

Paul Lawler: Hi, this is Paul Lawler and I am with Al Henson, founder of the Compassionate Hope Foundation, and this is Sage Talk. Al, recently in one of our episodes I had the privilege of sharing a part of my own journey. And it was a part of my testimony related to brokenness. And as we pick up today, I think it would be very valuable for our listeners to hear your story. I'm mindful that there's some particular things that you have navigated as you've journey with Christ, particularly from age nine into your early twenties. And I think that would be valuable for everyone, particularly our younger listeners, but really for people of all ages. Would you mind sharing with us a bit of your journey today?

Al Henson: I'd be honored to, Paul. And I think as I share this, as you listen to Paul Lawler's story and then you listen to Saul/Paul in the Bible story, and we've mentioned others like Jacob and David, every story is very unique, very different, very similar.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: And it's that potter and the clay, because each one is unique, finding the best way and unique way to mar the clay. To make it pliable and moldable. And so that's a part of my story. I want to give you the end before the beginning, but the end is, is that what brought me to brokenness was not some major human crisis like sickness, or someone death, or some trauma, but mine was the kindness of God.

Paul Lawler: Wow.

Al Henson: And I think that probably has a lot to do with my birth and my upbringing. My mother, who's still living now, is 84 years old and a godly woman. And my greatest cheerleader, prayer warrior, and servant, as we've talked about servants I think in one of our episodes. But when she was a young woman, she loved God. And when she tells her story, she said, "I watched people like Billy Graham being used of God. And I thought, oh, I wish I was a man so I could preach the gospel." Now that was 50 years ago in thinking, when we all know that everyone is a minister full time, should be a minister full time, a full time disciple and follower of Jesus.

Al Henson: So she said, "God, please give me a son and I'll dedicate him to you." So I was conceived, and she tells the stories about how even in the womb she would put her hand on her stomach and pray for me. She'd read the Bible to me. She would worship God. And then I was born in sin, strong-willed. I'm sure she didn't know what she was getting. But a strong-willed rascal really, in many ways. But it's interesting that by the time I was nine years old, a Sunday school brat, and to get pins I had read through the Bible five times by the time I was nine years old.

Paul Lawler: That is rare.

## SageTalk Episode 14: Al's Story

Al Henson: Getting all this. And I do tell you that the motives and intentions were not about loving God necessarily, but you know, you read the Bible, it's powerful and it's sharp.

Paul Lawler: So at nine years old you've read through the Bible five times.

Al Henson: Five times.

Paul Lawler: I don't even know, has that ever happened before, but keep going now.

Al Henson: But our church, which was a smaller country church, decided that they were going to have a youth Sunday. And Sunday morning they were going to let the young people do various things, but the pastor would bring the message Sunday morning. But on Sunday night they were going to let one of the young people bring the Sunday night message. And I was nine and none of the teenagers volunteered.

Paul Lawler: Oh my goodness.

Al Henson: So guess what I did? In my arrogance, I thought I'll do it. I can do that. And I'm being honest, I look back now and discerned the pride that was involved in that. And so I studied. And my message was around Moses, and it was around the burning bush. And it's interesting now when I look back, the insights that God was giving me, I feel like I was a lot like a Joseph. One that God had seen, looked into Joseph's heart at a young age, and had given him a dream and a vision. And then he was arrogant and prideful about it. And then God had to carry him through tremendous events with his brothers, and sold into slavery, and then prison and all to bring him to a brokenness. But actually tell us in all of that process but God was with him.

Paul Lawler: Yeah.

Al Henson: And we might say based our previous conversations about brokenness, that this was God's process with Joseph. And God was preparing the right path for Joseph to come to brokenness in his own life.

Paul Lawler: Yes, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Al Henson: And so that Sunday night I was well prepared. And the theme of my message was that the bush, it wasn't the bush that mattered. What made this a very special bush was what was in the bush. You think of a nine year old coming up with that kind of thought. But then when I stood up, Paul, to preach, I couldn't get anything out of my mouth.

Paul Lawler: Really?

Al Henson: A couldn't get anything out of my mouth. And all of a sudden I realized God is not with me. The very message I'm going to preach, God is not with me, I'm just an old bush.

Paul Lawler: Wow.

Al Henson: God gave me the strength to say to one of the deacons of the church, I got it out of my, would you come and pray. And when he prayed, I knelt behind and cried and said, "God, I'm sorry. I repent. Please God, would you be in this bush?" I would think there was a little brokenness there. But I preached. Our church hadn't had anyone saved in months, and we had two people come to Christ.

Paul Lawler: Wow.

Al Henson: And many of the adults were at the altars because God had moved in their hearts that they could be a bush that God could burn in. I walked out of that church that night, went out into the church yard, and I was consumed with the sense that this was what God wanted me to do.

Paul Lawler: Wow, nine years old.

Al Henson: Nine years old. Now I want to back up. My dad had come to Christ when I was two, three, and four years old. My mom was a godly woman and he'd come to Christ through her influence. And a pastor had led him to the Lord. And the pastor that led him to the Lord fell morally. And it confused my dad, frustrated my dad, and my dad pulled away from God and from the church. But I would always see my mom go to the altar almost every week and kneel, and she would pray for my dad. And I would go often, because I loved my mom. There was a special attraction. Still is. I'd just follow her, and I'd often be there, tears sometimes not for my dad as much as from my mom. That I saw my mom broken hearted.

Al Henson: And little did I know that this was occurring all through my childhood and teenage years. And God was ministering to my soul and spirit, a heart and compassion for others. That's interesting that now I have Compassionate Hope Foundation to the least of these all over Asia. So I went home, and one Sunday, a Saturday, I got the strength and I went to my dad, fairly strongly, and said, "Dad, mom loves you. She's praying for you, dad. Would you come to church please?" And he looked back at me in anger and said, "Son, I'm not going to church. Don't you ever, ever ask me again to attend church."

Al Henson: At nine God was asking me to become the very thing that my dad hated, that my dad despised. And I'd hear dad talk from time to time about pastors and how they're no good, and how they're just lazy, and et cetera. And then we were raised very, very poor. And so my dad always worked hard, rough hands. He couldn't read, couldn't write, had no education. And he said, "Son, you need to get a good education so you can get a good job and make money." So all of

these things were pulling at me. And so this is the way, we talked about in episodes, to brokenness, how that we tend to fight internally with God.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: And so I had a very unique way of going to battle with God. And this was it. Okay, God, I know you're real. I have love for you. I know some of what you want me to do. You know my dad, you know my situation. And so God, what I'm going to do is I want to become the best teenager in this church. I'm going to serve you like no other. I'm going to read books like no other. And so in my teenage years, I was reading books by Andrew Murray, and A.W. Tozer, and great missionary books. Reading them, weeping over them, and wanting to love God that kind of way, but at war with God because I wasn't giving God what God really wanted. And that was me.

Al Henson: You see, when you come to brokenness you come to the end of you. And actually what I was doing was more and more, God, I am going to do this. I'm going to serve you this way. I'm going to bless you this way. And you will be pleased with me. And it just wasn't working. And yet God, I could see the hand of God blessing when I'd teach the Bible. My wife then, Susan, we met when she was nine and I was twelve. We began to have love feelings for each other when she was 14 and I was 16. We committed our lives to each other and committed our lives to the Lord. And I never told her, never told anyone about this.

Paul Lawler: Wow.

Al Henson: I go to college. And just a year before I went to college, I had a dream. And in this dream I died. And through my death, my father came back to Jesus. And I went and told my mom, and it scared her because she knew how much she'd been praying. And she understand eternal things, that she knew that God potentially might take someone's life to see someone else come to Christ. And I remember her taking me to the pastor and having me tell the pastor the story, and the pastor comforted her that this was probably not what God would do. And yet I was willing.

Al Henson: Went on off to college at the age of 16. I graduated my senior year in college at the age of 20 in engineering. Many job offers. Got a phenomenal job out in the public arena, making a good income. My young wife now, we got married my senior year in college. And here we were, and we finally settled after some training time into a town. I went into the church, I joined the church. And this teenage boy stands up on Wednesday night in the church and starts crying, and says I have nobody to teach me the Bible. And I went to the pastor and said, "I'll be glad to teach him the Bible. I can get references, you don't know me that well." And he said, "Oh, it'd be wonderful." And so this young teenage boy, we invited over our home at 15. And Susan and I had dinner with him, study the word of God. When finished I said to him, "Was this what you expected?" "Oh, I love it. Can I invite another?" Now this is the kindness of God.

Al Henson: Paul, over the next 10 months, Susan and I personally led over 80 young people to Christ.

Paul Lawler: Wow, that's incredible.

Al Henson: When we would gather from, it was from one teenager, now the gatherings were at 120, 130. On this particular weekend, we gathered on Saturday and had a cookout and games. Went into a barn and had a meeting inside of a barn. It was supposed to end at about 8:00, 8:30. And God was so moving that night, I helped two young men surrender to the ministry, the very thing I was fighting with God over. And I remember, I called the pastor and said, "I don't know what to do here, because we're supposed to be back at the church. Is it okay if we stay? I just don't think we should leave." And he said, "Sure, I'll go to the church and just tell the parents either to come out, or come pick their kid up, or they're welcome to come join." Well we left that place at 2AM, and now the church was a movement of God started through the church that continued to the next morning. The church service went to two o'clock in the afternoon.

Paul Lawler: Wow.

Al Henson: They said let's go home. They picked the church service up at at 5:30 or 6:00 that evening, it went to 9:00 or 10:00 with kids sharing, in adults repenting. We were having a small revival. And hear was this young man, 21 now, leading this thing, fighting God.

Paul Lawler: Wow.

Al Henson: Which I realize through that anyone can be hidden among us, could be resisting God, and we not actually know it. But I was so full, I was so happy. I thought how stupid can a man be?

Paul Lawler: Jesus.

Al Henson: Either have this or money, what do you want? This or a house? And so finally I just went home and I remember waking up, just trying to sleep and I couldn't waking up in the middle of the night at 2AM that Monday morning. And I looked over at my wife who I'd loved, and we'd known each other, we've been married now about a year and a half or so and known each other five years prior to that, and loved each other. Talked about me getting a good job. And that week we were going to go purchase five acres of land and a house. We were going to settle all of that. And I finally said, "God, I can't do this anymore." I thought what all my dad say? I'm going to to become the very thing he despises.

Al Henson: And so I get up, go in the living room. And I didn't say, Lord, I surrender. I didn't say, Lord, I yield to the ministry. I said, "God, I'm done fighting with you. God, I am sick of how unloving I've been to you, how dishonoring I've been to you. Please, I want this old man dead." I'd read enough books that I already

understood the self. I want this old man dead, and I want to live. Raise me up in you in the spirit that I might live and walk with you. Three quick things. I'd never felt so joyful. Paul, a 12 year battle had ended. And now I was at rest with God.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: A deep brokenness was taking place in my life. I wondered what my wife would say. So the next evening, after we finished, I couldn't tell her at the table. And she goes and sits in the living room, and I finally just said, okay, I'm going to do it. I run in the living room and I say, "Honey, I need to tell you something." She starts crying. She says, "You don't have to tell me. I already know. Anyone around you knows it." She didn't say this, but I think she was thinking you're the dummy they didn't see this before all.

Al Henson: But anyway, we embraced and hugged and prayed. And then she says, "You need to call your mom." And I called my mom, and my mom said, "Yes, praise the Lord." She was weeping. She said, "I can tell you the night God called you." And she went back to that nine year old night. And she said, "God clearly told me you say nothing to him about this. This is between him and me." She said, "I can't tell you how many people, pastors, that wanted to talk to you. But I told them, please don't talk to him. Leave him. But this is between him and God."

Paul Lawler: That's so good. So wise.

Al Henson: So it's like when we talked about brokenness, you rightly said this is a gift. And God was preparing that. One final thing about my dad, just to show you the beauty of the Lord. That night when I surrendered and I used the word dead-

Paul Lawler: I follow.

Al Henson: ... God said immediately to me, this is the answer to your dream. I wasn't speaking about a physical death. I was speaking about a brokenness, and where you would come to the end of you and find me.

Al Henson: Went through seminary, and I came back, and we were going to start this church and mom was going to be the first one on the front row. We were starting it back in our home area. And I thought, what do I do with my dad? If I don't invite him, maybe he'll feel like I don't want him to come. If I do invite him, I'll dishonor him because of what he told me when I was young. Finally I said, "God, give me the words." And so I went to my dad, and this is what I said. "Dad, I remember what you said to me when I was seven or eight years old, and I don't want to dishonor you, so I'm not asking you to come to church. I just want you to know this is the morning we'll have our first gathering and you're welcome to come if you would like to come."

Al Henson: So he shows up, because he had seen, couple of times when I was in seminary I'd come on Thanksgiving, Christmas. Once he actually said, "Who are you? Are you my son?" He had seen such a change in my life.

Paul Lawler: Glory.

Al Henson: So he sat there for over a year on the back row. And I thought he came back Sunday night, he wouldn't miss a gathering. And he started saying he wanted to read the Bible, and he couldn't read so we'd give him tapes where he could start listening to the Bible. About a year in on a Sunday night when I gave an invitation, my dad walks down the aisle. And he doesn't stop at the altar. He comes up and he put his arms around me. Now my dad was an old codger. He never said I love you. I'm sure he did as a child, but I hadn't heard I love you for decades. Put his arms around me and he said, "Son, I'm so proud of you. And I love you. Please help me. I want to come back to Jesus."

Paul Lawler: Yes, Lord.

Al Henson: And so when we talk about brokenness, as brokenness is deepening a river's flowing out of you. That others get in the taste of it or the sight of it, it begins to change and transform their lives. And so I've seen that with dad, and now this has been 45 years ago, Paul.

Paul Lawler: What you just shared and what you're sharing, it so beautifully illustrates really the infinite worth of being broken for Christ, and the fruit that it produces now. Now we're both aware that somebody listening to us right now is battling. And in that battle, there's a young woman or there's a young man, or maybe someone at mid life or even older, that God has put his hand on. And he's drawing them and they're battling. What would you say to them? What would you speak into them?

Al Henson: I would say to them, just like the prodigal son, you have no idea how foolish you are. I remember thinking, if I give myself to the Lord this kind of way, I give up everything. And the truth is I gave up nothing and I gained everything. I'd say secondly, you have no idea how much God loves you.

Paul Lawler: Yes, Lord.

Al Henson: If you understood God's love for you and how he can fill your soul, and his eternal purposes and plans for your life, you would run into brokenness. You would run into it, because Jesus will run there with you. And so love and know the love of God. Understand the foolishness of anything less. I can imagine what it'd be like if you had a church with 20, 30, 40 people in it who understood brokenness and walked this kind of way. And my life has been 45 years of tens of thousands of people drinking out of my life and tasting the life of Jesus and the life of God.

Paul Lawler: Al, you have shared some things with us today that really are sacred gems, gifts to the body of Christ. Before we pray, I want to mention that in light of where we've journey today, that next week we're going to talk about Jesus is the source and authority. And I mention that because of how beautifully it bridges out of this topic of brokenness. And as you've shared today, and we're mindful that there are those among us that are listening today that in their heart they feel this tension. And so would you lead us in prayer for those that are listening today, as they're battling?

Al Henson: Father, I pray for that brother, that sister sitting in a car out back, in their home listening. God, you're right there with them. And I would ask that you would overwhelm them with you and your love and your presence. I pray they would hear you softly say, "Son, daughter, listen to this, your older brother. He's right there." That they hear you say in a gentle way, "Trust me. Just give in." Say yes, fully surrender. Turn away from the things they need to turn from and to turn to you, God.

Paul Lawler: Yes, God.

Al Henson: You are the way, you are the life, and you are the truth. And Lord, salvation was just the beginning.

Paul Lawler: That's right.

Al Henson: And I pray for each brother and sister, that they would be able through brokenness now, that they're in the room with you and you're in the room with them, and they're in you and you are in them. That through brokenness they might, through the grace of God, begin to experience and share all of the unsearchable riches that they have in Christ.

Paul Lawler: Yes, God.

Al Henson: We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Paul Lawler: Amen. Amen.