

Paul Lawler: Okay. Hi, I'm Paul Lawler and I'm with Al Henson, founder of the Compassionate Hope Foundation, and this is Sage Talk. Out today, we've gotten some feedback from some of our focus groups that they'd like us to give a little more understanding around this topic of brokenness, which we've had the privilege of journeying in the last couple of weeks. Al, I'm going to open up with something a little personal, in fact, very personal, a part of my own journey. I know that I shared a story out of experiencing initial brokenness just with something we navigated as a family. But probably if I'm honest, the most significant season that was pivotal in my life in dealing, or shall we say experiencing the gift of brokenness, was early in my ministry.

We planted a church in a very fast-growing city in the Southeastern portion of the United States. You know, I'm a young man who's relatively fresh out of seminary. I'm reading books on church growth. I'm going to conferences and listening to speakers share about how rapidly their church is growing. I'm seeing new models and methodologies in ministry. If I'm honest, as I look back, it was my pride that locked into those trendlines and potential trajectories of what could happen in a local church. I began coming back to that church that I was planting and visioning something grand and grandiose. Architects drew up renderings of polished buildings.

But what began happening in my soul over the next 24, really 24, 36 months, as I began growing emptier, desperate, and to a place where as the church is not developing the way that I had envisioned it. I would find myself, at times, going into our little walk-in closet off our bedroom and laying on the laundry and crying out to God, "God, you've got to do something. I'm dying here."

Al Henson: Wow.

Paul Lawler: "If you don't do something, I don't know that I can even hang in here." I, in the secret places of my heart, began drifting from my call. There were sins that were cropping up in my life, pride, lust. Just as I'm going through this inner turmoil, I remember going to a meeting in which there was a prayer warrior. She called herself an intercessor. But at the time, I didn't know what an intercessor was. But I knew this lady prayed a lot, and we were acquaintances and she said, "Paul, how are you?" I didn't know that this was somebody that was praying for me, that God in His sovereignty had touched this lady's life to begin interceding for this a church plant pastor. I called her by name. When she said, "How are you?" I said, "I don't even know if I'll be in the ministry this time next week."

Al Henson: Wow. Wow.

Paul Lawler: And she reached up and did the most unorthodox thing. She grabbed my face, hands on both my cheeks, and she began to slap me with one hand just like this.

Al Henson: Hard or gentle?

Paul Lawler: Well, hard enough to get my attention but not... Anyway, while she's slapping me, she says, "I'm so happy for you." Pop, pop, pop. "God is breaking you. And you just need to know that the best is yet to come." I'm as confused as I just look at her like, "What planet are you from?" To make a long story short, I found myself in a circumstance within a matter of months where some dear friends had invited me into a church conference that wasn't about church growth. It was just about knowing Christ and experiencing Christ. The afternoon before I went to that conference, I sat on a beach down on the panhandle of Florida and that conference happened to be in that area. You know, there've been rare times where sense we really hear the Lord clearly, but I heard the Lord just dropped these words in my spirit. He said, "Paul, I'm going to take you to deep water and your life will never be the same, but you need to trust me."

Al Henson: Yeah.

Paul Lawler: That evening, through the conference teachers and speakers, God just got ahold of my heart. As I said in parts four and five, I'm born again. But my pride had raised its head, and I had allowed my flesh to take the lead. But I surrendered. As I said at one part in our series, I waved the white flag and I surrendered. Again, the peace of God, the presence of God-

Al Henson: Would you say that-

Paul Lawler: ... the life of God.

Al Henson: When you say, "Ended," would you say that you came to the end?

Paul Lawler: I came to the end of myself.

Al Henson: Of yourself? And there, you found?

Paul Lawler: I found Christ.

Al Henson: Christ at a deeper level?

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: You knew Him already.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: You were teaching about Him, preaching about Him. But now you found him-

Paul Lawler: Absolutely.

Al Henson: ... experientially in life at a deeper level, at a real heart level, you had not known before.

Paul Lawler: Yes. And if I may, Al, when I return to the pulpit, I had been controlled by the fear of man... The scripture says, "The fear of man's a snare."

Al Henson: Yeah.

Paul Lawler: I began to teach the scriptures clearly. I began to teach the scriptures boldly. I began to move in a trust and a rest in Christ, and the Lord began to produce fruit, which brings us back to something we've said repeatedly in this segment. Brokenness before Christ is a gift. It's a gift. So I'm aware, we're both aware that there is much more that the scriptures have to say about this pattern. So would you take a few moments and point us to some of these patterns that we see out of the scriptures.

Al Henson: Yeah, Paul, thanks for being vulnerable, and open, and honest. Just you sharing, it's a gift. But, as you said, brokenness is a gift from God. And as we've said in our other podcast, brokenness is an initial work but is an ever-ongoing process. That as it deepens inside of us, it releases through us in ever-widening river of the spirit of the Lord.

Paul Lawler: I love that.

Al Henson: I don't want to go in detail about my story. I'm willing to, but you've told yours. But I want to amen yours. I think that there were some initial works of brokenness in my life as early as 21, 22 which led me into a life of where I laid down my life as I had known it and picked up his life where he says, "If you gain your life, you will lose it. But if you lose it for my sake, then you'll gain it." And I had been reading Tozer and other books, but I came into the ministry with a lot of internal fear, insecurity. I'm an A-plus type personality, which I tended to be a driven leader, very ambitious. Honestly, probably somewhat narcissistic. Maybe a lot narcissistic.

When I went, when I went to study in the seminary, the vision statement of our school was, "A champion for Christ." My carnal nature really bought into that. But even in those days, I was asking the question and saying even to my own soul, "You need to properly define what success is."

Paul Lawler: That's good. Yes.

Al Henson: From a biblical perspective, what is success? And I was beginning to define it as success, true success was transformation into Christ's likeness that allowed me to love God and to love others. But there was the carnal side of me that really loved this statement, "Being a champion for Christ." Nothing wrong with the statement. So I can say to my brother and sister listening in... Last time, we talked about our legs being out from under us. Slowly, as God was revealing, "Oh, wretched man that I am," at the same time, it was probably I would say 20 years of deepening of brokenness and revelation. We've talked about that, and we're going to come to that again today.

Revelation that the way to your issue was not my wrongness and not my depravity or what made me a spiritual beggar, but the way weightier issue became, "Oh, I'm a son of God. I am a Prince. I am in Christ. I am righteous. This new man, this new creation that I really was." If I was giving timelines, I would say mid-40s, at least 20 years in the ministry, that I begin to feel a freedom and a release from this old self that kept trying to beat me down, and the enemy involved in that, and condemnation, and shame, and fear.

What I'd like for us to do then, Paul, in answers to this question from our groups, give us more understanding. What I'd like to do... Your story's wonderful and my story's wonderful, but it's a God story and we're telling it.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: But let's go into the scriptures, and let's look at the story of a brother. We're going to look at Saul who became Paul in the New Testament. Because God tells that story, and so we absolutely know it's true. The process, there are four parts of this story, Paul, that I want us to talk about. The first part is the man Saul. And Paul talks about the man Saul very exclusively in Philippians 3. Then, the Damascus Road Saul, who now revelation is coming in, true revelation... Prior to that, he knows a lot of the scriptures but it's never been revealed to him, Acts 9.

And then the earlier part, I think, of Paul's ministry, Romans 7:24-25 when he's crying out, "Oh, wretched man that I am." When you are experiencing brokenness, as you and I both know, that really begins to scream out inside, "Oh, wretched man that I am. How could I have lived such a life? How could I been so foolish? How could I been so prideful? How could I been so selfish? Oh, wretched man that I am." Paul goes on, "And who shall deliver me? But I thank God that through the Lord Jesus, I shall be delivered." But his testimony is not of necessarily full deliverance or of significant deliverance. He just knows God will.

Then we come to the fourth area of his transformation life, which I think was more in the latter part, Galatians 2:20 when he says, "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet it is not I, but Christ in me and I don't frustrate the grace of God." What I love about that is that Paul, this old wretched man that he was, now realizes, yes, he needs to day by day continue allow this old man to be crucified. But even though he's crucified, he's now alive, living. "I am crucified with Christ, but nevertheless I live."

So let's back up, Paul, and for our brother or sister listening, let's just chat about each of these four. And there are other times that the scriptures gives us that Paul was getting revelation. I want every listener to understand again this whole process is a gift from God. The moving forward of the process is a matter of one seeking God and finding God as He promised and God giving revelation. Yes. So let's go back to chat with us a few moments out of Philippians 3. Who was Paul? Let us see this pride, and selfishness, and religiousness in Paul.

Paul Lawler: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Because Paul here describes his religious pedigree, if you will. He shares his whole background of being very religious. What comes to mind when I think about that state that Paul was in religious but not converted. He's like the modern-day person who is in church but they're not in Christ. And so that's the picture that comes to mind.

Al Henson: Right.

Paul Lawler: Yeah.

Al Henson: He talks about how he was Benjamite of the tribe of Benjamin. He was of the highest of the scribes and Pharisees. In essence, the way I like to view this text is that he thought the kingdom, the way up was up.

Paul Lawler: So good. Yeah. Yes.

Al Henson: The way up was up. The latter part of Philippians 3 he will say, "Now that I've had revelation..." This is brokenness. "Now that I have revelation..." It's a beautiful texts to read. Paul says, "Now that I have revelation, all of what I valued, what was so important to me because I wanted the acceptance of man and the praise of man." But he didn't realize all the slavery that went with all of that. He says, "Now I count it but dung but manure for the excellency of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ." I think he's not only giving us a testimony, he's probably giving us some good advice there.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: The advice is, wherever we are, if you're listening to the teachings on brokenness, the first thing to do is to begin to say, "I turn from what you have valued, what you've trusted in, and begin to seek God and to seek to know Him." Then God will grant revelation.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: Okay, well let's go to Acts 9. Tell folks what happens in Acts 9 then to Paul.

Paul Lawler: Well as we know, Paul is on the Damascus Road. We know that as Paul's journeying there, that there's a sense in which he becomes blinded, or he does become blinded, and it's almost like the Lord had to blind him to help demonstrate that, "Paul, I am the Lord. In your weakness, let me speak to you. Allow me to speak to you." It's like the Lord had to demask Paul at Damascus. Paul experiences a revelation of Christ, an initial revelation of Jesus, in that place.

Al Henson: He was blinded-

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: ... before he was blinded by his self, and pride, and his religion. I'm sure people who were around Saul... If you remember, Saul was there when Stephen was stoned. Perhaps that was the place of some revelation. So it wasn't just the Acts 9, but some revelation came there as he saw this man being stoned with great peace and looking up into the heavens and seeing God. So God was bringing Saul revelation. Then, Saul, in his heart, experiences brokenness and God changes his name as He did. In one of our other podcasts, we talked about Jacob becoming Israel and He changes his name then to Paul.

So what I would encourage you to see in this is the love of God for Saul, the perfect timing of God, and the perfect way of God. But also want you to see the revelation of God, that Paul had been blinded by himself. Now, he's blinded by the beauty, and the glory, and the wonder of the Lord Jesus.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: Now he's in Christ, and he begins to grow and he begins to mature. Roman 7, then, Paul cries out, "Oh, wretched man that I am." So he's got a strong revelation now of his old self.

Paul Lawler: Yes. And the holiness of God.

Al Henson: Yeah.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: Yes. That's good, Paul. Because Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah, when he was in the Holy of Holies, God called him up into the Holy of Holies, there as he saw the holiness of God, he said, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips." This young prophet then was launched into becoming the greatest prophet of the Old Testament that came out of a time of revelation. And when God revelates himself-

Paul Lawler: Glory.

Al Henson: ... He also revelates us.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: But, my brothers, as you're listening, or sister, when God revelates you, it's a twofold revelation. It's not only a revelation of, "Oh, wretched man that I am," a revelation of, "How could I have lived so foolish, so selfishly, so carnally, so unwisely? How could I have hurt people so much?" But there's an also a coinciding revelation, "You are created by me. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You're priceless treasure, and that's why I love you. And that's why I came in and died on the cross for you, buried and rose again for you." There's a revelation of both sides. When the enemy's involved, he's trying to confuse the

issue. But when God is revealing, He's revealing the purity of that. Another time Paul just mentioned about another time of revelation, II Corinthians 12, that Paul had.

Paul Lawler: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Go ahead.

Al Henson: Remember, Paul talks about this man that was caught up into the third heaven. Paul will not even acknowledge it's him, but most everyone believes that it is him. He says that God revealed things to him that it's unspeakable, almost. I really believe it's where God revealed to him about Christ in us, the hope of glory in us in Christ. But this revelation came. Then, I want to move to Galatians 2:20. Paul is saying, "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live." So here's a man, "Oh, wretched man that I am needs to be crucified out of my life." And yet, now this man is confident, more confident than he's ever been, no longer has a sense of his legs chopped out from under him.

Paul Lawler: That's right.

Al Henson: I've watched you, Paul, in your own life, how that after this time of brokenness, God began to build a man of God-confidence. Not self-confidence, but God-confidence. I love listening to you teach the word of God because you teach with such freedom and such an anointing. I have been in the church that you pastor, and I just see transformation everywhere.

Paul Lawler: Yeah. Thank you, Lord.

Al Henson: Yes.

Paul Lawler: Thank you, Lord.

Al Henson: I say, "This is not the same..." I think they maybe should've changed your name also. I said, "This is not the same man."

Paul Lawler: Al, thank you. That's very kind. But, as we share today, I think one of the good questions we might ask as we've shared the last three weeks on the topic of brokenness is, "Where are you? Where are you?" I'm speaking to, obviously, the person listening to us. Are you at the place of Saul, where you're religious but not awakened?

Al Henson: It's a good question.

Paul Lawler: Are you at the place at Damascus, where you know scripture but you haven't experienced revelation? Are you at the place of Damascus, where you realize you've been truly blind but now you are on the verge of seeing? There may be more you want to add to that.

Al Henson: Yeah. I think if you're listening and you're saying, "How? How? How?"

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: This is my simple encouragement. It's God's encouragement. If you'll seek Him, you'll find him, if you seek Him with your whole heart. But you cannot seek Him as a religious, "I've arrived," kind of person. You have to seek Him in honesty and integrity. Ask God, "God, please revealed to me, you. Please reveal to me, me." I think this is really important. This is where the disciplines of the Christian life come in. I think of it in this way. Seek God in prayer. Seek God in the study of the Word. Seek God in prayer with others. Seel God in the study of the Word with others. But it all the time that you're seeking God, and praying, and studying, faith is not passive. Love is not passive. You have to be actively obeying God.

I remember three or four months ago working with a brother that was reading and gaining a lot. Finally, I just said to him, "You need to just take a step of faith and obey." Because he was becoming stagnated.

Paul Lawler: Yeah. Yeah. I've seen it too.

Al Henson: So obedience is key.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: As you're seeking God through prayer, and Bible study, and fellowship with other brothers and sisters, all of these disciplines, they will bring you near God. And that revelation will cause you to trust God into brokenness that you'll receive the grace of God. But all the time, just continue to take steps of obedience. You should ask the question, "Is there something God is asking me to do, and I'm not doing it?" Then you're not seeking God. Because if you're seeking God, you're also obeying God.

Paul Lawler: That's such a good word. It's an encouraging word because everybody has an opportunity to be in movement and move in the gift of brokenness and the blessings of God, the fruit that comes from God, as we surrender and move forward in Him in obedience.

Al Henson: God loves you more than you'll ever dream. Just listen to a 67-year-old man. My prayer is, Lord, as we pray, I pray as Paul would pray that you would take this brother and this sister that's listening and I pray that you'd help them to comprehend with all of the saints what is the width, and the depth, and the height, and the breadth of the love of God. And I pray that you would cause them to no longer be afraid of you and of your work of brokenness in their life and that they would do what Jesus says that they would just simply, as an act of faith and surrender, cast themselves upon the cornerstone. And the cornerstone, in a very unique and special way in each one's life, will bring about an initial work of brokenness in an ever ongoing process.

Paul Lawler: Yes, God.

Al Henson: Thank you, Lord, that you hear our cries for these precious ones and ourselves too. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Paul Lawler: Amen. Amen.