

Note: Note: The following is a transcription and may include slight errors or deviations from the actual podcast.

Paul Lawler: Hi, I'm Paul Lawler. I've had the privilege of being a pastor for 31 years. I've served Christ Church Birmingham as the senior pastor since 2007. I have the privilege of sitting here with Al Henson, who has been a pastor for over 40 years, and is currently serving since 2000-

Al Henson: 11.

Paul Lawler: We're going to continue our conversation today around the topic of transformation. As we've journeyed together the last several weeks, we have talked about the relationship between spiritual fathering, spiritual mothering, and transformation as it relates particularly to the presence of God, the manifest presence of God in our lives and in the lives of others. We've recognized that this is strategic for not only our development but also the development of people that we influence and serve for the glory of God. As we pick up this conversation today, Al, I'm going to turn to you because we're going to move a little bit today into the role of spiritual fathering, spiritual mothering, and transformation as it relates to the richness of Christian fellowship. May I-

Al Henson: Yes, yes.

Paul Lawler: ... pass the baton to you?

Al Henson: As we have people listening in to these podcasts, some of the responses we're getting, even in the last several ones, Paul, on a transformation, as you have said, people that are saying, "We are understanding a bit of how that's done now through coming into the presence of God, but how do you actually walk that out? How, as a follower of Jesus, do I practice that so that I can have transformation and so that I then also, my goal is to become a spiritual father and a spiritual mother to father others to be transformed enough that God would entrust me with the spiritual fathering or mothering of others?"

Al Henson: We've been taking a passage each time. If you remember back, 2 Corinthians 3:18, getting into the presence of God, we must unveil our face, our very essence without fear, just come into the presence of God. Romans 12, tying into that, then when we come into the presence of God unveiled, the first thing is just say, "God, here I am." Romans 12:1, Paul is begging us by the mercies of God to present ourselves to God, and so when we come into the presence of God, we just come. I love the song Just As I Am. I come in just as I am. God, here I am, beautiful mess, and I want to be like your son, Jesus, because I know that's what you want me to be like.

Al Henson: Well, 1 John gives us the same message with different words. I love 1 John because it gives us some of the treasures and the values of living and walking

this kind of way. For John, you know, as one of the major apostles, and verses 1 and 2, I won't read it, but verses 1 and 2 of 1 John, he gets very intimate about Jesus. He said, "We heard him, we touched him, we felt him, we beheld him." It's almost like he steps away from the humanity of Jesus for a moment and says, "This life, this divine life was manifested to us."

Al Henson: Now, verse 3, which I will read, "And that which we have seen and heard, we declare unto you that you may have fellowship with us. Truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ." What John is saying here, that the intentions of God and the gospel, and the power of the gospel in changing us, bringing us into Christ, bringing us into the body of Christ into one another; and being able with the veil ripped to individually and collectively get into the presence of God, that if we do that, then we have a deep sense of participation in life, in hurt and pain. We mourn when they mourn, we weep in the weep, we rejoice, we know each other, we're vulnerable. This matter of openness and transparency is not only to be toward God but to be toward our brothers and sisters.

Al Henson: In verse 7, this is the phrase we want to focus on, "But if you walk in the light, as he is in the light, then you can have, truly, you can have this kind of intimate fellowship with one another." The Greek word here really is talking about a deep experiential intimacy, spiritually, soulful, in the soul area with one another. Then, verse 4 says this, "I write these things," John says to you, "that your joy might be full." Brother, sister, you listening?

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: How would you like to live and walk in the fullness of joy?

Paul Lawler: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So good.

Al Henson: The fullness of joy, even Psalm 16:11, this great man of God, David, David says, "In his presence is the fullness of joy."

Al Henson: John is actually saying, "In the presence of God and in the presence of brothers and sisters, unveiled, vulnerable; walking in the light." That's what it means, walking in the light, which means both walking in vulnerability, honesty, and openness before one another, but also walking out in the truths of God.

Paul Lawler: It's kind of like an unveiled face with one another. Keep going.

Al Henson: Then, this is the way transformation takes place, and our lives, it's not just being transformed, now we're actually experiencing the joy of the Lord.

Al Henson: Nehemiah would say, "Yeah, enjoy the Lord. It's where your strength will come from."

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: Amen.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: Paul said, "Today, we want to take this with the other texts that we've had, and you and I, perhaps, share some stories of our walks with God and our own transformation, and with others that could help people practically think through how this has happened and how it takes place."

Paul Lawler: You know, I think I would begin with an example with a group of men that I journeyed with for a period of time in a discipleship group. We had some study material, a lot of great studies out there and we utilize that faithfully, but we began to notice something. We began to notice that in our prayer times as people begin to open up and pray when we would begin the study, they were getting a little longer. As those prayer times got a little longer, there were these moments where the Lord was making his presence known among us. We got to where, without meaning to, sometimes we would pray for an entire hour, and the study, we might or might not get to. That wasn't intentional. I'm not saying that that's prescriptive always, but that's what we did.

Paul Lawler: Well, as the presence of God, as we've been talking about, became tangible in our midst, there was an evening where a brother, he began to weep. We knew it was something that the Lord, in a very loving way, was putting light on in his heart. We just gathered around him and just waited for him to compose himself. He opened up and shared something that he had gone through actually decades ago that was very deep, very personal. It had marked him. He had battled keeping that secret and the shame in which the enemy had also sewn into his life, how he was so bound up, it crippled him spiritually.

Al Henson: But at that moment, he was walking in the light.

Paul Lawler: That's right.

Al Henson: He was unveiling his [crosstalk 00:09:13].

Paul Lawler: Then as he began to share, and as you're sharing, the very light of God is touching him. He puts it in the light. He shares it openly with his brothers. As he did, those men took such a gracious posture of listening, then gathering around him, and praying over him.

Al Henson: Would you say, Paul, that this immediately brought about a deeper, intimate presence of God?

Paul Lawler: Oh, there's no question. In fact, not only was every ... every man in that room was marked by the indelible moment of what was happening in God's presence.

Al Henson: Holy, holy.

Paul Lawler: It was holy, but in addition, I have witnessed this particular man, who shared his life, since that moment, it's just a story of a captive being set free through the power of God in the midst of fellowship in Christ with one another.

Al Henson: Amen, amen.

Paul Lawler: Because his life has never been the same.

Al Henson: What a story.

Paul Lawler: This is a highly educated person who is a teacher, that it transformed his walk and it affected other people in a God-honored way.

Al Henson: Probably every man in that room remembers that time.

Paul Lawler: Absolutely.

Al Henson: The point they remember is not necessarily what the man said, but the point they remember, God is with us.

Paul Lawler: God.

Al Henson: God, it's about God.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: There is where worship really deepens, ah, God. I was thinking as you were sharing that, sort of a sister passage with 1 John is James 5, which says "If we confess our faults one to another and pray for one another, then God will heal." The idea of confessing our faults was this is what he did.

Al Henson: It enabled you, brothers that were present, to know better where he needed to be loved, how he needed to be loved, how to pray for him, how he needed to, his feet needed to be washed, how according to Galatians 6, "Bear ye, one ... how we need to bare. We had no idea that our brother was carrying such a burden. Now, we know how to supply the spirit and the grace of God in his life to help him to bear that burden.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: This matter, where we're breaking into today, of walking this out, this matter of getting into the presence of God, unveiling this, your yourself; it's not just apart from the body of Christ.

Paul Lawler: That's right, so good.

Al Henson: It's with the body of Christ. I think, Paul, as you were sharing, I really feel that I'd like to tell a story about how I allowed this to function in practice as a father and as a husband, and how it affected my family, our family life, and our children; this matter of the presence of God. I had been thinking about this and been getting to enjoy in my late twenties, a deeper, ever-growing presence of God and thinking about my family. I was reading 1 John about walking in the light and I thought, "You know, I'm really not walking in the light with my wife and my children as I am with you, God." I thought, "I don't want my children to not think highly of their dad, but if I began to tell them some of the truth ... The context of all of this is when we begin to move with others in the light, we need to speak wisely and appropriately at the appropriate time with the appropriate people.

Al Henson: Paul, I went home one evening, and it was back in the day when you were pastor, you had to wear your coat and ties. I remember that because the tie is going to be important in the story in the moment. But, I come home, we have a nice dinner, as we did. The family talking about the family some, just sweet unity. My children were, my daughter would have been eight or nine years old, my middle son would have been five or six, and my youngest son would have been about four, so these were smaller children. As I had done times before we, I said, "Can we just gather in the living room in the floor. Dad has some things he'd like to talk about."

Al Henson: The family was open to that, so we come over, and I said, "Today," to my wife Susan and to my children, I said, "I'd like to talk to you a little bit about the kind of conversations I have with God sometimes about your daddy." I just opened up my heart and begin to tell them that often I tell God how selfish a daddy I am. I used a couple of illustrations where, "You've seen me do this or that and I want you to know that your dad has areas of selfishness." I talked about pride and talked about how I let my pride hurt your mother from time to time. My pride, only by pride comes contention and conflict. This went on for a few minutes.

Al Henson: The more I opened up like this, the more tender my heart got, and the more I became grateful for such a gracious God. I found myself prostrating myself before God in the Jewish kind of way, where I'm on my knees, and my head is down into the carpet, but I'm not laying flat, flat on the carpet. I just start praying out loud, the kind of prayers I'd often pray privately about being a husband and father, just crying out to God, telling him how much I loved my wife, how much I loved my children, and how much I wanted them to walk with

God and be godly. I needed your help, God, to be the kind of father that ought to be, to love my wife as Christ loved the church, and to be the right example of the heavenly Father. I just poured my heart out.

Al Henson: Next thing I know, Paul and brothers, sisters, you listening; on one shoulder, I felt my daughter. It was as if they wanted to get as close to their dad as they could. On the other shoulder, I felt my middle son. My littlest son didn't know where to go, he couldn't find a place, so he crawls up underneath me as I kneel, between my face, my chest and in my legs. I could hear Lacy, "Daddy, you're not such a bad daddy. You're okay, Daddy. We love you, Daddy. You're a good daddy, you're a good daddy." They were trying to comfort me-

Paul Lawler: Precious.

Al Henson: ... because they knew that I was sorrowing, repenting, and sorrowing before the Lord. I'll never forget this day, and I've used it many times in many contexts. But then, my youngest son, he was four years old, pulled my tie, "Daddy, God's here. Daddy, God's here." I knew at that moment that what I shared in the last podcast, my children, who were tasting the world and thinking the world was good; now they were tasting God, and now they had something that was really good to compare with the world too. My children, I'm glad by the mercies of God and the grace of God, to share that all of my children are walking with God-

Paul Lawler: Praise you, Lord.

Al Henson: ... in a deep way. You know them, Paul.

Paul Lawler: Precious children.

Al Henson: Several of them are leading ministries in the Kingdom. Practicing this unveiling, as you become more and more saved with God, ultimately, the hope is, is that you can become walking in the light, as this passage, with your brothers and sisters.

Paul Lawler: You know, Al, as you share that, there's a couple of things that come to mind. One is that it seems that we grow better in circles than rows. The reason I make that statement is because so much of what we see in the New Testament, particularly here in 1 John 7, is that the life and the practice of life is to get heart to heart. I'm not saying, you know I'm not in any way saying that anything's wrong with sitting and listening to a sermon or being a part of a worship gathering. That's not the point. But, the point is, is that our experience of Jesus is not full-orbed unless we genuinely get in fellowship with one another, that where we're first in fellowship with Jesus. Out of fellowship with Jesus, we're walking in light and we're walking in koinonia, fellowship with one another in a manner that we can get close enough to hear each other's hearts.

Al Henson: You mentioned at the beginning that I've been pastoring for over 40 years, and I've watched God use my public speaking teachings in many different kinds of ways, but nothing compared to the times that I've been in smaller groups of believers, nothing compared to times I've had one or two, or nothing compared to the time that I said, we had people living in our home that we just took time to mentor them, to love them, to go heart to heart with them, life to life with them. My experiences run from some of those who were deeply wounded and those who have been exploited to pastors of churches of 6000 to 7000 to CEOs of large corporations. What I have found is it makes no difference. We all need Jesus-

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: ... and we all need to get into the presence of God. I've not used a different practice with any of them. It makes no difference if they're exploited, or they're a CEO of a corporation if I can get them to Jesus. When I use that phrase, it's really into the presence of Jesus.

Paul Lawler: You know, a number of years ago, you were instrumental in bringing a group of Christian leaders from an area of the world where they're heavily persecuted. You were influential in bringing them to North America. I had a privilege of sitting with them. I remember the day we sat together, I pulled my notepad out. I was aware that they had been very effective in reaching people for Christ and discipling people. I had my notepad out, I'm a linear thinker, I'm ready to write down the principles that they're applying.

Paul Lawler: You said, "Wait a second," you paused, and one of these brothers began to lead in prayer. These brothers, who have suffered for following Jesus Christ, who love the Lord, love one another deeply; began to cry out to God, not only for themselves but for one another. They ministered to one another. There were tears. Most of all, even though there was a language barrier, I was so conscious, we are in the presence of God.

Al Henson: Presence of God.

Paul Lawler: After about 45 minutes, the prayer time came to a close. When the word amen was sounded, you turned to me, and you said, "Now, Paul, what did you want to ask?" I was mindful that something so powerful and so beautiful had just been illustrated before me, brothers walking in the light, interceding for one another, walking in the presence of God. I saw the secret. I saw what I felt that many of us need to see, practicing the life of knowing Christ together.

Al Henson: I remember years ago, to continue to illustrate this, that I loved our Sunday morning services, I loved, even more, our Sunday evening services, and I loved, even more, the Wednesday night services because they were smaller and I could lead more. One of our key, our two key passages were these two, 1 John,

practicing it, and James 5. On this particular evening, maybe a hundred people, adults were present. A gentleman walks in the back, as we've gotten started, this nice three a three piece suit on, tie. He sits down, very handsome looking man. But, I lead forward. We open up for a share time, and people begin to stand and share a weakness or share a fault, then ask for prayer. Some were standing and sharing a praise of where they had shared and God had answered prayer.

Al Henson: We'd had this family that had been visiting with us. This man stands up and his lip is quivering. He's trying to get control of himself. He says, "Most of you don't know me," and he tells his name. He said, "We've been going to church all of our life, but I've never been in a church like this one, in a gathering like this one." Puts his hand on his wife's shoulder and he says to the fellowship, "Man, I need you to pray for me." He says, "You see this woman here? She's my wife, and I can't tell you how much I've hurt her in my pride, how selfish I've been, and the pain that I brought her life." She's wiping now because she's wondering who is this man standing up here? You know?

Paul Lawler: Yeah.

Al Henson: We're all just realizing, like the story you told at the beginning, and it was just so holy and so pure. I invited some men to gather around him over in a corner somewhere and just pray, and moved on with the gathering. We closed the service.

Al Henson: This gentleman in the back comes forward, introduced himself, and he says, "I live a couple hundred miles from here. I'm a pastor of this church, 300 or 400 people." He said, "I'm so discouraged, I'm so dry, I'm so empty that I drove here tonight, got a hotel room just over here, I have my gun, and I was intending-

Paul Lawler: Oh, God.

Al Henson: ... to kill myself." But, he said, "I've been here tonight and I have hope." The presence of God, he realized that even as a growing pastor, even growing in the Lord himself, and trying to lead his people that he had not really learned how to walk into the presence of God, experience God, and lead his people in that kind of way. He was dry, his people was dry. He didn't kill himself, praise God.

Paul Lawler: Jesus.

Al Henson: Over the next days and weeks, I spent some time with him and he felt he should step away because of the denomination he was in, they probably weren't going to accept what he was seeing that was so biblical and so right. Ultimately, he and his wife go to Kansas City. Now, that's been 30 something years ago and took a church of a few people up to thousands. Just a beautiful, when you walk in to gather, just a beautiful place of-

Paul Lawler: Thank you, God.

Al Henson: ... God, God in his presence.

Paul Lawler: Thank you, God.

Al Henson: I can say this, Paul, and I know we need to close, our time is up, and I'll let you end things, but in my experience, the times, and the movements of God have always come around when people are willing to have, whether in desperation, in faith, in repentance, in both, in a place of grace and safety; they unveil themselves before God. They find the ability to do that one with another, and they are surprised sometimes at the amount of the experiential presence of God that they will begin to experience.

Paul Lawler: Oh, that's so good and so life-giving. You know, maybe there are persons listening today, and as you're reflecting on what Al and I've shared today, you may have additional questions. We just want you to know, we would love to hear from you. You can contact us at info@SageTalkPodcast.com. We would love to be able to respond or interact with some of your questions or thoughts that you may have.

Paul Lawler: But, we also want to encourage you, if you're walking as a Christian alone, we want to encourage you to get with a group of believers and journey in some type of discipleship gathering where you can not only bear your heart to God, but you can bear your heart openly with one another. The very presence of God-

Al Henson: Amen.

Paul Lawler: ... which is so life-giving, is at stake and you were designed to be a dwelling place of the Lord. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Paul Lawler: We're going to close today in prayer and just take a moment to be still before the Lord. You may be driving down the highway, you may be sitting in your kitchen, you may be in your office at work in your company; but let's take a moment to bow our heads and go before the throne of-

Al Henson: Can I pray? Can I pray, Paul?

Paul Lawler: Please, please.

Al Henson: I'd love to. Jesus, my heart is just so aware that the brothers and sisters that are listening in are embracing, saying, "This is what I want, this is what I need, this is what I desire to bring to the body of Christ and to my brothers and sisters." Many of you are thinking, "Oh, if I could just get in the presence of God, if I could just see God with my spiritual eye." Lord, I want them, I want you to help

them to know this is not only what you want, but it's what you desire and what you will help them to accomplish.

Paul Lawler: Yes, God.

Al Henson: It sounds scary a bit. It sounds uncomfortable, but I pray that you'd help brothers and sisters, as you clarify things in their hearts, to begin to walk in the light, as he is in the light, that they might have fellowship one with another.

Paul Lawler: Yes, God.

Al Henson: God bless each one listening. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Paul Lawler: Amen. Amen.