

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

Paul Lawler: Hi, this is Paul Lawler, Pastor of Christ Church, Birmingham. I've had the privilege of serving in pastoral ministry for over 31 years and I'm with Al Henson, Founder of the Compassionate Hope Foundation, who has had the privilege of pastoring for over 45 years. And this is Sage Talk.

Paul Lawler: As we journey together today, our ongoing topic is, Knowing God. We had the opportunity to journey together, Al, last week around this topic and some of the things that we had the privilege of having dialogue around is, knowing God is really more than head knowledge. It gets into the heart. And as we explored this topic, some of what we discussed was the purpose statement of the Apostle Paul's life when he stated, "I want to know Christ, I want to know the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings."

Paul Lawler: And we're mindful as we journey together on this topic of knowing Him, that it's a rich and deep life-giving area to explore. Al, would you begin by sharing some thoughts today? I think God may have given you a word picture that's very beneficial for us.

Al Henson: Yes, thank you Paul. And as you heard in our last podcast, knowing God is so at the core, at the center of priorities in the believers life, and what you hear Paul setting, this is his life purpose in Philippians 3, and I like just always love to read scripture. In Philippians 3, Paul says in Verse 7, "What things were gain to me, I now count as lost for Christ." In Verse 8, "Yay, doubtless I count all things but lost for the excellency of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ." And then Verse 9, "I want to be found in Him."

Al Henson: And then this powerful verse, Verse 10, "That I may know Him." There's a succinct five words of Paul's life's purpose, "That I may know Him." And this word know, is a heart knowledge, not just a head knowledge and intimacy about knowing Him, experiencing God. And then he follows that with the gospel, "And that I want to know Him, but I want to know Him in the power of His resurrection, and in the fellowship of His sufferings."

Al Henson: And this is really important, "Then being made conformable unto His death." The whole purpose of God for us is summed up in Romans 8, that we might be conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul says, "If I can know Him in resurrection, and if I can also know Him in the fellowship, the participation of the sufferings of His death, then that will conform me, the gospel will conform me." And Paul will say in Romans 1, "For the gospel is the power of God unto salvation." Not only salvation from hell to heaven and salvation from the penalty of sin, but also daily salvation into this process of transformation and transforming us in into the knowledge of Christ.

Al Henson: The question that often I'm asked is, "Okay, how we got it?" We got it. We need to know Him. And you keep talking about the gospel and the gospel's significance in knowing Him. And what I'd like to do, in our conversation today is to set out a word picture. And to our brother, sister that's listening in, I like to picture things because that helps me to understand and put things together. It's

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

like a room having putting all the furniture in the room at the right place, then I can see it and begin to try to understand how to live in this room.

Al Henson: What I like to do is to give a word picture of knowing God and the gospel. I want you to picture with me a two lane highway, and this highway is leading us. It is the path by which that brings us to knowing God and enjoying God, and understanding God and strengthening in our faith so that we can trust God, et cetera, et cetera. We're going to call this highway, the gospel. The gospel is the way into the way, Christ Himself.

Al Henson: We all believe that and understand the emphasis. We have a highway, but this highway has two lanes. Lane one is the conditioning of the heart. As Jesus will teach, the heart is pictured as the soil and the soil needs to be fertile and then it can produce 30 fold, some 60 and so a 100 fold. The first lane of this highway called the gospel is going to be how the gospel works in the transforming and the conditioning of the soil of the heart to be able to receive the revelation of God that comes by the Spirit, through the word of God and through just life experiences.

Al Henson: On the other side then is what we call the disciplines of Christianity that all of the godly man through all of history, and we hear many messages on these disciplines. And I just like to list those. I-

Paul Lawler: Absolutely.

Al Henson: I speak in terms of five different disciplines in my own life, five different disciplines. There's first the discipline of the word of God, and I put it first because it'll guide the other disciplines. But the discipline of the word of God, which the Bible says, read me, in Revelation 1, and 2 Timothy 3. It says, "Study me." It's Chapter 2, it says, "Study me. Study to show thyself approved." Psalm 1, it says, "Meditate upon me." Just keep, keep thinking and meditating upon the word of God. And then in Psalm 1:19 it says, "Memorize me, for thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against God."

Al Henson: The discipline of the word of God, reading it, studying it and meditating upon it and memorizing it. The second discipline is prayer. And prayer is not just asking, prayer is an intimate communication with you and God where you are listening as much as you're talking. And it's filled with thanksgiving. It can be filled with requests, but I've learned to make most of my requests before God around questions.

Al Henson: "God, would you let me know what it feels like to love the way you love? God, would you revelate yourself to me? God, what are you feeling when you see this picture or when you see an exploited child, God, what are you thinking?" It's a lot about learning the petitions before God should be a lot of questions about God Himself. "And about me, God, what do you think about me?" And I was surprised one time I thought He was going to say, "Well, you're just a poor

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

sinner saved by grace." It was wonderful to hear the voice of God say, "Oh, you're my son."

Paul Lawler: That's right.

Al Henson: "You're fearfully and wonderfully made." And I started weeping and I said, "Really Father?" "Yes, well, you've been studying the word we need to get that out of your head and into your heart." This intimacy of prayer. The third discipline that we don't hear as much about is fasting. And even all of the early teachings in my life from others that I heard about fasting you wanted to get something. You fast so that you could be... you could show God how serious you were about getting something from God. Whereas as I began to study the scriptures, fasting again was about intimacy with God, seeking Him.

Paul Lawler: Yes, I hunger for you.

Al Henson: I thirst for you, seeking Him. The fourth discipline then is the discipline of fellowship with our brothers and sisters, the gathering. Forsake not the assembling, the gathering of yourselves together. And when I say that, I'm not thinking about just on a Sunday morning, I'm thinking about regularly Bible studying and gathering with one or two or three brothers and sisters around Jesus and having your conversation spiritual. There should be the constant gathering around the brothers and sisters in Christ.

Al Henson: And then the fifth one is really, really important. The discipline of obedience. I actually never had heard that put in the disciplines, but I felt that this needs to be added in because everything is on to something it can't just be about... God will never make it just about Him. It's got to be about others.

Paul Lawler: Yes. That's so good.

Al Henson: Obedience is, you cannot know God without walking with God and you cannot walk with God if you're not obeying God. Because actually obedience it means wherever God's going I'm going, whatever God's doing, I'm doing. Obedience, and we've used this phrase in a number of our podcasts that our circumstances, our surroundings and what God is leading us into or allowing to come into our life is our classroom.

Paul Lawler: Yes, yes.

Al Henson: As we are obeying God, going. The command is to go, as we're going with God obeying God it's in that context that God teaches. Now, I know I took a little bit of time-

Paul Lawler: Oh, no that was good.

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

Al Henson: But the final thing I want to say, the highway is the gospel. The right side is how the gospel prepares the heart, the left side is all the disciplines. And you need to make sure now that you're driving down the middle of the road because it's not an either or. They're simultaneous, the heart and the disciplines working in the context of the gospel, a death, burial and resurrection. As Paul says here in Philippians 3:10, that you really begin to grow to know God. I want to give it back to you, Paul. Maybe jump on that right side of the highway a bit, the gospel and to repairing the heart.

Paul Lawler: Well, first of all, you share that picture it's so life-giving and so encouraging and it's a picture we can really grab a hold of. But I'm also thinking about the believer who may be rotting down the highway right now listening to this podcast.

Al Henson: Don't get in the middle of the highway.

Paul Lawler: That's true. That is very true. But this may not be for everybody, but it may be for somebody. And I'm mindful of the believer who he's born again, she's born again and maybe he or she's struggling in the process of their sanctification.

Al Henson: Right.

Paul Lawler: And as they're working that out and growing in the Lord, I'm mindful of the right side of the highway, the beauty of the gospel in the context that the gospel is still for us as believers, it's not only what birthed us into the kingdom, the gospel sustains us in the kingdom. And I'm thankful and mindful of the Apostle Paul when he was teaching Christians at the church at Ephesus of how to grow strong in the Lord, how to grow in the power of His mind.

Paul Lawler: And he described the gospel as this place that we stand. And he's talking to believers, this gospel that whereby your sins are forgiven by faith through grace in the person of Jesus Christ, or faith in the person of Jesus Christ. And as he describes this, it's a picture that as we're, let's say we're walking on this highway, that it's a pathway that we're to continue to walk in.

Paul Lawler: As we walk in it, 1 John 2:1, tells us that through this gospel, Jesus is our advocate. Whereas the scripture describes the enemy of our souls as our accuser. And I'm mindful that in this walk on this highway, that there are fiery darts that come at the believer. There are lies that come at the believer. There are distortions, there are words of condemnation that the enemy fires at the heart, and as Jesus said, "He comes to steal, kill and destroy."

Paul Lawler: And if a believer steps off the highway in a way that he or she is not, their feet do not remain grounded in the gospel, one would begin to believe the lies of the accuser rather than believing the advocacy of the Son of God.

Al Henson: Amen.

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

Paul Lawler: There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. He is the blood covering, the atonement of our sins. And it's essential for the believer to walk in victory in this gospel, to continue to walk in the belief and confidence of what this gospel continues to accomplish on an ongoing basis, in setting the captive free. To embrace the fullness of all that God has made available to us in knowing Him in walking on this highway.

Al Henson: I was thinking about this, Paul, just the thought about the difference in condemnation and conviction.

Paul Lawler: This is good, keep going.

Al Henson: What I'd like to do is just to talk about the thoughts of condemnation and the feelings of condemnation versus the thoughts of conviction. This way you could discern. If what you're hearing inside of you, which the enemy and his lies are in so many of us, you can be able to decide if this is condemnation that is coming from the enemy, because it's not coming from God. But if it's conviction, someone give conviction first because light helps us to understand darkness. Now, I have to say much about the darkness, but here's conviction.

Al Henson: If God is speaking to you, I want you to notice the words. Conviction will say, "That is wrong." Notice it didn't say, "You are wrong." Because in Christ I am righteous, in Christ I'm a Son of God. As you said, "I've been forgiven." God would never say, "You are wrong." God would say, "My saint, my righteous son what you did was wrong." If it's coming from God, it's what you did was wrong, but it'll always have a but in it. "But son, I can forgive you and will. And son I can give you the strength to turn and to change and transform." Now that's conviction. There's hope with conviction.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: There is hope. Conviction will actually cause you to be sad and smile it at the same time. But condemnation comes and when condemnation comes it says, "You are wrong and you don't deserve anything." And there be no hope whatsoever in condemnation. That way you can discern the voice of God versus the voice of...

Paul Lawler: That's so good.

Al Henson: ... the voice of the enemy. Any condemnation is from the enemy. Never is condemnation from God. Conviction comes from God and it says, "You're a right one, but as a right one you've done something terribly wrong and you need to acknowledge that and turn from it and come to me and there's hope, forgiveness and growth and we'll learn through this and you'll live out or walk a life of a better son."

Paul Lawler: Amen. Amen.

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

- Al Henson: The gospel, when we talk about the gospel, that's the feelings of the gospel, the message of the gospel, the hope of the gospel as I'm walking along.
- Paul Lawler: As you described that Al, what comes to mind is that there's such joy and peace in Christ on this highway. This highway that we're talking about in knowing God, it's life-giving for not only for ourselves but for others as we journey.
- Al Henson: And back to the foundation of the gospel, Paul, if I could just change directions here, just a moment.
- Paul Lawler: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Al Henson: You hear Paul constantly in his writings talking about how he's living in the gospel. He'll use a lot of words that are living in the gospel like Galatians 2:20. "I am crucified with Christ." Now that's the power of the death of the gospel. "Nevertheless, I live." That's the part of the resurrection. "Nevertheless, I live, but it's not I but Christ who lives in me. And I do this so I don't frustrate the grace."
- Al Henson: See, often in many Christians lives grace is being frustrated and the gospel is being frustrated because in our fear or our rebellion, our own will, the gospel is not able to work. If you really want the gospel to work in your life then you have to follow the pattern of deny self. As we're going down this highway, deny self, take up the cross and follow me. And I think I shared a bit of this in the last podcast, but I want to say it again.
- Al Henson: If you just picture three things with me, the garden of Gethsemane. If you're going to travel, live by the gospel, you have to say, "With Jesus, not my will, but thy will be done." You just have to surrender. Even in the 12-step program that there's a lot about that I like.
- Paul Lawler: Yes, same here.
- Al Henson: There's a lot of things that I would strengthen in that. But one of the things I love about the 12-step program is in the first one or two steps, you're beginning to acknowledge, "I can't do this on my own. I'm in slavery, I'm an alcoholic and I can't do this on my own," and that gets you to the garden of Gethsemane. "If I can't do it, it can't be my will anymore."
- Paul Lawler: That's good. Yes, yes.
- Al Henson: It has to be God's will. And brother, sister, if you're listening in, that's where even every moment is, this is not a one time thing in your life.
- Paul Lawler: That's right.

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

Al Henson: It's day by day. Even Paul was saying in 2 Corinthians 4, "Always bearing about." In 14, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." Where every moment, every moment I'm living in the garden, not my will. Okay, and circumstances have changed, "Not my will God, but thy will be, I submit. I surrender." And later on we're going to talk, we're going to do a series of three messages on our podcast on brokenness. And brokenness is in the garden of garden of Gethsemane. It's when Jesus just fully cast Himself upon the will of God, relying totally upon the way of God in the power of God to help Him to go to the next step, which is the cross.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: Deny self, the garden of Gethsemane. Take up the cross, joining Jesus in the place of death and that death is not the death of this wonderfully fearfully made creature, but it is the death of the self-life. Where the way I see that is I've already surrendered to His will. Now God as I'm walking out your will, I wanted to walk it out in the resurrection power of the Spirit. As I'm walking this out, I'm willing for death to be working in me. I want you to bring to death, selfishness, and bring to life love. I want you to bring to death pride, and bring to life humility. I want you to bring to death foolishness, and I want you to bring to life in me wisdom.

Al Henson: I want you to bring to death impurity, impurity of motives and impurity of moral appeal. I want to bring that to death and I want you to bring to life into me purity of motive and why I do what I do and purity of moral purity. Finally bring to death into me these lies of the enemy that bring about such unbelief and fear and bring to life and to me faith.

Al Henson: You're moving in now from the cross into resurrection. And this is what Paul is saying in Philippians 3:10, "That I may know Him and I want to know Him, the power of His resurrection, but also as I'm knowing Him, following Him" "Deny self, take up the cross and follow me," the power of resurrection. I'm also every moment wanting as I'm following Him in the Spirit for the power of the death of the gospel to be bringing the things to me that need to die.

Paul Lawler: Al, as you share that, you and I and many people who are listening have seen the gospel of Christ. What we're describing on this highway affect many, many lives in a way that we realize only God, only God. But I wonder about the listener who's tuned in and is thinking to themselves, "I'm glad that works for somebody, but I don't know about me." Maybe the person who sees things as they are, rather than the possibility as things really can be. What would you say to that person?

Al Henson: I would say, first of all, God is not a respecter of persons. God has no partiality and God died for you. And God loves you and He died for you. And this is available to you, not just the apostle Paul, but to you.

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: And not just Al, but to you. He loves you. He died for you, He's not a respecter of persons. And by the way, if you're thinking, well, you don't know what I've done, the gospel has its greatest and most powerful work to the wickedness of all sinners, which I am the greater of along with Paul.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: But Paul, he murdered Christians. He murdered many people. He'd done very, very wicked things so if you're saying, "Not me because of what I've done." Nope. The truth is, the gospel is more powerful. The greater your sin, the greater the grace, the Bible says.

Paul Lawler: Yes. Thank you God.

Al Henson: Those four things, God is not a respecter of persons. He's impartial, He loves you absolutely and completely. He died for you and no matter how great your sin is, praise God if it's even greater. Because in that context, the gospel works even more powerful.

Paul Lawler: Al, thank you. And I know that speaks deep into our hearts. Let's take a moment as we close today just to pray. Would you lead us?

Al Henson: I would, and I always like to ask if this has been a blessing to you because I want to see the truths of God spread. If it's been a blessing to you, call your friends or share the link with them and encourage them to listen to this. And now God, we pray. We pray that the soils of the heart of our brother and our sister would become fertile as even right now. I pray that someone listening in which say, "Lord, not my will, I'm tired, tired of fighting. I'm tired of arguing with you. I give in, I give up. Not my will, but thy will be done." And don't let them stop it. Not my will, because that's what they need, is pick up your will.

Paul Lawler: Yes, God.

Al Henson: You love me God. You died for me. The gospel works for me. I pick up your will, your will for me. And you may want to just pray this Lord, that you may want to say, "Lord, not my will, but by will and your will for me is for me to to live in the gospel. And I embrace that will that there are things in me that need to die, but there things in me, this beautiful creature that need to be resurrected."

Al Henson: Just tell God that and say, "Lord, bring that about as I give myself to you in my life. Father, only you can revelate the gospel.

Paul Lawler: Jesus.

## SageTalk Episode 11: Knowing God Part Two: Growing Down the Highway

Al Henson: Yourself to people's hearts. We pray that would be done and we pray many will be strengthened and some might be sad on this highway of the gospel, both with the heart condition and the disciplines that will bring them into a greater and sweeter intimacy of knowing God. In Jesus name. Amen.

Paul Lawler: Amen. Amen.