adultery. Talking to the wife and trying to reach out to the husband.

Think, what if you showed him now, played a recording for him when he was just pouring out his heart to her before they were married or when they were first married and how wonderful it was and how special she is and how she means everything. Read it now, it seems like a different person. We may not be engaging in all kinds of wicked acts.

Our lives may be cleaner than the world and even cleaner than a lot of other believers. We might even be disciplined on a certain level in terms of our daily times with God and still, like Ephesus, the congregation in Ephesus, despite all of its good works and the Lord commending them for persevering, despite their sifting out the false apostles, despite all that, the Lord rebuked them for forsaking their first love and told them to repent and do the first works or else. Has my personal devotion to Jesus decreased? Remember when you were hot, Jesus was everything.

You couldn't wait to spend time with Him, praising Him even with the simplest little choruses was pure joy. Just stay there one more minute. How many of you got saved in the church environment, the

congregational environment where you got saved was culturally very different than your own background? Okay.

Some of you, not a whole lot, but a number of you. I mean, my own experience was, you know, immersed in rock music, drug-using 16-year-old rebellious drummer, immersed in rock music, you know, heavy, hard rock music, Led Zeppelin, dazed and confused, Jimi Hendrix, Purple Haze, going from that to gospel ditties. In my heart there rings a melody.

Sunshine, sunshine in my soul. I have a song that Jesus gave me. Walked in the garden.

There was a song that we heard, came from Scotland, I don't know where it came from, that's what we heard. Not the most profound lyrical hymns in church history. It was called I'm Satisfied.

I'm satisfied, satisfied with Jesus. I am satisfied, satisfied in Him. How did it go? The camera, it was from Scotland.

Okay, how did the rest of it go? Got to sing it to get it. I'm still not getting it. We're only sang it 9 million times a day for 20 years, but I'm not... Every need has been supplied.

Praise the Lord, I'm satisfied. So that's how it went. I'm satisfied, satisfied with Jesus.

I'm satisfied, satisfied with Him. All my needs have been supplied. Praise the Lord, I'm satisfied.

I'm satisfied, satisfied with Him. Listen to me. So here I am, freshly, off shooting heroin, off, you know, mescaline, and LSD, and amphetamine, and methadrine, and every kind, and drinking, and every other kind of drug-induced stupor and experience, living a clean, holy life before the Lord, skipping down the street singing, I am satisfied, satisfied with Jesus.

All my needs have... Praise the Lord. With my hair still really long. It just adds to the skip of the whole picture there.

Now, can we be like that 24-7, all the days of our lives? Well, that's not even the goal. You know what I'm saying? That'd be great if that was the goal. We all just came skipping in to... Still satisfied? Yeah, praise the Lord.

All your needs still been supplied. Praise the Lord. You know, Peter even talks about sometimes enduring hardship, going through sorrow, and yet still rejoicing in the Lord.

There are trials and tests, and it's not a matter of just plastering a smile on our face. Years ago, Nancy and I saw this couple speaking that was on Christian television, and they were just sharing their miracles, one miracle after another after another. If I remember, they had the chicken miracle, where they had no money and no food, and every day... Remember, this is not Third World, this is here in the States.

Every day when they would, you know, they'd eat the chicken to the bone, and put it in the refrigerator and close the door, and the next day, praise the Lord, they'd open it, it was full again and replenished, and they'd eat that same thing. And as they went on, just kind of recounting one miracle after another after another, and how amazing life was. I remember at a certain point, Nancy leaned over to me and said, I wish they would stop smiling.

There was a certain artificiality to the whole testimony after a while. Did you ever have a hard day? Did you ever have a bad day? Did you ever have a difficult day? Did you ever get edgy, anxious, annoyed? The last thing I'm talking about is a superficial putting on of a religious act. But some of us have swung, and certainly at different times in my spiritual life, walking with the Lord, I've swung far, far, far from that... that radical being caught up with Jesus.

And Him just being so wonderful. Let's say that was hitting a 10. You say, is it possible to live at a 10 all the time? How about a 4? Maybe a 6. See, we have this resolve, we have this commitment, we walk with the Lord, we're not going to backslide in terms of denying the faith or walking away into some serious sin.

We're followers of Jesus, but we're lacking something so fundamental. He says, come back. Come back.

Do the work you did at first. Be diligent with your schedule and shut things down and look to see where the idols have crept in. The other interests, the other loves, the other things seeping and taking your energy, grabbing your heart.

Has my personal devotion to Jesus decreased? Two, and I touched on this already, has my personal satisfaction in God decreased? My personal satisfaction in God. It has struck me over the years through ministry how much satisfaction I get through God doing certain things or blessing the ministry of His Word or opening up doors to do what He's called us to do. Those are all good things as opposed to just a fundamental satisfaction in God.

Do you feel the need for things other than God to gain fulfillment? Are you increasingly seeking social orientation in place of private devotions? Do you find that more and more you desire recognition and acceptance by persons of flesh and blood? Has my personal satisfaction in God decreased? Robert Murray McShane from Scotland said this, If you are ever so much engrossed with any enjoyment here that it takes away your love for prayer or for your Bible, or that it would frighten you to hear the cry, Behold the bridegroom cometh, then your heart is overcharged. Using the words of Luke 21-34 in the King James. Paul talks about those who love the Lord's appearing.

We're not a congregation that teaches every week about the latest details of prophetic fulfillment, but there should be an anticipation, a desire, a longing in our heart for the return of the King. Longing for His appearing so we can see Him and be with Him and become like Him. And so that ultimately there will be an end to the suffering and pain of this world.

Just a couple more. Has my passion for spiritual work decreased? Has my passion for spiritual work decreased? This can be reflected by a decreased burden for the lost, a decreased burden for revival and visitation, and a penchant for respectability in place of radicality. Has my passion for spiritual work increased? Maybe you just get settled in.

Okay, I kind of found my niche here. I found out how to be a balanced Christian. I found out how to be a follower of Jesus and live in this world.

I found out how to be a follower of Jesus and have a job, raise a family, be in school, etc., etc. Maybe you needed to strike a certain balance, but it's never at the expense of a burden. It's never at the expense of a heart that longs to see the gospel go forth.

Just because God has taught you the spirituality of holding a job and the spirituality of raising a family and the spirituality of generating funds for the kingdom and the spirituality of being a godly example in your

community, doesn't mean that the fire goes out for the burden. Doesn't mean that we just settle in and become nice Christians, nice, toothless, tame, non-threatening followers of Jesus that everybody likes. Has my passion for spiritual work decreased? Maybe you thought, man, God was going to use me to preach and I burned with that and then it worked out differently.

That doesn't mean the burden leaves. Doesn't mean the burden for the Word leaves. Doesn't mean the passion for souls leaves.

Number four, have my standards of holiness become lower? The danger is this is often done in the name of spiritual maturity. There was a reason why when you were really in that special place with the Lord and the Word was burning in your heart, you said, Lord, I won't touch that again. Lord, I won't watch that again.

Lord, I won't be around this again. Then over a period of time, things creep in. You get used to it, become insensitive.

Come on, the first time you see a certain thing or hear a certain thing, you can't even look at it or hear it, get near it, but if you're around it enough, you become desensitized. And being in the midst of the world, you can't get away from things totally. You may be around people on your job that are profane and godless.

You may have to watch your eyes as you're walking down the street. There may just be junk that's around. We can't get totally away from it, but we can check to see if our heart has become hard.

If the Lord said, go back to Bethel, say, okay, let me shut this off, turn this down, get away from this. Just give me a few days to get my head clear, then I'm ready. Listen, if you have standards without the Savior, if you have laws without love, if you have rules without relationship, you have legalism.

If you have people just trying to put outward things on you and say, you must conform to this norm in order to be spiritual, that's legalism. But it doesn't mean that the standards themselves are wrong standards. It just means they haven't been written on your heart.

Maybe you were into a legalistic righteousness before, and now you've thrown that off, but God hasn't changed His standards. Purity is still purity. Things still grieve Him.

Look, I can tell you about one thing in particular I've seen in my own life that I was convicted about many years ago. Just enjoying violent sport, boxing specifically. I was convicted about it years ago, but if I've watched it since then, I don't feel anything.

I don't feel any conviction. It doesn't bother me. God doesn't have to convict me again.

How I feel is not the guiding light. One friend told me about a couple that came to a professor for prayer. He was a professor at Oral Roberts University, as the story was told to me.

Man and woman came up to him for prayer and asked him to pray for God's blessing on their relationship. And as he went to pray, just about to pray for them, he just felt something funny and said, Are you married? And they said, Oh yes, yes. Both said, We're married.

So he goes to pray again, but still feels something funny. So he asks them a question you'd never dream of asking. To each other? Are you married to each other? And they said, Oh no, but our divorces are almost through.

And we know the Lord is in our relationship because before we're together, sexually, before we're together, we pray in tongues and really feel the blessing of the Lord. It's just different levels of self-deception is all it is. And when something is not explicitly addressed in the Word, many times we have to go by what God convicts us of in our own personal lives.

And if we're not as close to the fire, if some of the stench of the world is on us, if our hearts have grown insensitive, it can be dangerous to just say, I don't feel convicted about that anymore. Perhaps it's something we need to go back to God and say, Father, if that was really you, would you remind me of what you spoke to me or what I felt at that time? Or would you help me to see the principle behind this so I can live this out regardless of how I feel? Have my standards of holiness become lower? And then lastly, am I backsliding in spiritual authority and personal victory? Am I backsliding in spiritual authority and personal victory? I'm speaking here to some of the dads and husbands as we have a special responsibility in our household. Do you have that same touch in your life that when attack comes, you can assure the family you've got things in control? That you can just go after the enemy and that you're aggressive? That your stand is strong? Be the same with mom's home, with your kids? Chaos seems to break loose? Hey, nothing's going to happen because mom knows Jesus.

Just in your personal life, maybe there are things that start to creep in and times past, you just go after the enemy. Times past, man, you just even if there was nothing there, you'd go stomping and smashing it out. And now there's a timidity, now there's a lack of ability to shut the door in Jesus' name.

It's a result of backsliding. Backsliding in heart. Idols come in.

Paul asked the Galatians a profound question. What happened to your joy? Joy is not the barometer of everything. And there may be times of mourning and pain in our lives in between other seasons of joy.

But just as an ongoing measurement in our lives, there is something to it. What happened to the joy? Why? Because when things are right with God, there's a certain sense of freedom you have. The ultimate sense of joy you have is God's with me and everything's alright.

That's the foundation of it. God's with me. He's good.

He's God. He's with me. Everything's alright.

You just get those surges of joy sometimes when you get hit with that. Nancy and I were out driving around yesterday and something happened. I just read one little thing, but out of the blue, I just had this surge of joy.

I knew there was that sense of God saying, I'm with you. I'm going to fulfill my purposes. Listen, God is not sitting here with a club saying, what happened to your joy? I said, what happened to your joy? That is not the joyful God that we're speaking of.

It's an appeal to say if something's missing, if something's lacking, come and be healed. Come and be restored. Come and be repaired.

Come and take steps back. Come and resolve to go after God. When the word comes, it's time to seek the Lord till he comes and rains righteousness on us.

Like Hosea 10-12 and other verses like that that make it clear there's an opportunity. There's a window open. We go after it.

We seek God during those times. We take advantage of it. You say, well, wasn't there a message about this two weeks ago? Yeah, there may be a message in two weeks and another two weeks.

God's calling us in. He's calling us deeper. For those that say, hey, I'm going to pray for others, but I tell you, this really doesn't apply to me.

Listen to me. That's the best thing you could tell me. Unless you're self-deceived, that's the best thing you could tell me.

The very best thing you could say is, praise God. My walk with the Lord is more solid than it's ever been. Or praise God, you're a little fine-tuning here and there, but no, I can not answer any of those questions in the positive.

It's all in the negative, because no, my personal devotion hasn't decreased, and my personal satisfaction in God hasn't decreased, and my burden hasn't decreased, and my standards of holiness haven't lowered, and my spiritual authority is strong. That would be the best thing. The best thing to do is preach a message like this, and nobody responded because nobody needed to.

But God's calling us in. God's calling us deeper. If your life is in a great place with God, it's an invitation to seek Him more.

It's an invitation to be touched by Heaven all the more so that you can touch other lives. For those that feel you need some fine-tuning, God's saying, come after me, keep coming after me, keep making decisions. Look, this is something that's a daily, a weekly, a monthly thing.

You keep reminding yourself, go after God. Turn back from this, go after God. Get some extra time, go after God.

And when it starts to haunt you like condemnation, that's when you just step back and worship Him and praise Him and remind yourself this is an invitation from Heaven. This is an invitation from Heaven. And for those that say seriously, whoa, yeah, I think I had the wrong answer on every question.

Well, it's the right answer for the message because those are the ones God's here to help. Those are the ones God's here to turn. If they're idols in your life, get rid of them.

Come back to Bethel, that place where you met with God. If He's drawing you in, respond. Today, if you hear His voice, don't harden your heart and continue to pursue Him, continue to go after Him, continue to take opportunities to meet with Him.

And I tell you, breakthroughs will come on a personal and on a corporate level. If we do the things we did at first, we will experience the restoration and the blessing of God. And the best days for each one of us can yet be ahead in the Lord.

Let's stand to our feet together. Here's what we're going to do. I ask everybody to be respectful of this.

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