

No Regrets - God Can Use Your Past

by Shane Idleman

Shane Idleman emphasizes that God can redeem our past mistakes and use them for His glory, encouraging personal responsibility and humility in the process.

Duration: 59:45

Scripture: Acts 9:1

Topics: "Redemption", "Overcoming Regret"

Description

Shane Idleman emphasizes that God can redeem our past, using the example of Saul's transformation into Paul, who once persecuted Christians. He encourages listeners to stop blaming God for their past mistakes and instead take responsibility, positioning themselves to receive God's grace and direction. Shane shares his own struggles with regret and how he learned to use those experiences as stepping stones towards a deeper relationship with God. He highlights the importance of humility, fasting for direction, and trusting in God's sovereignty to overcome life's challenges. Ultimately, he calls on everyone to fall forward into God's arms of forgiveness and restoration, regardless of their past.

Transcript

The title of the message is, No Regrets. No Regrets, God Can Use Your Past. And we are in the book of Acts, so if you want, you can turn there, believe Acts 9. We're starting in Acts 9. But before I get to Acts 9, I want to give a fairly long, lengthy introduction that sets the stage for Paul's conversion.

And most of you know, Paul, the apostle Paul, was first called Saul. And he actually persecuted Christians. He was agreeing to their death and their persecution.

He would go and harass them and throw them into jail. The same Paul who writes the New Testament. So God can use your past.

There's not a week that goes by that I don't encourage people to get back on track, and they say, but Shane, I've done so much damage, I've lost my kids, this addiction, this job. Okay, I've got it, there are consequences, but it's much better to live in God's arms, redeemed and forgiven back in His will than it is to live outside of His will and to keep falling in certain areas and not to regain lost ground. And that's the wonderful thing about God is there are consequences.

I'll be the first to admit there are consequences. I would encourage you to live on the straight path, the narrow path, seek God. But when things happen and you regret decisions, God is a God of getting us back on track.

The famous passage, Romans 8.28, that He works all things together for the good, for those who are called according to His purpose, those who seek Him again. So it's this wonderful mystery of God can take the junk and put it into this wonderful picture of His redemption plan and use us again despite our past. So there is a wonderful encouragement in that.

So let me get right to the message. God can use your past like He did with Paul. And I'm going to speak a little bit about my past just for those who may not be familiar.

But I used to deal with a lot of regret, and especially when you're living in the regret. When you make a bad choice and say it results in a failed marriage or something and you're living in that regret, it's difficult. It's very difficult.

That's why people go back into certain addictions, because they're caught in that regret. So now I can look back and thank God. It's so funny.

I thank God for some of the terrible things that happened because it got me here. Had it not been for those things, I don't know where I would be. So God used all that.

Some of you know, but it's worth repeating for this type of sermon that I was actually made fun of a lot. I have a construction background, and it's not looked upon well with a lot of people in the academia world and blue-collar, and they forget that hard work is good. They forget that God blesses that.

Jesus was a carpenter. And so I was looked upon construction, a lot of heavy equipment, and just kind of this, you know, good old boy, right? Not very smart, couldn't write well, couldn't speak well. And now that I read on what dyslexia is, I go, that was my problem.

Now I know what happened throughout school in numbers. Still, it's hard for me to quote verses. I can tell you it's in Philippians or James or Old Testament, but try to find that verse and number.

Somebody will give me a phone number, and I have to ask three or four times. I don't know why. A good memory, but not a good memory of numbers and dyslexia and not being able to read and skipping.

And so I barely graduated high school. I had to cheat my way through it, to be honest with you. Geometry? Wow.

I even help my kids now and ask, you know, with Shane, I was helping him yesterday on math. And, you know, you divide these numbers. What's the remainder? I'm like, what's the remainder? What is that? You know, I had to Google.

I had to Google. So just not good in all these areas. I think I made it at A.V. College for about three weeks and just had to quit.

So here's what happened, though. Those things, if you're not careful, will drive you to alcoholism or drive you to suicidal thoughts because you can never measure up. Not understanding that God says, I've given you this wonderful memory.

I've got a good memory. My wife doesn't like it, but I do. Eight months ago, you said that when this day comes, we'll do this and this and this.

I remember that. I remember that street sign. But when it comes to numbers and reading and writing, those are big challenges.

So God says, I'm going to use these foolish things. Now you're actually going to write books, which to me is just laughable. And that's when people, oh, you're just, you know, you guys who write books, you're just in it for the money.

I'm like, we spent \$20,000 of our own money to publish the first four or five. We've given out a lot more than we can read. There's no profit margin.

We've given out free to the college. It doesn't matter. But people have this certain perception because you write books.

I look at it as, God, how in the world did you do that? How did you do that? You get all the, instead of me, well, I've got a Ph.D. in this and I wrote for the book. You know, you're resting on what God did, and it keeps you very humble before him. As you know, from high school, this led to the party scene.

It led to a failed marriage. It led to a lot of disaster and regret. When I finally came back to the Lord, I think half of my tears were over the regret.

Oh, this is what I should have been the last 15 years. And half the tears were, thank God I'm back on the right track. And using that past.

So here's my first point on this whole thing of God using your past. Stop blaming God. And I blamed him.

My dad was mean and angry, even though I loved him. It was a hard thing. You're very walking on eggshells.

I know what that means. My education, my background. But Lord, this, this, this.

And stop blaming God. You allowed this. How could you do this? I remember I would say he took my dad when I was 24.

Never got to say goodbye, never anything. We kind of left on weird terms. I never was able to fix that.

So what do I do? Grab tequila, start making margaritas all week and two weeks. And I remember there's scenes of I would have a .357 in my hand loaded. And I would just be mad, mad at God, mad at life.

And so I had to get to a point where most people do. It's scriptural is you stop blaming God. And you take responsibility for your own actions.

And you get back on track. And there's a lot of people with this upcoming atheist debate. Actually, an atheist visited the service Sunday.

He was up in the balcony. I had lunch with him afterwards. We've got a good relationship going.

But they're so mad at God. Wait a minute. There's no God.

So who are you mad at? Well, the God. How can a good God. Oh, wait.

So there is a God. You see, so a lot of atheism, I believe, it is a religion. It's a mindset that there is no God.

And that's how I'm going to live my life based on these principles. So blaming God is a very destructive area. And I hear people, they continue in sin because of this.

Here's what happens. I'm blaming God. I'm mad at God.

I'm going to stop and get that drink or get that pill or pornography or abuse or whatever it is. And then they're blaming God because that happened. And then they repeat it again.

This repeating ongoing cycle until we say, God, I am wrong. Use my past. I'm going to stop blaming you.

The second point, before I actually get to the book of Acts, is position yourself to receive from God. You have to position yourself. Now this might seem a little trite, but it's powerful.

Coaching baseball. I have to put my players in a position where they're going to catch the ball. Same thing applies with God.

First Corinthians 127, I'm going to paraphrase this. He said, not many of you were wise by human standards. So God's talking to Christians, the Christians that God has called.

He said, not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many of you were influential in your community. Not many of you were born into privilege.

God chose the foolish things to shame the wise. God chose the weak things to shame the strong. So here's what happens.

Might, power, and success don't get the credit. God does when he uses the least likely. And what happens is once we realize we're the least likely, once we realize, God, I'm nothing without you, he says, now I can use you.

Now I can use you in what I've called you to do. Once you've removed self out of the equation, now I can use you. But once we have self in the equation, once we don't position ourself to receive from God, we rely on an education.

Education's great. I've studied a lot, and I continue to. But once we rely on that, and that's my concern with some pastors, who they'll rely on their Ph.D. from seminary, but fail to realize that it's a power of God through relationship with him that's going to determine the course of their ministry.

I'm not putting down, and sometimes people say, well, you shouldn't put down a Ph.D. I don't. If a person can pursue a Ph.D. and stay humble and not rely on it, good for them. And there are some people who need Ph.D. such as Ravi Zacharias, apologists who are going to be defending the Christian faith against other Ph.D.s. It's good to have something like that, a credential showing that they have earned certain things.

But we have to be careful because if we begin to rely on those things, and I'll talk to people, I've got to get my Master's, I've got to get my Ph.D., I've got to get this. And many times it's good, just don't count on it. Don't think that's going to be the answer.

Now I have this. No, now you better have God, and then let that come behind the equation. Romans 8, 28, what we started with, all things work together for good for those who love Him and want to do His will.

Perfect example, in my 20s, I did so many things that would disqualify me from being a pastor. I'd have to step down right now. But He used all of that to say, okay, now when you get up to the pulpit, you're not going to be all haughty and arrogant.

You're going to be broken, realizing that it's me who put you there. So unless I speak to you, you're not going to speak to the people. You better rely on me every time you prepare a sermon.

You better, when you start to mess up and you can't read and you remember, you go back that my grace is sufficient, and God is an all-consuming part of my life that drives everything. But it had not been for the past, it wouldn't make sense. It would make sense, it wouldn't allow me to, I believe, to preach to the degree I preach now, through brokenness and through pain and through experience.

That's what God does. Now I'm going to take a quick detour. I think it's necessary, especially with now online or the live stream, with the sermons being picked up, KKL A in Los Angeles, Riverside.

They picked up the radio station again, or the radio program again. They're running it now to a broader audience. And I get this question a lot.

So I'm thinking, you know what, I might as well answer it. What seminary did you attend? I'm glad you asked. Now, two questions here.

One, or two scenarios. One, I don't mind the question because I'm often curious, too, where people got their theological education, where their thinking comes from. There's no harm in that question.

It's a good question. I actually had a couple I just talked with two weeks ago, and they haven't been coming because they said, I'm not going to go to a church from a guy who didn't go to seminary. And so you have the two views.

Okay, I'm interested, I'm curious, where are you coming from? But also this view that, you know, you're stupid unless you went to seminary. Now, here's what happened. What seminary did I attend? Number one, the school of experience.

When you come out of seminary, or at any age, I've got pastors here locally, they're in their 20s, and I try to give them advice such as, I would not have alcohol at your Bible studies. Just throwing it out there. You know, just, I don't know.

You know, it might be hip and cool, but it's not a good thing. Okay, so what happens without experience, without life experience, it's hard to talk to people and help people and relate to people. So life experience is vital.

Also the school of Christian history. You have to know when the church was born, what happened, what developed the early church fathers, Roman Catholicism and Protestant and these different splits and the Reformation. You even go back farther to Augustine, and you can read about his debate with Pelagian.

And Pelagianism basically says that we are born without evil. It's not in our DNA. We kind of, based on our environment, we can become evil later, but we're really born good.

That's Pelagianism. And Augustine debated a guy by the name of Pelagian. You read about those debates.

You read about Calvinism and Arminianism, and you read about all the church history. Martin Luther debated a man by the name of Erasmus. It's a very famous debate on the bondage of the will.

Is our will in bondage, or are we free to choose? So Christian history. So I went to the school of Christian history by reading hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of books on these subjects and biographies. That's the next one.

I went to the school of Christian experience from the past. So I read the church fathers. And the interesting thing about the church fathers, I don't think we should elevate them to the degree we do.

I think it's a wonderful volume of history. I read them. I read interesting things.

But Origen, I believe it was, believed that even Satan will go to heaven if he repents, or God's plan. You have Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Ignatius, Irenaeus. You read these church fathers, and they're disagreeing on different points.

So that's why the Bible is our standard, but we look to them. So I went and read them myself. Here's what this all boils down to.

I could go online and look at Westminster Theological Seminary. I think it's in Pennsylvania, reformed. I can look at John MacArthur's college.

I just went down to the Shepherds Conference and bought way too many books that I'll probably never read. And I looked online, and like, okay, here's the books they're reading. Spurgeon's Lectures to My Students.

The Apolline Epistle. Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem. And I just went and bought the books.

And I read those books and looked at the professors, looked at the outlines, looked at the questions, did my own research. I've been doing this for 17 years. So to say there's no background, I would submit to you that there might be more of a background because I'm reading it just for the enjoyment to know God and not wanting to put that Ph.D. on my business card.

And reading the same things. And I think here's what it really boils down to. If somebody can go to seminary, and it helps them, great.

But for those who are very self-disciplined, who want to read and read and read and get ahead of the class and read more and read both sides, then it might be an idea if you're very self-disciplined is to read different sides. And that's one part. If you go to a Reformed seminary, you'll come out Reformed in your thinking.

Infant baptism, Calvinism, different things. And then if you have Dallas Theological Seminary, a lot of people, I read a lot of their books from there. Who's most recent? Adrian Rogers, I believe, or David Jeremiah, Chuck Swindoll.

I might be misquoting some of those, but some of those guys came from Dallas Theological Seminary. They teach that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not valid today. It ceased with the canonization of Scripture.

We don't need the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So if you come out of there after four years, you might be persuaded to embrace that position. You go to a Pentecostal college, you come out of there, you might need some theological grounding.

You might need to come back to theology. It's not just all about experience. So what I did is I read all of those.

Jack Hayford, John MacArthur, Wayne Grudem, Norman Geisler, Calvin, John Calvin. I've got his whole commentary set to people who would not necessarily embrace him. John Wesley's journals.

And I just read and continue to read all these people. At the Shepherds Conference, I picked up books on pastoral ministry, on leadership skills, from D.O. Moody to Charles Spurgeon. John MacArthur just came out with a new huge book on systematic theology.

So that's what people I don't think understand is, yeah, of course I didn't go to a seminary and earned a degree from a certain area, but I've been reading and studying all these areas, so I'm prepared when I go into the Word of God. If I have questions, then I look to commentaries and the Word of God, and of course relying on the Holy Spirit. So that's why you'll hear me talk about pneumatology, eschatology, soteriology, ecclesiology.

All those big terms mean study of the church, study of the Holy Spirit, study of salvation, study on the work of the Holy Spirit, the depravity of man, and then big things like systematic theology. What is that? It's just talking about how God is systematic in what He does, from creation, to order, to the fall, to redemption, to His will, to the character, to the attributes of God, to now the church, the sacraments, baptism, communion. You just read systematically how God works, theology, the study of God.

That's all it is. So when people ask, actually I might just make this into a short clip. Here's my experience at seminary.

It's reading from all, and I think that's healthy. Because what happens is when I went to this seminary, all these guys are bad. No, they're not bad.

They just read the Bible differently. For example, if somebody was raised in a Reformation-type setting, Calvin, Luther, Swingly, Knox, when I mention those names, these are all Reformers. And we look to them, so they'll take on that denominational setting.

But then when you get to another group that believes that the Holy Spirit is evident today, that when they gave their life to the Lord, and one day they just submitted everything, they were worshipping, they start to just worship God in this unknown language. They have these types of sometimes a word of wisdom for somebody, and they're humble about it, and you see the Holy Spirit working. Then you read 1 Corinthians, like, that's what I've experienced.

So they're going to agree with that. They're not going to think that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not valid today. So they're going to have a hard time going to a church that doesn't believe that.

And that was one argument. Somebody said, why are there so many denominations? Well, that's why. Because people, they want more of a hymnal, hymns, quiet, piano, and just more of a hymnal-type setting and very conservative.

Then there's other groups that are more expressive, and people, they go to a church way out on 40th East, you know, here in Lafayette. They want to be conservative and choir. And Pastor Paul, I met with him at city council.

We talked for four hours addressing the city on marijuana. We're brothers. Chris at Grace Chapel, text him off and talked him off and built up.

We're brothers. Calvary Chapel, it's all, but it's different types. But the enemy will come in here and cause division.

Now, there are some churches I do have concerns with. But for the majority of churches in this area that are Bible teaching, and there are churches I can name just west of here, that will say, well, they're not Calvinistic. You know, is Westside Christian Calvinism? Well, then they're not really going in a healthy direction.

I would encourage you not to go there. So they take to that doctrine pretty, they hold to it pretty closely. For those who are interested, Calvinism, Armenianism, basically Calvinism is, and I love John Calvin, but actually he wouldn't subscribe to the five points of Calvinism.

He would subscribe to the four points. And they break it down, total depravity, irresistible grace, unconditional election, perseverance of the saints, and limited atonement. And basically, you have this group that God only chooses certain people to heaven, the elect.

So if you're not chosen, you're, you know, sorry, you weren't part of God's plan. Now, God, the Bible teaches election. But then there's this side who says that man does have the ability to repent and believe.

And then people say, well, what side are you on? I say, well, what does the Bible say? That's why I talk about, I don't like these isms. What does the Bible say? God is sovereign, yep, election's true, yep, but man is commanded to repent and believe so much so that he'll be held accountable for his choices. So, Shane, what do you believe? I believe both.

You can't. You've got to jump on this camp or this camp. No, I don't.

The Bible teaches both. He's sovereign, I'm resting in that, but I'm calling people to repentance until the day I die. It's very healthy balance.

I love that tension. So that, hopefully that answers some questions. Probably not for the 9 a.m. service.

You guys are already in tune, right, with what's going on. You've turned your clocks forward. But that is the, in a nutshell, six-minute version of what seminary did I go to.

I've gleaned from a lot of them Bible-believing, solid seminaries. So here's the third point. Use regret.

Use regret. Don't live in regret. Don't live in it.

Use it as a stepping stone. In other words, I regret my choices. I regret my failed marriage.

I regret my abortion 24 years ago, six weeks old. I've talked about this. I conceded to that.

I regret it. There's not a week that doesn't go by that rips me apart. But I'm going to use that as a stepping stone to preach the glorious gospel of forgiveness and to try to stop that in the sex trade.

And I'm going to use that as a stepping stone. I'm not going to use that as regret where I have to turn to the bottle every week because I did something that I can't live with. I'm going to turn to God and let him heal me.

Many don't use it as a stepping stone. They use it to continue in this pattern of failure. Because isn't that easy? You get up in the morning.

Let me just use an example. You get up in the morning. I can't believe I did that yesterday.

I shouldn't have drank again. I shouldn't have whatever. I'm trying to just put different things in there.

And then now here it comes today. I'm so sorry over this. I have so much regret.

And now I'm just going to continue it. And then the next day I'm just going to continue it. It's just this endless cycle of regret and failure, regret and failure.

So remember this. Bad decisions made in the past are not the unpardonable sin. I had a divorce.

It's not the unpardonable sin. Rejecting Christ is the unpardonable sin. That's the unpardonable.

That's something that you can never be pardoned from once you die and reject Christ. So don't live in those patterns. I mean, Paul killed Christians.

Is there anybody here who's, I've been killing Christians. So he, and I think God uses extreme examples. Paul, I mean, I read the book of Job, and I say, oh, my God.

Please, please, Lord, let me just remain simple and quiet. I don't want the devil to say, I've been observing your servant, Shane. And there's a hedge upon him because he's just trusting.

He's just trusting in the goodness and the blessings of God. But if you remove that hedge from Shane and you take his family, you take everything, we'll see if, no, no, I don't want the Job experience. I don't want Job.

I don't want David's experience. So we use his extreme examples, which are true and valid, to keep us on the straight and narrow. Philippians 3, many of you know this.

Not that I've already attained or that I'm already perfected. Paul's saying, I have not attained perfection. I do not have this complete relationship with Christ just yet, but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, I forget the things in the past and I move forward to the things in the present. That's biblical. That's the only way you'll get back on track.

It's to say, well, devil, you got me there, but you're not getting me in the 12th round. God, I'm back on track. And maybe it's me.

Maybe this message isn't too applicable to this group, but I talk to a lot of people. Just today, he's going to be at the 11 a.m. service, hopefully, caught in regret. What's it lead to? A lifestyle of running from God.

Okay, that's the introduction. I think we can conclude at that, right? Acts 9, Acts 9. Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. Can you believe this? Paul is breathing

threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.

He went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus so that if he found anybody who was of the way, of the way is Christians. We're first called Christians in Antioch. They became called the way.

Are you in the way? Are you with that group? It's El Paseo in Spanish, in case you're curious. Are you part of the way? Christians, are you part of that group? So here's what happened. If you were part of that way, Paul was going to bring you bound to Jerusalem for trial.

So we see here just a couple things. Saul was angry and murderous. He was very angry and murderous.

And Saul, his old name, actually means asked for. Asked for. Now, if you rewind your mind a while back to when Saul was anointed king over Israel, the people said, we don't want judges anymore.

We want a king. So God said, I will give you what you ask for. And that was the first king, Saul.

Interesting. So this name Saul means asked for. And then his name is changed from Saul to Paul.

Paul means little and humble. Little and humble. Now, should you change your name? I don't know about that.

I'm just throwing that out there that there is a change that takes place. And we see here also that religious people don't like Christians. So stop being offended.

What I mean by religious people is those who have formality. Those who go every Sunday but they don't know Christ. Those who can say certain things but don't have a relationship with God.

Religious people don't like you. They don't like me because you challenge their religiosity. See, when something challenges their relationship with God, they get mad because they don't have one.

They have rules and they go through different things and rituals. But when you challenge your relationship with God, they do not like it. That's what happened with Paul.

He was convicted by Stephen's sermon a few weeks back that Paul was not a Christian. He killed the Messiah. They were furious.

So now here's Paul. He's journeying. He's coming towards Damascus.

And suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul said, who are you, Lord? Then the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. It's hard for you to kick against the goads.

So he trembling, I bet he was, and astonished, he said, Lord, what do you want me to do? Boy, that's a whole sermon right there. But let me just pick out a few things from this. Well, first, look at what goads are.

I think that's important because you're like, what's he talking about, goads? I don't even know what that is. Well, they're big. I've heard that they can be up to 10 feet tall.

But let's say 6, 7, 8 feet tall. And at the end, they've got spikes on the end. And as you're sitting or riding or pushing or behind your oxen, you kind of goad the oxen.

You think it's going to get to move? Try that or a feather and see what's going to work. Right? These goats. So Paul is fighting against the goats.

And you're not going to win. So Jesus is basically saying here, how long are you going to fight against me? How long are you going to fight against me? And this is something I think we need to look at just for a minute. You're not going to ever get God to a point where he says, okay, uncle, you're right.

It works at home, doesn't it? It works. The kids are badgering you all day about the computer. No, no, no.

And then after a couple hours, you're like, fine, just get on that thing. Get on that thing and leave me alone. Right? That doesn't happen at my house.

I'm just giving examples of what happens. And it has happened. Mike, you too, right? You know, we don't.

It's like, here's my phone. But God's not like that. You're not going to pressure God.

And people, if I just keep resisting him, if I just keep pushing, pushing. No, we can't stop fighting God. If you know there's something he's wanting you to do, he's not going to buckle under the pressure.

He's going to stand as Fort Knox because he loves us. And he'll say, you bend to me. I can't bend to you.

Stop fighting. So if you want to use your past, if you want God to use your past, listen, there's future pastors in this room. There's future worship leaders in this room.

There's future men and women study teachers in this room. They're all in this room. But the enemy will have you bound in your past and say, you can never do what Shane does.

Why do you think I explained my past? To show you, yes, you can when God's in it. Nothing can be against you. But there's a wall there.

You can't keep fighting. I tried to negotiate with God. I keep fighting.

I'm not going to pastor for many years. Ask my mom. Ask my, I'm not going to pastor.

Those guys, they just smile all the time. And they wear glasses. And they're, you just, oh, my little pastor.

I go, I don't have that. I have the fire of Elisha and the fire of John the Baptist in my belly. I can't do that.

And God says, that's what I need. That's what I want. I want that.

I want that fire. I want that unction. And so, but I didn't want it.

I kept fighting it, fighting it. And you know what happens? When you're fighting with God, you're not fun to be around. Right? It's like the little kid who, you know, you just, I can't, I'm not going to.

No. And if I just ignore God enough, he's like, no, I'm going to apply the pressure. I'm going to turn up the heat.

And so, if you want God to use your past, if you want to be used mightily by God, this is important. Stop fighting whatever he's telling you to do because it often starts with the first step, not the 23rd. See, we don't want to take that first step, the first step of obedience and the first step of humbling ourselves.

It's from that first step that the second step is formed. And once you're obedient in this area, then the next step, then the next step. And even in my own life, I'll just, I didn't do this at the first service, but maybe it'll help somebody.

Maybe it won't. Maybe it'll upset somebody. Maybe that's okay.

This is funny. Just a little thing. Sometimes I don't know where I should share too much because people take it the wrong way.

But I knew for, like Morgan will tell you too, like there's many times I've been like, Lord, what kind of fast? I want to go on a powerful fast. I want to just, man, just nothing but peanuts, right, or just water. Lord, I want to fast.

And there's this little voice going, no, you need to stop coffee first. No, no, no, no. That's staying.

Whatever I'm doing, the coffee's staying, right? That's given. That's a given. But, like, Lord, what kind of fast? And I'm just miserable because I can't figure out what kind of fast to do.

I'll go weeks that way. I'll go weeks. He goes, start with the first thing.

Get rid of this thing you're addicted to. No, I like that black thing I'm addicted to. It makes me feel good in the morning because I'm tired.

Get rid of that first. No, I'm not going to get rid of that first. What do you want me to do? I live frustrated because I can't figure out what he wants me to do.

What am I supposed to do? Start with that. I don't want to start with I love that. Just, I mean, just, right? Just no, God.

It's just, but those are just examples of my own life. The little things. The little things.

Or when we were with, like, live stream. That's a fun example because people have been asking for six years. You know? I'm like, no, we're not going to do that.

That's ridiculous. We're not going to do that. I got to really worry about what I say.

You know? You can't do that. You're fighting different things. And I knew, kind of, but I was trying to, well, let's just try video.

Let's try. And I didn't want videos. I just want CDs, audios if people want something.

So, God's been pushing and pushing, and I had to say yes to all these smaller things. Now, there are big things in our life. I'm not minimizing.

Some people have got to get out of relationships that are not healthy. There's adultery in the church. There's addiction to pornography in the church.

There's something called fornication in the church. There's something. These are deep things that we have to take steps on if we want God to use our past.

It's impossible to live in sin and covet and hold on to our sin, yet want to be mightily used by God. That's an oxymoron. You can't have both.

You can't cuddle the thing that's called to destroy you, and they say, God used me to destroy the thing that's destroying me. You have to release that. No doubt, Paul was in spiritual turmoil.

Think about this for a minute. He watched Stephen break down the Old Testament like nothing he's ever heard. He said, you crucified Christ.

Here's what the Messiah has been foretold. You killed the prophets who proclaimed him. You killed.

Paul is now faced with the certainty of the resurrection. Paul sees Jesus. He hears from Christ.

He is faced with the reality that he has been led astray, and he's in turmoil. Now, there's something here. I actually crossed it with this so I wouldn't forget.

We keep talking about this, but I can't assume that everybody, especially now with people listening, that everybody listening to this is saved. Paul didn't get direction until he was converted. And if you have never, never repented and embraced Christ as your Savior and believed in him and said, God, I want to be changed, I need you, I need that sacrifice for me because I can't be right with you without Jesus.

It doesn't matter how eloquent your prayers are. God forbid I be in trouble. It matters your heart.

If your heart's saying, God, I need you, I need what he's talking about, I need to repent and believe. I've never done that. You better do that because the rest of the whole sermon doesn't make sense because God uses people who are in right relationship with him.

Now, he'll also use people who aren't, Pharaoh and different things, but those are for destruction, not for blessing. You want to make sure you're on the right side of the equation. And here's my heart.

You know this if you've been here a while, but there's a lot of people who go to church as if it's something on their checklist. It's what good people do, but they're not a son or daughter of God. They've never believed and repented.

That's why the heart hasn't been changed. See, they're trying to change a heart that's unchangeable. Unbelievers do that.

They'll try to change a heart that you can't change by self-discipline and willpower alone. It has to be changed from the inside out. See, that's the wonderful thing about God.

You go to him, you repent, say, God, change me. Okay, I'll change your heart. Now, why do I have a love for this person I used to hate? Why do I want to not spend my money on all that or consume all that? What is this happening? What's changing? I mean, the most radical thing in all of my life was when I opened up the Bible and I could not put it down.

Something I couldn't get through, like, what is this? Oh, man, don't eat shellfish. I love sushi. And I just, it doesn't make any sense.

It doesn't make any sense because the heart's not right. But when the heart was right, it was like, you can't explain it to people. It was like food.

Oh, that's why. Oh, that's why. Yes, Lord, I'm trusting you.

Psalms comes alive. When it said, the first one, I said, I've got to memorize that. Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.

That's been my problem. I go to everybody but God. Everybody but God.

And does not stand in the path of sinners nor sit in the seat of the scornful. I was standing in the path of sin, so I got hit by the train. I was sitting in the seat with the scornful, with the scoffers and the mockers and the gossipers.

I was part of that group. But blessed is the man who meditates in the word of God day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by living waters, and his leaves will not wither, and everything he does will prosper.

And that woke up something inside of me. And I said, God, I have to follow you. And it's funny because I go, why are you so loud? Why are you so passionate? Because a living God changed my life.

My good folks, we go out, we love, we love movies, right? All these, oh, I love, you've got to watch The Shack, people say. I love The Shack. You've got to go watch it.

But when it comes to God, we're quiet. Why is that? Jane again tells pros and cons about The Shack. No, I'm not going there this morning.

I don't know much about it, actually. I'd have to do more research. On that, though, their view of God and the Trinity and hard issues of the Bible from what I've read is disheartening for sure.

So the fourth point, stop fighting God. Like Paul, you have to say, Lord, what do you want me to do? Because, I mean, I don't know for sure, but Paul could have just got off his whatever he was writing and kicked that thing, hit it with the pro, I don't know what this is, and just been mad and angry. But he said, Lord, who are you? It's interesting.

Do you catch this? Who are you? Lord. He clearly, something rocked his world, and he knew it wasn't him at the top of the Pharisee order. Who are you, Lord? What do you want me to do? And that's why there's this whole debate on lordship salvation I won't even get into.

I had before, people believe you can have Christ as Savior but not Lord. And personally, I just don't see that. Now, there's progression.

People are Savior, and they haven't quite surrendered everything, and they're still living carnality, and I got that. But if he's Savior, he's Lord. They're interchangeable.

Yeah, he's Savior, but he's not my Lord. Heck no. Well, hello.

Hello, that's not conversion. That's giving God his due. So no matter where you are right now, right now, I know there's people Canada, Puerto Rico, here, Leona Valley, right now you can say, Lord, what do you want? I've ruined the last ten years.

I've ruined the last ten days. I've been off track. Lord, what do you want? Please, God, show me, and he will answer that prayer.

And then this is the fifth point, trust in God's sovereignty. Trust in God's sovereignty. There is a God who can raise one president up and pull another president down.

I will tell you this much. As much as I've been studying on atheism and scientific discoveries and quantum physics and deoxyribonucleic acid. You guys know what that is? There you go.

That's why they call it DNA. So you don't have to say deoxyribonucleic acid. And you study all that.

I'm like, how in the world does people think that there's not a God? It's just the DNA. There's like three million letters. They say grab this amino valine.

Grab this one listening. Grab these amino acids and create this. And it goes like this.

These strands and creating life. They have to be just perfect, just perfect to create life. The chances are absolutely, there's no mathematical equations to put the chances on it.

So that God who said everything in order, said, Jupiter, you stay there. Sun, you stay there. Give out just enough heat just to keep my people.

110 to 110 degrees to, you know, 50. You know, and now it's getting full. Just keep it there.

The oxygen, the nitrogen, all this. That sovereign God has everything in control. Trust in his sovereignty.

Don't look at your circumstances. Don't look at what the court's going to say. Don't look at I have no job experience.

Don't look at anything. But God is sovereign. The God who created can do anything he wants to.

But you have to remember that. Because even my heart, even my heart deals with struggles. God, you're sovereign.

I mean, when this whole debate thing came out, I had a tough time sleeping sometimes. This group went and grabbed the best of the best of their debaters of knowing this topic, and that's who they're going to have to speak. And I'm going, oh, God, without you, without you, who do you think is putting that whole thing together? Me? Absolutely not.

I'm writing down stuff jogging. I'm writing down stuff driving. I'm writing stuff.

He's just unloading all these things into my spirit because I'm saying, God, I can't do this without you. Would you show me, daddy? I mean, would you go to your dad and say, your little boy dad, would you show me how to build this? No. God's even ten times, there's no numbers to put on it.

He's just much better than we are, and he's going to lead. He is sovereign. I don't know what your theological persuasion is, but God called Paul.

There's not any way around this, really. Paul's on his road to Damascus. God says, bam, right hook.

What do you want to do with me, Lord? Here's what I want to do. You're going to be a chosen vessel to go to the Gentiles. Jeremiah, before you were even born, I called you.

What? I called you, and I formed you in your mother's womb. I took this DNA and that DNA. Stay on that topic for a minute, right? Deoxyribonucleic acid.

You just take all these little things, and I'm going to form you to be a prophet. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. So God is sovereign.

God does elect certain people to do certain things. How all that unfolds, I don't know. If you just let your mind keep going and going, you'll wander into an unhealthy spot on either side.

I mean, if it's all man, oh, gosh, we're in trouble. But did God create evil? And then God created the devil, knowing the devil would do that, and then he allowed this. So then is evil good, and God is not good? And you start to, your mind just, you have to understand that both.

God is sovereign. His sovereign plans will prevail. He is a loving, gracious father, but he's also holy and righteous and just.

Don't forget all those other attributes. Right? We forget. We just, well, God is love.

How could he allow this? Well, he's also holy. He's also just. And here's the important thing that's always helped me, well, at least for 15 years.

Remember this. I'm not as worried about the things I don't know in the Bible. I'm very concerned about the things I do know.

Repent and believe. Do not reject God. Do not deny him.

Those are the things we need. But we get caught. Well, how about this? How does a loving God allow this? And it's funny because atheists will act, well, how does a loving God.

Well, hold on now. Hold on. There's no God.

So that's it. The question isn't relevant. How can a loving God.

So now we just turn from there is no God to the attributes of God. And now we have to study who God is and his nature. And there are things I don't understand in the Old Testament.

I'll tell you right now. How could he allow. What? But I'm not God.

Will the creation say to the creator? But that's exactly what we do. We shake our fists at God. Then the Lord said to him, Saul, arise.

Go into the city. And you'll be told what to do. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

So this wasn't just some inner feeling, right? You know those people. I don't know. I don't know if God really spoke to you.

You know. I don't know. I don't know.

But this is a genuine. They felt it. They saw it.

God spoke to Paul. This might be important. Maybe God brought this to my mind.

I didn't remember it at the first service. But this is a very valid point for the Bible. Because people say, oh, it's a Bible written by men, put together, the church put together to try to control.

The council of Nicaea and 350, well, right in there, 300s, brought together this council. They put whatever books in the Bible they wanted to. Actually, they did.

And the council that meant, I think it was 325 now A.D. All they did was say, these are the books the early church has been using since its existence. They are authoritative. Meaning they are written by people who experienced and walked with Christ.

That's what sets the Bible apart, especially in the New Testament, about any other book. These are authoritative books from people who were there firsthand witness accounts. That's what it is.

It's called authoritative. That's why. So Paul was there.

Paul saw this. Paul now is a writer of the majority of the New Testament. So after he's speechless on the ground, it says, saw a rose from the ground.

And when his eyes were opened, he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was there three days without sight and neither ate nor drank.

He was silent and completely broken. This isn't really a point, but I would throw this out there. When you want God to use your past, that's good advice.

Be silent and be broken for a season. Because we're so busy running our mouth off at everything. Sometimes it's good to just be silent and be broken.

Paul was broken before God. And I found this from Family Life today. I think we passed it out this morning.

Proud people focus on the failures of others. Broken people are overwhelmed with the sense of their own spiritual need. Proud people have a critical, fault-finding spirit.

They look at everyone else's fault through the lens of a microscope. But their own shortcomings through the lens of a telescope. Broken people are compassionate.

They can forgive much because they know how much they have been forgiven. So this is an important part. Paul was broken.

I see prideful people. You know prideful people, right? Pride's dripping off of them like you just got out of the shower. And water's dripping.

And it's just, oh, you don't see it. I mean, I can't be around those people very long either. I'll either call them on it or, you know, I just don't want to be around them.

It's just so much pride. And I'll say, well, Shane, aren't you prideful? Yeah, we all are to a certain degree. Don't think you're going to sneak out of here this morning and think you're not prideful in some form.

All of us, because it's in our Adamic, Adam's DNA, because we're in that fallen nature. But there's a difference between a struggle and a lifestyle. I've talked about it many times before, but let's just focus on this.

You've got to be broken before God. You've got to be humble before God in order for him to use you. Back to that pot of clay represents humility.

The sixth point. This will not be the most popular point of the day, but it's the most important sometimes. Consider fasting for direction.

He's not eating. He's not drinking. Now, granted, he's probably doing this for mourning.

In the Bible, you'll see fasting is either used for mourning or protection or direction. So Paul is in a state of mourning here. He's mourning what happened.

But this also applies for fasting. And I've talked about this before, but it's fasting starves the flesh. And knowing God's will is not taught, it's caught.

Now, let me help you catch it. Me just talking about this doesn't do much at all. Let's think.

If everybody in this room said, oh, that makes sense, but nothing changed, we'd just waste a lot of time. Is there any football games on today that we could have watched? Or golf? I mean, no, we're worshiping God. I know, I'm being a little facetious, right? Joking a little, but overall I'm not because this is true.

If we don't apply things, it's only taught but not caught. Fasting helps us starve the areas of our life that need starving. The God of materialism, the God of our bellies, or the God of our bodies is still on the throne.

Fasting starves that. And it's an interesting concept that's not taught too much nowadays. Here's what we normally teach.

If you fast and when you sin. But the Bible says when you fast and if you sin. Big difference.

It's assuming when you fast, do it to yourself, do it to the Lord, starve the body. But if you sin, there's an advocate. But we think, well, when you sin, I mean, it's just going to happen.

And if you decide to ever fast, I mean, down the line, you might want to consider it. But the Bible says when you fast. They assumed.

It was an assumption. Jesus said, when you fast, do it this way. Paul fasted.

Peter fasted. Cornelius, we're going to read about, fasted. Ezra fasted.

Nehemiah fasted. Moses fasted. You want me to keep going? It's vitally important.

That's why it's so hard. Because this is where the rubber really meets the road, doesn't it? If I just open up my Bible, oh, that's not too hard. I've got my large Krispy Kreme 12-ounce dark coffee with three Krispy Kreme donuts.

And now it's real easy to study the Bible. But you remove those things and just have water. Now it's, I don't want to do this.

Why? Because you have to starve that fleshly nature that wants to get in there. Now, can you enjoy something and read the Bible? Of course. But you know exactly what I'm talking about.

The flesh, if given enough control, will control us. Perfect example. Why do many people not want to stick around for worship and prayer? King's stomach is on the throne.

Let's just be honest, right? I mean, that's why I kind of want to, come on, guys. I haven't eaten today yet. Come on.

I've got to make it. So what I purposely do now, putting myself on the spot because I'll see some of you later today. But I don't eat later.

I just wait until dinner. I just keep it going. Because I want, I'm praying for a lot of you.

I'm praying for the service to still, because I know even after here it penetrates hearts. And I still want to keep the body in submission because it helps with other areas of self-discipline. If you're self-disciplined in this area, it's not a far stretch to read the Bible the next day.

It's not a far stretch to continue in prayer and worship. It's not a far stretch to put anger at bay and bitterness. It's not a far stretch to be filled with the Spirit because you're already disciplined in this area.

That's all it's about. Here's the bottom line. Are the cravings and the desires of the flesh controlling you or are you controlling them? Fasting helps us control them.

We put them into submission. Yeah, you're hungry right now? Well, shut your mouth. You're going to wait about six hours.

You can talk to your flesh that way. It's very healthy. And this is why this isn't popular, right? Move on to the next point, Shane.

Hurry, move on to the next point. But this is crucial, so consider this. Take it to God.

Just look up. Just Google all the verses dealing with fasting. It's amazing.

Ezra didn't even set out without protection before fasting. Nehemiah didn't go before the king until he was fasted. Esther didn't go before the king until three days of fasting.

Moses fasted. Oh, somebody by the name of Jesus. Forgot about that one.

Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness. Now, if you've ever fasted, you know why he went to the wilderness. Because all kinds of emotions will come out that you didn't know still live there.

You didn't realize how mad your flesh gets when it's denied something. It doesn't like it. So consider that.

Consider fasting for direction. Now, the seventh point, and I'm going to end here, and this is very important because this is what people need to hear, a lot of people. When we're talking about regret, I'm reaching a whole audience of people now, a different audience, meaning some are living well.

Some aren't living in regret. They've been following Christ and praise God for that. Just use this worship service to worship God and thank him for that.

Then there's others who have learned and aren't living with the past pain, but they've learned to deal with it. Thank God that God brought them through it, and they're in a spot of worship, and they're in a good spot. But I also want to talk to that group where they're caught.

They're caught in that, what I talked about at the beginning, they're caught in the circumstances. And you know what those are, right? Kids are being taken from you, or marriages are being destroyed, or relationships are being broken, or jobs are being lost, or things that you would have said that haven't been said to family members. You're living in that regret.

Here's the final point, is you must fall forward. It's not just a cute little saying, it's true, because when we fall, we fall forward. Here's the idea, you fall forward into God's arms of restoration and renewal and forgiveness.

Have you ever fell into somebody's arms? It happens a lot at funerals or when you lose somebody. I remember vividly falling into my brother's arms at my dad's funeral 25 years ago and just weeping and falling. Same thing, you have to fall into God's.

It's okay to weep. It's okay to cry. We like to play Mr. Tough Guy, don't we? I'm real spiritual, I don't cry.

But really, it's the spiritual people who do weep. Those close to the Lord, there's joy and there's weeping. There's just this flood of emotions.

So fall forward into God's arms of forgiveness because they don't fall into God's arms of forgiveness because they're too worried, thinking God doesn't want them now. They've done too much damage. Have you ever stated that? Some of you, I've done too much damage.

God can't use me now. I've blown it. I mean, there are times when I say there's no way in hell he's using me.

I'll be lucky to even get into heaven by the skin of my teeth. God, I'm so sorry. But those are crucial times that you fall forward into God's arms.

There's a poem I read about eight months ago. I went online and found it again. It's about this little boy who kept running a race and kept falling.

I'm just going to catch the last part here. So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been, still he gave it all he had and ran like he could win. Three times he'd fallen, stumbling.

Three times he rose again. Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end. They cheered another boy who crossed the line and won first place.

His head held high and proud and happy. No failing, no falling, no disgrace. But when the fallen youngster crossed the line in last place, the crowd gave him a greater cheer for finishing the race.

And even though he came in last with head bowed low and unproud, you would have thought he'd won the race to listen to the crowd. And to his dad, he sadly said, Dad, I didn't do so well. To me, you won, his father said.

He said, you rose each time you fell. And now when things seem dark and bleak and difficult to face, the memory of that little boy helps me in my race. For all of life is like a race with ups and downs and all, and all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall.

And when depression and despair shout loudly in my face, another voice within me says, get up and win that race. Isn't that the heart of God? Get up, win that race. Get up, you've fallen, yes you have.

Get up, prevail. Finish. Here's another secret that I don't quite understand.

And I'm leery to say this because I don't want to encourage backsliding. I don't want to encourage prodigal living. I don't want to encourage people to sin because I think it's best not to.

But as a word of encouragement to those who are trapped or caught, often the greater the pain, the greater the love for Christ. The deeper you fall in, the more you hold on. I know pastors who haven't went through much at all.

They've never made mistakes. They're doing great. And I wouldn't trade my relationship with the Lord with them for a million dollars because there's no relationship, right? There's no love.

Jesus said those who have been forgiven much, love much. Do you know who he said that to? Prostitute. She was a prostitute, giving herself, coming to Christ, weeping, washing his feet.

How could Jesus even know? Does he know what type of woman this is? And he said those who have been forgiven much, love much. And it's interesting because those who have seen their depravity, they see that they should have died a dozen times over, they see all these things. They actually can love Christ more than the person with casual Christianity.

Now, it doesn't have to be that way. I believe that those who seek, those who find. But those who love much, that's why there's tears, that's why they love God with all their heart because he's brought them to the brim of hell and back.

He's brought them through life. And you hold on to the Savior, you love him. So use that.

Use that pain. Use that past to draw you to Christ, not further away. Use it.

Because if you don't use it for that, the enemy will use it for evil. He will pull you right back into bondage and addiction. He'll pull you right back into not seeking God.

And you stop reading the Bible for a day or a week, it turns into a month. And then a year. If you don't grab it and fall into God's arms forgiving.

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