

Paul Lawler: Hi, I'm Paul Lawler, pastor of Christ Church Birmingham. And I have the privilege of sitting with Al Henson, founder of Compassionate Hope Foundation. Both of us, Al, have had the privilege of serving as pastors for decades. I, for 31 years. You for over 40 years.

Al Henson: Right, right.

Paul Lawler: 40, am I right? 45 years if I'm not mistaken. And out of these lenses, both of us have a heart for spiritual fathering and the development of spiritual fathers, spiritual mothers in our culture. And today our topic is a very exciting one, knowing God. And so as we delve into this topic today, I want to ask if you would take the lead in sharing first, and then as we enter our discussion.

Al Henson: I would be glad to Paul. If you've been following our podcast, we started our podcast ... this is a podcast to the hearts, at the heart level, not the head level. A podcast to the heart of the servants of God. So we started with spiritual fatherhood. Knowing that the heart of the heavenly father and the heart of any spiritual mother would be that the transformation of their children. So we spent a three or four, three podcasts, I think maybe four podcasts, on transformation. And then today, Paul, as we've talked, we thought we need to stop and address the subject of knowing him.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: Because it is so foundational, again, to God's desire for us, and hopefully we will join him in that desire. And as a matter of personal testimony, you would know this, Paul, and others that are around me. I fought with God in my teenage years of God's purposes and plans from my life. He wanted me to do what I've done for 45 years. I eventually said yes and gave in. But the way I fought with God was serving, being a youth leader in the church, serving in the church, pouring my life out in the church and tried to please God that way. That was the way I thought it would ... "Lord, I'm good. Look what I'm doing here. Look, I'm giving more time than most everyone." And I would hear God whisper, "Yes. And thank you. But it's not what I want. I want you. I want your heart. And I don't have that Al."

Al Henson: And so when I came to the point of just giving in out of my ... coming out of my foolishness, and saying yes, Lord. I didn't use the word surrender. I used the word, tonight, God, I die. And I want you to raise me up into your purposes and your plans, and to be the new creation that you've created me to be in the resurrection of Christ. And I pondered my life's purpose. And that's why this podcast is so dear to me. I wrote down, I had thoughts like being a missionary, pastoring a church, planting a church, making disciples. And all of those things were very biblical, and what many give their lives to. And finally I said, "Oh, I got it. My life's purpose is that I might love God." And I thought, man, I've got it now. And then I got quiet before the Lord, and I heard, not an audible voice, but the inner voice of God saying, "How are you going to do that, son?"

Al Henson: And I was first amazed at the intimacy that I was experiencing with God, that I hadn't experienced before. And I could sense him smiling at me, "Son, how are you going to love me with all your soul, all your heart and all your mind? And I remember thinking, "Oh, I could do this." And then I thought, "I guess the answer is I can't do that, God." And then the thought was, "Okay, what do you need to have as your life purpose, that you might out of that, love me and then love your neighbor?" And that's when I penned the words 46 years ago that has guided my life. And I wrote these words down, "God, my purpose is that I may know you." And in a little bit we're going to go to Philippians three, the passage that lead Paul in that direction, that led me in the direction. But I think it's important, Paul, before we do, that the title of it is to know God. Could you help us to define this word, know, from a biblical basis and standpoint?

Paul Lawler: Yeah. Let's take a moment to that. And I'm going to draw us toward what may be considered one of the more sobering passages in scripture. And I think it's particularly relevant for persons, whether you're serving in ministry as a salty Christ centered business leader, or full-time in a local church. Jesus once said this, it was in Matthew seven, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Cast out demons in your name, do many mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." There's much we could dissect in that passage, but I really want to focus on one sentence that Jesus shared.

Paul Lawler: And that was when he declared, I never knew you. And this a very revealing power packed sentence. Because the Greek word there for know and knew in its tense, is the Greek word [foreign language 00:07:04]. And it's a word of deep intimacy. In fact, the New Testament when it's translated that Joseph did not know Mary, because Jesus was born of a Virgin, that the Greek term that utilized is [foreign language 00:07:21]. There was no intimacy between Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus. And so it's in light of that reality, that nuance, that I believe is very intentional here in the original language. That it's revealing, it shares with us, or declares before us that Jesus really has a heart that we would know him intimately, and that our ministry in our life would indeed flow out of knowing him.

Paul Lawler: In fact, I know you're going to talk about this in a little bit, but not only the mission statement of your life, but, Al, the very mission statement of the Apostle Paul. Personal opinion, but I think he was the greatest spiritual giant ever to live, other than Jesus. That's just my opinion. But the mission statement of his life? I want to know Christ. I want to intimately know him, walk with him. And we recognize in light of Matthew seven, this is a very important matter because it's life giving, so much is at stake. So I think it's important that we understand this is something the Lord cares very much about, and it's also something he wants to give to us. And so would you share with us a little bit about how the Lord seeks to and is willing to do this very thing?

Al Henson: I was thinking as you were talking about this, about Jesus, in John chapter 10 he presents himself as the good shepherd. The the not so good shepherd is the hireling. But one of the things he will state in John and chapter 10, as the good shepherd, he will say, I know my sheep. And he does. But it he follows it up with, "And I will be known of them." And I think as you have defined the word, as you think, it's not a head knowledge.

Paul Lawler: That's so important.

Al Henson: It's a term of intimacy. It's a term of heart knowledge, which means not only just truth, but actually sensing God. Emotionally knowing the Lord and having the thoughts of God, first Corinthians, "But you have the mind of Christ." He's given us the Holy spirit that we might have the thoughts of God and the desires of God. But this text that I'd like to lead us to, Paul, and our brothers and sisters is in Philippians and chapter three here. Paul is talking, I think as you said, maybe his mission statement.

Al Henson: Can I correct you there?

Paul Lawler: Please.

Al Henson: And not that I'm correcting, but I think that this is Paul's purpose statement. His life's purpose. I think if you go to Acts 20, his mission statement is to preach, to proclaim, to live out and to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in Acts in chapter 20. But we're going to see the two tied together. So purpose and mission. You cannot walk out the purpose of knowing him without walking out the mission of living in the gospel of the Lord Jesus and proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus. But here in Philippians chapter three, the first six verses, Paul talks about what he valued. That he value that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. He was circumcised on the eighth day. Verse five, and of the stock of Israel, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. And as touching the law of Pharisee.

Al Henson: Concerning zeal, he even persecuted the church. Touching the righteousness, which is in the law. Blameless. Now verse seven, "But what things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yeah, doubtless I counted all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ. And being found in him." And then verse 10, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death." And as we're looking at this, I'd like to just dissect it a bit. I want you to notice Paul's values before Christ was revealed unto him in the Damascus road, and that revelation continued.

Al Henson: His values were his title, where he'd come from, his position. He valued the praise of man. He valued in the religious circles, how he was admired and respected. He valued how he could honor his religious leaders, even under carrying out persecution. And he was so blinded and in his mind he thought he

was pleasing God, because he was fulfilling the law. And these are the things that he valued. The very kinds of things that people value today. Titles, names, and having things, and positions. But now his value has changed. There's a value word in here, "But these things I count now as dung." They're worthless. They're like manure compared to Christ himself, that I may win him. The second thing I'd like is to see in this passage, Paul, that opens his heart to really know God, is that he has his [inaudible 00:13:11] has changed.

Paul Lawler: Yes. It's very apparent.

Al Henson: Yeah. His desires have changed. And now he wants Christ. And I might explain it this way, he has experienced what title and name and the praise of man, being patted on the back, and you're a wonderful Pharisee and all of this, he had experienced what that was like. Now he sees Christ, and he sees the love of God, the wisdom of God, the holiness, the righteousness of God. He's beginning to understand who God really is, and the very nature of God. And he's beginning to taste of that. And he says, now that's what really fills me up. That's what I really want.

Al Henson: And then I think at the foundation, he's really come to understand his need. You see, he had seen religion, and religion had taught him that the way up is up. Now he had seen Jesus, who was God, became man, became the servant of man, and he died for mankind. Even the death of the cross. And he had seen this risen Lord and he said, "Oh God hath exalted him." In the kingdom, the way up is down. And so I want, I need this life, because what I had was not life at all.

Paul Lawler: You know Paul exhibits this pattern, in fact he even used the term I died daily. But there's this pattern that he embraces that's in second Corinthians four, I believe. Around death, burial, and resurrection. Could you say something about that?

Al Henson: Well even in this text, in Philippians three verse 10 he says, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death." What Paul is saying ... sometimes I draw out a circle, and I put Christ into that circle. And then there's this barrier, which is our sin and our self nature. And outside of that is us. And the only way into Christ is through the gospel. So if you just picture with me, you're coming into Christ as we all did, and we picture that through water baptism, buried in the likeness of his death, raised in the likeness of his resurrection. So I come in to Christ and I know him in salvation, and eternal life and forgiveness of sin through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Believing that, accepting that, embracing that.

Al Henson: And now I'm in Christ, but Christ loves this fallen world. And so now I want to know Christ, and so I bring Christ with me out to the world. But to go out to the world, I must walk through the gospel. And so the way I phrase this, before I can preach the gospel, I must be living it. And for me to really know Christ, I must know him in that lowly level on the cross. I must join him in the garden of

Gethsemane. And I must cry out, not my will, but thy will be done. I must deny self. It's what he was doing. Remember he had 15,000 people following him, so you want to be my disciple. Okay. Deny self, take up the cross and follow me. I think to deny self is pictured in the garden of Gethsemane.

Al Henson: See you in the first garden, the first Adam did not deny himself. He pleased himself by eating of the tree. In the second garden, the last Adam, Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane, he was in his humanity, realizing and feeling that the torment of becoming sin. And I'm sure the enemy was involved in that kind of attack. And he said, "Not my will, but thy will be done." And the essence of that then led him to the cross. And there on the cross, he bore our sin and our sufferings. Now practically speaking, Paul, then for me to know God, I must deny self. I must not my will, that the surrender, true repentance, moment by moment.

Al Henson: I've often said to people, if you want to walk with God, you have to be in a constant state of repentance. And I'm not thinking about repenting of sin, but repenting of me. I've got to be turning away from me, myself, deny self, like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, and then take up the cross. Do you see that process, Paul? With Jesus, he took up the cross, he was on the cross, and on the cross he suffered.

Al Henson: Now this, this is all through scripture, Paul. Mourn with those that mourn. Weep with those that weep. And if we're really going to follow Jesus, we have to be able and willing to go out and bear the sufferings of humanity. Now I want to make that clear, as you know, I'm with Compassionate Hope and part of what we're doing is rescuing exploited children. And people think, "Oh, that's what it means." And yes, it is. That's a part of what it means to suffer. But I also have sat with the CEO who makes at least seven to eight figures a year in salary, and suffer with him. And I'm going to use a couple of words here.

Al Henson: But what Christ did upon the cross was, prior to that he had identified with humanity by walking among them and seeing at different levels. On the cross, he fully identified with mankind. And what we need to do is to have the willingness to step into the CEO who's suffering in his own way. To step in anyone's life, which sacrifice the time to listen, the time to care, the time to give if needed. And when we identify, we begin to agonize. Oh, I just wish we had more time here. But this is when you really begin to know the Lord. And that's what he's saying in this passage. God, I not only want to walk in the power of his resurrection. And everybody wants to know God and the power of the resurrection, but I also am willing to walk with you in the fellowship of your sufferings.

Al Henson: And any man or woman that has really grown to know God is willing to step out of their comfort zone with Jesus in Jesus, and Jesus in them, and go out to suffering humanity at all levels. And be selfless, full of love. Yes. And full of love, step into their lives, those that'll let them, listen and care. Meet them where they are. Bear, mourn with them. Weep with them. And in there, bring to them

the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God. And then out of that sufferings, walk with them into resurrected life.

Paul Lawler: You know you remind me of when Jesus said, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and it dies, it can't have life. And I'm always marveling when Jesus shares an organic picture, because there's, excuse me, there's a fullness to an organic picture. Meaning that when he refers to a seed, there's something he wants us to see in the seed. When he refers to a burial, there's something he wants us to see in the burial. When he refers to the new life that comes from a seed that sprouts up after being planted in the soil, there's something he wants us to see in that. And so what I'm mindful of as you share, is that when we die to self, when we embrace being hidden, humbling yourself before the Lord, it is God who says in due time I will lift you up.

Paul Lawler: It is God who has designed you in a way that as you die to you and live for him, you actually bloom into what you're truly designed for, as you flow with your designer. And [inaudible 00:22:25] as you share the story of Compassionate Hope and reaching out to the least of these around the world, and Al Henson is bloomed into who he's really designed to be. And that's true also for the teenager listening. That's true for the CEO who's listening. And for everyone that as we recognize this call to lay aside self and follow Jesus, to know him, we not only have the greatest treasure in knowing Jesus, but we actually have the treasure of coming fully alive in who we're designed to be, in light of who he is.

Al Henson: Even the disciples, they followed him and they begin to know him. But until they saw him on the cross, they really didn't know love and understand it. And for me, I've found the same. When I found enough love of God, then I was willingness to deny myself, and to begin to take steps with God out of my comfort zone, into the lives of people. I literally, I can tell a thousand stories like this. I sat once in the slums of India, the team had said, go ahead. The nationals left someone back to guard me. And I said, if you could stand at a distance, and I sat down on a rock. And I was watching children eating out of garbage. And I sat there, and I said, "God, you're here. You've been here 1,000 years watching this. Please, would you let me know when you see that, what do you feel? When you see that? What do you think?"

Al Henson: And God allowed me to know him and the suffering and the grief that he had for those little ones. And then add that to move forward in resurrection life to bring the gospel and an answer to that. And so this knowing God is not passive. It's being active with God. And a constant entering into death, into resurrection. It's a constant circle with God. And I hope in our next a podcast. We can talk more about this.

Paul Lawler: Oh, that sounds good. It's been a delight to share this time. And so as we close today, would you mind leading us in prayer?

Al Henson: I'd be glad to Paul. And as you're listening, if this podcast is a blessing to you, encourage you to share this with others. Now let's pray together. Jesus, the

gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The gospel is the means by which we can have intimacy with you. And so we pray, Lord, that in the theology of the gospel, that you would bring us to the practical living of the gospel. And I pray that the listener might even now, just in the spirit, go into the garden of Gethsemane with you. And in their hearts they would say, Lord, not my will, but thy will be done. And then realizing that what that means that they will get up and now go to the cross with you. And in that cross is enough of the death of self, this will happen little by little in their lives, Lord.

Al Henson: That then they would be willing to join you in feeling and sensing and understanding the suffering of humanity enslaved in sin. And be willing then to bear whatever sacrifices they need to carry out in their life, to be able to open the door for you who have birth the gospel through your death and resurrection. That we might now proclaim that gospel through our own death and resurrection. Reveal this to everyone that's listening. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Paul Lawler: Amen.