

Aaress Lawless: As young men, Al Henson and Paul Lawler each found themselves asking, "Where are the spiritual fathers?" Unable to find someone to speak to them heart to heart and life to life, they purposed and one day become spiritual fathers themselves. Hi, my name is Aaress Lawless and welcome to Sage Talk. This episode is dedicated to helping you become a spiritual parent to those God has brought into your life. Now with over 75 years of pastoring between them, and decades of walking among the nations as a minister to the persecuted church and the least of these. Let's join Al and Paul as they shepherd the hearts of faithful servants and Christian leaders in today's edition of Sage Talk.

Paul Lawler: Hi, my name is Paul Lawler and I am with Al Henson, founder of the Compassionate Hope Foundation, and this is Sage Talk. Al, Sage Talk is a podcast that's designed for the heart of God's servants. Another way we might put that is, that these are conversations really intended to shepherd the heart of God's servants.

Al Henson: Yes. Thank you Paul. And to this brother, sister that's listing in, what God has put upon our hearts is to be a shepherd to those brothers and sisters that are hungry for the Lord. And to, in some ways, spiritually father them, spiritually mother them, and to the continuation of their spiritual growth. And a part of our hearts is that I remember ... I'm 67 now. I'm an old man in some ways, even though in spirit and heart I feel like a young man. When I was in my twenties, I was a young man pursuing God in a very passionate, strong level. And I began to run across in scriptures spiritual fathers like Jesus who was perfect, and Paul, and others. And I remember crying out in my heart, where are the spiritual fathers?

Al Henson: I'm sure they were around, but the things that I was reading and studying, I couldn't find that in my own life. And I had to find Christ for decades almost as enough. And wonder what my life could have been progressive like if I had have had someone older, maturer, full of faith, full of the spirit, full of the wisdom of God that could have helped guide and direct in my life. And I know Paul, you had had a similar kind of passionate heart as a young man.

Paul Lawler: Very much so. I was out of seminary in my early days of church planting and I too began crying out. In fact, I even approached persons that were farther along in the faith than I was and really wanted to be mentored. I longed to have someone father me, but at that stage in history that never came to fruition. I remember praying in my late twenties and early thirties that "Father, as I get older that if you'll give me the grace to live into it, that I will pour into the next generation, I will encourage and seek to love and father those that come after me."

Al Henson: And you know, Paul, I prayed a similar prayer and that was 40 years ago. And I certainly have no prideful thought that I am a spiritual father but many have said so. And I have felt that fatherly heart and part of the birthing of this podcast is coming out of that. A passion that in my life with my wife Susan, you

are one of those. I don't know, hundreds and hundreds that have come and stayed two days at our house and then we've built a relationship with. We've been married 46 years and we were discussing the other evening that there's probably only been about two years of the 46 years that we've not had someone, that's not including our children, living with us. That's come to live with us for a week, or for months, or for a few months that we might truly spiritually father them heart on heart, life on life. And all through these years I said, "God please one day could you by your grace help me become a spiritual father."

Paul Lawler: And you know, Al, as you, as you share that, I'm one of those whose life has been impacted by that sense, that place in your heart where you pour into others, you really do father others. And I'm mindful that while you may not carry that label for yourself, that others have said that about you and including myself on many occasions. If we could for a moment, why don't we look at the scriptures at how this is actually reflected very clearly out of the heart of God.

Al Henson: Yeah, I think that it'd be great Paul. I'm going to let you start. I think we're going to look at four or five passages and just read them or discuss them. But I'm thinking right now about that brother, sister that is listening in and I would encourage you in two kinds of ways as you're listening in. One, perhaps you see a need to be spiritually fathered, or spiritually mothered. Then this podcast is for you. But you also would like to become a spiritual father and a spiritual mother. And I hope you do want to become that. God wants you to become that. That is the will of God for your life. And I hope that these podcasts will be a blessing to you in that process of your own growth and transformation towards spiritual father. So Paul, why don't you jump in with a passage description? We'll just go back and forth with a few verses of scripture here and just chat about those a bit.

Paul Lawler: Yeah, sounds excellent. Let's start. 1 Corinthians 4:15, where the apostle Paul wrote, "For though you have countless gods in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ through the Gospel." Now that is a spiritually paternal type of statement that reflects the heart in a unique way. Does it not?

Al Henson: Yes, absolutely. And Paul is basically saying here that you have many people to encourage you. You have many people that have helped you, but I was your spiritual father. And you have not many fathers. And Paul knew that fatherhood ... And I think it would be important to state here that in my early years, in twenties and thirties, which was 45 years ago, the general thought was discipleship. Mentoring was a matter of classroom. And one of the things I learned is that you can't disciple and mentor the masses. You don't see that kind of thing taking place in scripture now. And I am in no way opposed to any kind of teaching and ministry of God's word, whether it be in a classroom or large setting at all. All of those things are very helpful, but when we're talking about when the scriptures and what Paul is speaking about in this passage, and

spiritual fathering is a phrase that I coined 30 something years ago. Life on life. Heart to heart.

Al Henson: Another passage then is in 1 John in Chapter 2. The apostle John who was very close to Jesus, I think perhaps the closest of all the disciples of the Lord Jesus. And perhaps when you look at the apostle John, he very well ... The others were probably 30 years old and more, because of the Jewish culture. To be respected you had to be older. And so Jesus called Peter and James and others to him that were 30. More than likely, John, if you research the age, he could have been a 16, 17, 18 year old young man. Especially when you think about the writing of the book of Revelation and the number of years between that and the crucifixion of Jesus. Had he been 18 he would've been 80 something by the time he wrote the book of Revelation. So I think in some ways, John may have been, in the heart kind of way, like a son to Jesus.

Paul Lawler: Yes, yes.

Al Henson: And then John writes the book of John. Then he writes 1, 2, 3 John, and he's used of God to write the book of Revelation. But in 1 John, in Chapter 1 and 2, the apostle John lays out a spiritual progression. A spiritual development. He doesn't use the word baby. Paul will use the word baby in Christ in 1 Corinthians, but John in 1 John 2 will mention the child, spiritual children, little children. Then he'll mention the young man speaking, and he's taking physical to describe spiritual. The young man would be like a spiritual teenager. And then he goes beyond that and speaks about spiritual fathers. And it's interesting that with the spiritual children, John is saying how you cease to be a baby in Christ and begin to become a spiritual child, is that you walk in the light. You become a vulnerable person, openhearted and you begin to be transparent and you really walk in the light with God, and with others and you're willing easily to confess sin.

Al Henson: Then moving from a child to a young man is all around your love and hunger for the word of God and studying. And it says this young man and the word of God abides in him. He's learning. So if you begin to think about this, most of the church in America may still be in babyhood, or at best in spiritual child. But how many people have you met in the kingdom, Paul, that actually walk in humility and integrity that they're open and honest about their need of God? They feel it deeply. And that's necessary to move from a baby to a young child.

Paul Lawler: Yes. Yeah, we need more of this. Keep going.

Al Henson: But the spiritual fatherhood that we're talking about, he says the spiritual father has known him, that is, from the beginning. And if I might share just a word of testimony of what I was surrendering my life to the Lord, I say ... I didn't use the word surrender. I actually said, "God, tonight I want Al Henson dead. The old Al. And I want you to raise up the new Al in you to live the walk." And I was thinking, "What do I want to write down as the purpose for my life?" And I

thought all about many things being a pastor, or planting churches, or making disciples, or fulfilling the great commandment to love God and all ... And finally I got down, "Oh, that's it. My purpose of my life is I need to love God."

Al Henson: And I remember that night that the Holy spirit asking me, "Okay, now how are you going to do that?" And I remember thinking, "I can't. I want to, it sounds like that would be a good purpose for a man's life to love God." And then the Lord led me to Philippians 3, Paul's writing when he says that I may know him. I count everything else, but done and I said, "Oh, that's it. God." If I can know you, if you'll let me find you, then I can love you.

Paul Lawler: Yes, Lord.

Al Henson: And then later I was reading in this 1 John 2, and it says that a spiritual father has known him. That is from the beginning.

Paul Lawler: That's good. Yes.

Al Henson: And so at 21 that began to put me on a path to spiritual fatherhood. And the word known there is experiential. It's not head knowledge. It's not theological knowledge. It's not doctrinal knowledge. And through the word of God and through our circumstances in the life we're living is our classroom. This is where God is teaching us. We're growing and walking with God through life. As I pursued to know him, really wanted to know him, just know him. God began to reveal himself to me. And I think this knowing him means that we can experience in a deep, deep level, on a regular basis the thoughts of God and the heart of God.

Al Henson: And this is what characterizes a spiritual father, that this brother, this sister ... When we're talking about spiritual fatherhood, we're not talking about the male only.

Paul Lawler: That's right.

Al Henson: We're talking about a spiritual motherhood in essence. And a so you sisters that are listening in God wants you to be a spiritual mother, a godly woman. And a godly woman will be that woman that has known him experientially when she speaks of God, you know that woman knows God.

Paul Lawler: That's right.

Al Henson: She doesn't know about God, she knows God.

Paul Lawler: Yes, Lord.

Al Henson: And I wanted God to help me. I wanted to become a man who just didn't know about God, that knew God because I knew God was beautiful, perfect, pure, almighty.

Paul Lawler: Worthy of knowing, yeah.

Al Henson: Yes. And I wanted to be able to like a lover, I wanted to be able to talk to people about God and help them to see God, and know God. And that's what a spiritual father is. I might say this, I was running in some discipleship circles at 25 years old and 26 years old and I didn't say much. When you're a young man, you just keep your mouth shut and grow and learn. And there's wisdom in that. But I remember them saying, "Oh, if you've led to Christ now you're a spiritual father." And I thought in essence they're right in this sense, by God's grace, you've helped birth someone. And you need to, like an older brother or someone that's maybe a little further along, help them along the way. You certainly don't want to lead someone to Christ and not help them along the way.

Al Henson: But even then I was thinking, "No, they're not ... Don't declare them a spiritual father."

Paul Lawler: That's right. Yes.

Al Henson: Because it's not what the Bible is speaking about, when it talks of Paul as a spiritual father, or John as a spiritual father.

Paul Lawler: I think that's so important. Everything that you've shared, but that last bit that you just shared Al, particularly around what is a spiritual father. The Bible has so much more to say around this topic. This topic pops up, or shows up, in the book of Malachi. In Malachi, in the word there in Chapter 4:6, the scripture gives this description of the latter times. It says, "And God, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers." Now I recognize that may not be speaking specifically to spiritual fathering, spiritual mothering, but it reflects that this matter is important to God.

Al Henson: Yes. Well, God is a father. He's a son, he's a spirit, but he's also the father. And even in we're praying "Our Father who art in Heaven." And Jesus wanted us to know God as father, so we could trust him. And if Christ is in us, and working through us, then he wants to work through us to that we feel to others as spiritual fathers, as spiritual mothers. Obviously, another passage of Paul would be ... I'd like to just use Jesus as an example. He's obviously the perfect one in this, and we're so imperfect. But in Mark, in Chapter 3:14, Jesus is calling his disciples. He's choosing his disciples.

Al Henson: And I love this in what he says. He says, "And he went to the mountain to pray." And I would like to say to anyone, if you want to spiritually father someone,

spiritually mother someone, start with prayer. And trust God to lead the right people to you. But he was praying and then after he prayed, it says, "He called to him those he himself wanted." I love that.

Paul Lawler: That's powerful.

Al Henson: God wants us. 10,000 times more than we want to love God, or think about loving God. He loves us and he wants us. And in my twenties like, "Oh God wants Al. God really wants me." And I again asked, "What does he want from me? And I learned what he primarily wanted from me was my heart. And he wanted me to love him, but he says, "Those he himself wanted and they came to him that they might be with him." And I've learned in spiritual fathering, I don't go out and seek people to father.

Paul Lawler: Yeah. You don't have to, do you?

Al Henson: No.

Paul Lawler: Yeah.

Al Henson: I have to say no often. I have this young man in Alaska just three or four months ago that I met, and within within 30, 40 minutes, he said, "Would you father me?" And I hadn't talked about fatherhood. "Would you mentor me?" And I looked at him and I said to him, "I can't say no, and I can't say yes. But I can tell you that I will pray. And you have my phone number. And you can text me if you would like." You see Jesus called those he himself wanted, and it says they came to him. One of the things I was seeing was with this young man, was he hungry enough that he would pursue? Would he go ... He had had a lot of deep wounds in his life. Would he pursue fatherhood? Spiritual fatherhood.

Al Henson: Next thing I know every other day he's saying, "Al, I'm just texting. I'm praying for you. If you have a few minutes, could we talk?" And finally know after a few weeks I knew he wanted to be with me. And so I set up a time to talk with him on the phone and now we're doing that regularly. And Alaska's a long ways away. This is the heart of a father. Where already I'm talking with the people around, is there a way we could set up some kind of Zoom, including him and maybe a few others where we could do some spiritual fathering. Because fatherhood, "Those who came then," it says, "that they might be with him." And this "with him," It's certainly more than a head to head.

Paul Lawler: Absolutely.

Al Henson: It's heart to heart. And it's life to life. Just a side note here, watching and observing in the kingdom, one of the problems that I see is because our culture is so dysfunctional now. And people have been so deeply wounded that when it comes to relationships, even husband and wife relationships, parent child relationships, people cannot connect at the heart level. And I actually believe

Paul, that the majority of our people sitting in our church services on Sunday morning cannot connect with God-

Paul Lawler: ... at a heart level.

Al Henson: ... at a heart level. They're connecting with God at a head level and not a heart level. And spiritual fathering allows a person to gain a grace place.

Paul Lawler: Yes, Lord.

Al Henson: A safe place. Those are the two words. A grace place and a safe place where they can ... Like what we said about the spiritual child for the first time they can become vulnerable, and feel safe. They can become open and feel safe. And ultimately in this passage then Paul, I know we need to move on, "He did this, that he might send them out from him."

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: That they themselves might then start mothering, and fathering, discipling and caring for others.

Paul Lawler: I know we just have a few more minutes, but there's one more passage of scripture that comes to mind. We're mindful that what you just stated, first so that they may be with Jesus, but also that he sent them out. I think about Paul's spiritually fathering Timothy. And when we read the books of 1 and 2 Timothy, we see all of this imagery being played out of Paul continuing to pour into Timothy, and to encourage him as a spiritual father. But there's also a key verse. Well, I think there are many key verses, but there's one particular verse that stands out just in terms of what he's instructing Timothy to do. It's that verse that many of us know. 2 Timothy 2:2 "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses and trust of faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Would you share a comment or two on that?

Al Henson: Yeah. I'm thinking right now about the pastor listening in, or the spiritual leader listening in and they're thinking about their impact of their life. And we're always thinking about the crowd. I'm not opposed to that, and God's not, there were crowds around Jesus at times. But Jesus had a ministry both to the multitude and had a ministry to the few. And I would ask that spiritual leader listening in, which would you say impacted the kingdom and eternity more, his ministry to the multitude, or his ministry to the few? The obvious answer is, is to the few. I'm 67, and when Susan and I looked back over our lives, we've preached to thousands around the world. We've pastored and shepherded churches. But when I look back, the real impact over these last 45 years have been the hundreds.

Al Henson: Now after 45 years, it's not just 12, it's hundreds and hundreds of those that we took the time to invite them into our lives and we stepped into theirs. Heart to

heart, life to life, spirit to spirit with Jesus, with one another. Searching the scriptures, digging into our ... Letting God dig with us into our own souls. That is where the fruit and the impact has come. And so now I love the idea Paul that we can do a podcast like this, with this purpose in mind of ... And in some ways mothering and fathering some but encouraging others to be spiritual fathers and spiritual mothers.

Paul Lawler: Amen. You know, as you share that out, let's just take a moment to, in that spirit, to encourage someone today, that to pray and to seek to mother or father someone in the Lord. Or maybe there's someone listening that they need to be, have a spiritual father or spiritual mother and to be in that place where they are being mentored and molded and shaped. And I want to encourage those listening today that even what we share, just may they share it with others as well to encourage movement like this.

Al Henson: And just a sort of a teaser for next, we're going to shift next podcast into transformation. Which this is truly what when you're fathering, you're looking for. It's what God's looking for in our lives that we might be conformed in the image of Jesus Christ, that we might be transformed into his likeness. So we're going to talk about the desire of God the father, the desire of any spiritual father, spiritual mother is transformation in the life of those that they're ministering to and walking around. Paul would you close us today then in prayer?

Paul Lawler: It would be an honor. Let's pray together. So father, as we've had the opportunity today to look at your word together and share, Lord, around the benefits and the gifts of spiritual fathering, spiritual mothering, we recognize this comes out of the image of who you are.

Al Henson: Yes. Lord.

Paul Lawler: Lord, the word even tells us that when Paul went and served the church, that he was like a spiritual mother, in the context that when we gather among you like a nursing mother taking care of her own children as the scripture says in 1 Thessalonians. And so Lord it's out of this imagery that we pray that you continue to do the indelible work of the development of hearts of fathers, heart of spiritual mothers in continuing to birth, nurture, develop the heart of people, your people, for your glory, and we pray this in the strong and eternal name of Jesus.

Aaress Lawless: I hope each one of you were able to echo Paul's prayer, that God would grow us into spiritual parents. If this episode of Sage Talk spoke to your heart, we'd love to hear from you. Al and Paul welcome your thoughts and you can email us at info@sagetalkpodcast.com. In our next episode, Al and Paul will be sharing about the catalyst God uses to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. Make sure you subscribe to our podcast so you don't miss this insightful episode on spiritual transformation. You can also visit our website at sagetalkpodcast.com

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