Courage or Compromise? — Delivery Transcript

Matthew 26:30–41 (ESV) · Wes Terry · Sunday, March 7, 2021 · *The Reward*

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All right, if you have a Bible, you can open it up to Luke's Gospel, chapter 22. Put your thumb in there and then turn over to Matthew chapter 26. Matthew chapter 26 and Luke chapter 22 are going to be the passages we're going to look at, hopping back from one to the other. They tell the same story, but they tell it in a different way. And so Luke chapter 22 and Matthew chapter 26. We're going to start in Matthew 26. It was 1999, April 20th, at Columbine High School, and seniors Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold walked into their school and murdered twelve of their classmates and one of their teachers.

It's now infamous in American history and has gone on to inspire other copycat murders and killings. But one of the people that was murdered on that tragic day was a young lady by the name of Cassie Bernall. Like most other students, she walked into her school on that day expecting, like every other student, just a normal day of school. And she left the building on a stretcher and would later become known as a Christian martyr. Her mother and family actually wrote a book after her death that described the scenario. Cassie wasn't actually always a Christian.

She had actually just recently come into a newfound faith in Jesus as Lord. She had dabbled in the occult and played around with most things that high school students play around with, whether it's drugs or premarital sex or drinking and the like, but she came to hear about Jesus and believed on him as Savior and Lord and had just recently rededicated her life to Jesus Christ. And one of the ways that her family knows that is because of a note that she wrote down in her journal the Sunday before her murder.

Her brother actually went into her room after her death and found this note in her journal. It's really fascinating. The Sunday before her death, she writes this: "Now I have given up on everything else. I have found it to be the only way to really know Christ and to experience the mighty power that brought him back to life again. And to find out what it means to suffer

and to die for him. So whatever it takes, I will be one who lives in the fresh newness of life of those who are alive from the dead."

Really fascinating note. I didn't actually know that until studying it this week. The reason I tell the story and bring up her life is because at every crisis of faith, one of two things will be exposed in our life. Now you may not be like Cassie. Hopefully, God forbid you don't have the same experience she did. She was posed with a question. When those gunmen went into that library, all the other students were hiding under tables, hiding in closets, running for their life. The gunman came to her and said, do you believe in God?

And the reason he asked that question is because she was sitting there in the library reading her Bible. And when she gets that question asked to her, she replies with, yes, I do, in a bold, courageous voice, loud enough for everybody else to hear, which is why we know about it today.[1] But in that moment, her life was marked by spiritual courage. What would your life be marked by? The thing is that spiritual courage isn't born in the midst of a crisis. Spiritual courage is exposed by a crisis. And in every crisis, one of two things will be exposed, either spiritual compromise or spiritual courage.

We're going to look at a story this morning of an individual, a disciple of Jesus, whose life was marked by spiritual compromise when he thought it would have been marked by spiritual courage. It's a big, burly fisherman by the name of Peter. Most of you know his story well. And he ends up denying Jesus three times. And I think in studying his life, we'll not only get an insight or a blueprint on what makes for spiritual compromise but also how to avoid it in our life so that when we're posed with the same kind of crises, we're able to stand strong in the faith without compromise.

So let's start the passage in Matthew chapter 26, starting in verse 30 to give you a little bit of context, Jesus has just had his last supper with his disciples. He has professed his love for them and has warned them that one of them is going to betray him. Of course, that would be Judas, who goes and sells out Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. When they had finished the dinner, they sung a hymn and they went out to the Mount of Olives. And it says in verse 1[2] that Jesus said to all of them, "You will all fall away because of me this night.

For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." And so Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." You got to love Peter's confidence, right? He's always quick to say how amazing he is. After this encounter with Jesus and the disciples, Luke's gospel actually gives us a little added insight into another conversation between Jesus and Peter. It's in Luke chapter 22. So turn to Luke chapter 22, and we're going to look at verses 31 to 34.

Luke chapter 22. Again, I think this is just picking up right where Matthew's gospel left off. Jesus says in Luke 22:31, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." When Peter hears Jesus say that to him, Peter says to the Lord, "I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." Again, a confidence in the flesh that Peter has. And then Jesus responds, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."

And if you hop back over to Matthew 26, the conversation concludes with a final expression of confidence by Peter. He says in Matthew 26, verse 35, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And then all the disciples said the same. So pretty interesting little passage, and I think two truths just come right to the surface that we need to know if we're going to avoid spiritual compromise in our life. Fundamental truths that we're prone to forget, I'm afraid. The first is that we have an enemy who is literally hell-bent on crushing you, destroying you, sifting you, as Jesus says in this passage.

Number two, we have a flesh that's prone to fail us. We have an enemy who wants to crush us, and we have a flesh that's prone to fail us. You see both of these in Peter's conversation with Jesus. Number one, the enemy that wants to sift you— it's not some generic figment of your imagination. It's a literal person called Satan. The name Satan literally means accuser or it literally means adversary or enemy. He's really not just a figure of speech. He's not something in the fairy tales that people tell their kids so that they'll behave.

He's not some wooden person or some red person with a pointy tail. He is an angel of light. He is committed to your destruction. He is smart, intelligent, cunning, and wise, and he is committed to sifting you, to use Jesus' language. It was something that they would do to wheat. If you've ever sifted wheat, which probably none of you have because who does that anymore? But if you were to sift wheat, you'd take the little wheat things and you would thresh them. And then you'd be left with the head of the wheat, which has kind of got some stickery stuff around the seed.

You got the stalk and the trash and stuff. And the way to get the seed out of the trash is to put it through a sieve. All right. And a sieve— think of a bread basket with some filters and liners down at the bottom, and you would just kind of put the wheat in there and you'd shake it around, and the seeds, the heavy stuff falls to the bottom. And then the big stuff and the trash would stay on the top and you'd get rid of the trash and keep the seed.

And then after that you would do a winnowing process to remove the chaff from the seed. But Jesus is talking about a pretty violent process of shaking. I think it's a metaphorical example of suffering, pain, hardship, failure that the devil wants to use in your life to expose the real from the fake, the true from the false. And you might think to yourself, well, isn't

that a good thing to have that exposed in me? Isn't that what the Holy Spirit does? Convict me of sin, expose the sin in my life so that I know where I need to grow.

And in a sense, yes, that's true, the Holy Spirit does convict of sin and he does expose our weaknesses, but he does it for a fundamentally different purpose. The Holy Spirit exposes sin in your life to convict you, so that you would be cleansed of sin and overcome sin in your life and become a better person. It's a conviction that leads to a knowledge of God's love and mercy and grace for you. On the other hand, the devil wants to expose your weaknesses so that he can harp on them, preach about them, and destroy you.

He wants you to only ever identify with your sin. He wants you to only ever identify with your weaknesses. You'll only always ever be an adulterer or a failure or unlovable or unusable. You'll only always ever be the weird person that nobody really likes. And if he can get you to believe that narrative about yourself, he can take you out of the game. He can take you out of God's will for your life, and that's exactly what he wants to do. And by the way, it's not just something that Satan did to Peter.

It's not something that Satan does just as a one-off to the important people. It's something that he wants to do in every single believer's life, your life and in my life. He wants to sift you like wheat, exploit your weaknesses, expose them, preach on them, and take you out of the game. He wants you to believe the worst about yourself. The problem is Peter wasn't prepared for this sifting process. Jesus warns Peter about the coming sifting, but Peter is totally unprepared, and the reason he was unprepared is because he had put too much confidence in the flesh, an overconfidence in the flesh.

You see it in passages like Luke 22:33, when he says, Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death. He says in Matthew 26:33, though everybody else fall away because of you, I will never fall away. Matthew 26:35, even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. And by the way, I don't think Peter was being insincere. I think he believed his own press. I think he had every intention of being this bold, courageous Christian. The problem is that he shouldn't have believed it.

He shouldn't have read his own press. He shouldn't have drank the Kool-Aid. He shouldn't have had that much confidence in his flesh. He should have remembered a core spiritual principle that number one, your faith is prone to fail you. Or your flesh is prone to fail you. You're not who you think you are. You're not as strong as you think you are. It reminds me of that story of Muhammad Ali who's on the airplane and the stewardess is having a hard time getting him to buckle his seatbelt. He's making a big commotion.

I'm Muhammad Ali, I'm the greatest of all time. I don't need no seatbelt. I'm Superman. And the stewardess said, well, sir, Superman doesn't need a plane, so put your seatbelt on, you know. You're not who you think you are. You've got too much confidence in the flesh. And

when that happens spiritually, when you think you buy into this American line that we're all independent and we're self-sufficient, and you go into an American bookstore, the self-help section is the biggest section in there. It's an American idea. It's not a Christian idea.

The Christian idea is, blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who know they're not as sufficient as they may think they are. Blessed are those who don't think more highly of themselves than they ought to think, but they think of themselves with sober judgment. An overconfidence in the flesh will set you up for a spiritual compromise every single time. An attitude of I'm it, look at me, I'm the one is going to take you out. The second thing that happens, and really this happens because of an overconfidence in the flesh.

Peter's overconfidence in the flesh led to the second culprit of his spiritual compromise, and that was prayerlessness. And you actually see this materialize later on in the passage when they leave— or they leave the Mount of Olives and they enter into the Garden of Gethsemane. This was a garden where Jesus would spend a lot of time in prayer, and so he goes in there to pray. And he asks his disciples to pray alongside of him. So in verse 36, you see Jesus go with the disciples to a place called Gethsemane.

And then he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. And then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and he prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." Now we don't have a lot of time to camp on this, but I just want to point out this is exactly what we should do to prepare our heart for a crisis.

Jesus knows the cross looms, he knows it's the will of the Father. He knows he can't avoid it, but even though he knows all of that, he gets down on his knees and he prays, if it's possible, let it pass. Father, I don't think I'm ready. I don't think I'm prepared. I need you to either remove this cup from me, or if it's unavoidable, if I must drink it, then your will be done. Give me the energies I need, the spiritual grace I need to walk in your will. So he prays that prayer, and then in verse 40 it says that he came to the disciples, who were supposed to be watching and praying, but he comes to them and he finds them sleeping.

And he says, look at this, he says to Peter. Now who's with him? It's Peter, James, and John. They're all sleeping, but he only gets on to Peter. Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour?" Mr. I will die with you. Mr. I will go to prison for you. Mr. Even-if-everybody-else-falls-away, I will not fall away. Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray. Why? That you may not enter into temptation. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Now I think the reason Jesus gets upset with all the disciples is because they were sleeping when they should have been praying.

But he singles out Peter in particular because he knows what Peter's about to face. He knows Peter is about to be confronted with a crisis of faith in which he's going to deny the Lord, and it was a crisis, I believe, that could have been avoided had Peter prayed, had he prepared himself for the crises that he was about to endure. It's as if Jesus is pleading with Peter, watch with me and pray. He actually does it three times. He goes back to pray, Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me.

He comes back to the disciples, he finds them sleeping again. He goes to pray one more time. He comes back, he sees an entourage led by Judas who had betrayed him for 30 pieces of silver or 60, I can't remember. And the high priest and the servants of the high priest. So you got these people with weapons, they come to arrest Jesus. And because Peter had not been praying, he responds to this crisis wrongly at every point along the way. Instead of supporting what Jesus wanted to have happen, Peter pulls out his sword.

He starts throwing it around, he ends up cutting off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. He goes by the name of Malchus. Jesus actually has to throw up his hands and go, whoa, Peter, that's not how we're going to do this. Shall I not drink the cup that my Father has prepared for me? You see this contrast between Jesus, who had prepared his heart for the crisis through prayer over against Peter, who had not prepared his heart for the crisis and was responding wrongly to the crisis at every point along the way.

The main point is Peter was bragging when he should have been trusting. And he was sleeping when he should have been praying. And those are two sides of the same coin called spiritual compromise. Prayerlessness and pride. Pride and prayerlessness. They go together. Well, like whatever goes together— peas and carrots, you know, whatever that song is. You show me a Christian who's a proud Christian, I'll show you a Christian who doesn't pray. I don't care what he says. Even if he's got big fancy prayers on the stage or big fancy prayers in your small group, if he has pride in his life, he's not a praying man because a praying man is a humble man, because a praying man realizes where his strength comes from and you show me a prayerless Christian and I can show you a Christian who has pride in his life.

And he may not think he's a proud person and it may not show up in external ways in certain areas, but if you show me someone who's sleeping in the garden of prayer, I'll show you someone who's proud. Because pride and prayerlessness are two sides of the same coin and they always result in a spiritual compromise in your life. Every time you decide I can do it on my own, look at me, I'm the one. I've got everything that it takes. You're going to fail because you have an adversary committed to your destruction.

He knows you better than you know yourself. Actually, in Peter's life, he's going to take Peter out at the area of his strength, not his weakness. At the area where he was least expecting it, Satan takes him down, and you have a flesh that's prone to fail you. You are not nearly as strong as you think you are. It's exactly what happens in Peter's life. If you keep reading the

story, they arrest Jesus, they take him away. Peter follows at a close distance, not so close that he would get caught, but close enough he can keep track of what's going on.

They go to the house of the high priest. When they go into the house, they begin to put Jesus on what I would call a mock trial. They accuse him of blasphemy. They try to get witnesses to stand up against him and accuse him of this, that, and the other thing. They're trying everything in their power to get Jesus crucified by the Roman government. Time after time, they are frustrated in their efforts, and Peter's watching the whole thing take place from the courtyard. The most amazing thing about it is Peter's watching his master get beat and spit in the face and falsely accused.

He just sits there and he watches. So much for prison and death, so much for even if everybody else denies you, I never will. Peter watched his master get falsely accused and condemned of blasphemy, which he did not commit. And then when the rubber meets the road, Jesus has been condemned, he's about to be crucified, Peter begins to feel the footsteps. He feels the heat. And somebody points out you are one of his disciples. It's in Matthew 26, verses 69 and 70. And when Peter is confronted with being a disciple of Jesus, he says, you're wrong, I'm not.

He denied it before them all, saying, I don't know what you're talking about. I do not know what you mean. Peter knows he's in the hot seat, so he begins to back up. He makes his way to the entrance of the courtyard. Think of the courtyard like the big front yard of the high priest's house. The second time he gets to the entrance, another servant girl saw him and said to the bystanders, no, this man was with Jesus of Nazareth. And again, Peter denied it. This time he says an oath.

He says, I swear to God, I don't know this man. Which is a big move for Peter to do. Very serious about this denial. And then an hour goes by. An hour that was long enough for Peter to really realize what was going on. And one more person comes to him. This time they point out his Galilean accent and say, no, listen to this redneck. Look at the way he talks. He's obviously one of Jesus' disciples. And if you go to Luke's Gospel, Luke's portrayal of this last denial is really insightful.

It says, Peter says, I don't know what you are talking about. I don't know what you're yelling about. And then immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crows. Remember the words of Jesus. Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you know me. And then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord. Jesus is in the house, Peter's in the courtyard, the rooster crows. Locks eyes with Jesus, and he remembers how he had said to him before the rooster crows today you will deny me three times.

And he went outside and he wept bitterly. Now can you imagine what Peter must have felt in that moment? Can you imagine how happy the devil is in this moment? He has all the ammunition he needs to take Peter out. You're the A-lister. You're the leader of the disciples. You were the confident one. You were the one that was supposed to never fail, and look at you, failure. You're nobody. You were intimidated by a servant girl. Who are you to ever be used by the Lord? How could Jesus ever love you again?

And do you not think in that moment, when Jesus was looking at Peter, that the Lord was saying to himself, kind of like, I told you so, without saying a word: this is why I told you to watch and pray? This moment— this is the temptation I wanted you to avoid. This is the temptation you could have overcome if you would have watched and prayed. You say, well, I don't know if I believe that. Well, why does Jesus single out Peter in the garden? And do you not think that Peter was thinking to himself, I wish I would have watched and prayed?

I wish I wouldn't have been sleeping. I wish I wouldn't have been so confident in my flesh. I wish I wouldn't have been so dumb. All these regrets flood his soul and he goes out and he weeps. The principle is, for us, we will fail in the courtyard of temptation if we are sleeping in the garden of prayer. Prayer is the one thing everybody assumes and nobody actually does. It's the one thing we know is important, but we don't actually ever do it because we're so caught up in so many other things.

We're overconfident in the flesh. I'll pray if I need to. It's a last resort instead of a first resource. We're just like Peter. We have too much confidence in the flesh and not enough prayer in the garden. How many of us fail in life because we fail in prayer? How many of us cave to the courtyard of temptation when it comes to addictions to pornography or drugs or alcohol or when it comes to standards of behavior in your home with your kids in your marriage. How many of us fail in the courtyard of temptation in the workplace or with our finances or in those areas of life where the rubber meets the road?

How many of us fail in life because we fail in prayer? All the battles you're trying to win in your life are won in the courtyard, or they're won in the garden of prayer. The battle for the heart of your children is won in the garden of prayer. You have a child running from the Lord who wants nothing to do with Jesus, has no hope in their life, no hope of eternity. There's a lot of things you need to do, but the first thing you do, and the most important thing you need to do, is get that battle won in the garden of prayer.

The battle for your marriage that feels lifeless and lost is won in the garden of prayer. The temptation that you cave to, the besetting sin in your life that you cannot seem to overcome, is overcome through the garden of prayer. The measure of a man or a woman is not determined by how many accolades they receive. It's not determined by what other people say about you. It doesn't matter how popular you are. It doesn't matter if you're a preacher and you got a big church with a lot of big budget and a lot of attendance.

I don't think the devil is scared of a good preacher one little bit. Because good preachers can build big churches for man, to be seen by man. What he is afraid of is a person— a man or a woman— committed to prayer, because that's where the power is. A husband or a wife committed to prayer, that's where the breakthrough comes. A grandma or a grandpa who's committed to prayer, that's where deliverances happen. We will fail in the courtyard of life because we sleep in the garden of prayer. No man or woman, no church or nation is greater than their prayer life.

Period. And again, I think we'd all say, well, I believe that because the Bible says it, but do we live as if it's true? You know, when the Bible talks about when we get to heaven, it says that there will be no more tears in heaven and that Jesus will wipe away all of our tears. And it's an interesting passage because, depending on your eschatology, you know, the battle's already won, so why are you crying? And I wonder if the reason why some of us will cry when we see Jesus and we enter into that eternal state— if the reason that we're crying is because of the missed opportunities like Peter, how many of us will be like Peter and say, I wish I would have listened?

I wish I would have prayed. I wish I would have handled it differently. I wish I would have surrendered. I wish I would have said yes. I wish I would have been committed to winning this battle in the garden of prayer. If only I would have listened, then things would have been different. And I wonder if Jesus will wipe away tears of regret because of those things. And some of you know right now you're thinking of instances in your life in which you failed to pray and you failed in life because you didn't pray.

You had too much confidence in the flesh, not enough prayer in the garden, and you succumbed to spiritual compromise when you should have had spiritual courage. And if that's you this morning, I think that would be a lot of us in this room, myself included, in many instances of my Christian walk where there's been failure. There is a better word that is available to us in that moment. There is healing. There is resting. You can have Jesus wipe those tears away from your eye even now before you get to the eternal state.

But the way to avoid and recover from spiritual compromise is through humility and repentance. That's exactly what happens to Peter. He goes outside, he weeps bitterly. Jesus is crucified. The disciples run in horror. They're up in the upper room. They're fearful for their lives. Jesus is in the tomb. Three days later, God raises him from the dead. Hallelujah. After Jesus is risen from the dead, he begins to appear to the disciples, and one of the moments in which he appears to the disciples is to Peter and a couple of the other disciples on the Sea of Galilee, right there on the seashore.

He calls them up, he says, let's come and have fish. Peter, cook up some fish and chips, and let's have a conversation. And in that moment, Jesus restores back to Peter everything that this spiritual failure caused him to lose. His self-confidence. His faith, his knowledge of—

does, am I saved? Am I part of the kingdom? Can I ever be used by God again? And we don't have time to look at the particulars of the passage, but essentially Jesus asked Peter the question, do you love me? Three times he asked the question, just as Peter denied Jesus three times, three times Jesus says, do you love me?

And every time after that he says, then feed my sheep. Get back to business. Get back in the game. My grace is greater than your sin. You are not what the enemy says you are. I can use you again. But Peter had to humble himself and repent. And he did. And you know what happened in Peter's life? He was never the same. This moment transforms him. I think this was the defining moment for the Apostle Peter because from this place he becomes the fiery preacher of Pentecost. You look at Acts chapter 4, Peter is taking on suffering for the name of Christ, along with— Peter and John, or James and John.

He ends up writing two letters of the New Testament, letters to suffering Christians. Letters to Christians who were themselves in a crisis of faith. And do you know what he says to those believers? It's so fascinating, in 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 8. It's almost an exact parallel to what we just read in these gospels. First thing he says is, number one, be sober-minded. In other words, you're not Muhammad Ali. Don't put too much confidence in your flesh. Don't be a fool. Don't be like me. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.

Don't put too much confidence in the flesh. And number two, be watchful. Wake up. Stop sleeping in the garden. Jesus says, watch and pray so that you may not enter into temptation. You need to watch and pray so that you won't enter into temptation. Why? You have an enemy who wants to crush you. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. What you need to do is resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by other brothers and sisters around the world.

And then I love this part, verse 10. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. It's exactly what happens in Peter's life. This was his defining moment. And it's an important life lesson, I think, for us to learn from because each of us are very prone to make the same exact mistakes that Peter made. We're prone to have too much confidence in the flesh. We're prone to fall asleep in the garden of prayer.

We're prone to fail in the courtyard of temptation because we were sleeping in the garden of prayer. And some of us are believing the lies of the enemy. You'll never be used of God again. Your marriage is hopeless. It's a lost cause. You'll never have any kind of happiness whatsoever. It's done. You're too far gone. You can't recover from these things. And you need to hear from the Lord: that's not the final word. You can be forgiven, you can be cleansed, you can be healed if you will repent. This really came home to me in a personal way this last year during 2020 during the coronavirus, which we all just love.

The corona wasn't that bad. I mean I got that in November and recovered and it was okay. It wasn't fun, but it was okay. But the spiritual damage up to and after that moment was terrible. We shut the church down sometime last year around this time. And I was thinking to myself, it'll just be a couple of weeks, it'll be fine. We'll open it back up at Easter, everything'll be good. And week one we were farting around with iPhones and iPads in the gathering place trying to do live stream. Had no idea what we were doing.

It was a joke. And so the whole next month, essentially, I was on Google figuring out how to do church online. And we figured it out. We bought a lot of it and we built a whole new room over there and we got it all lined out and people were watching online. And it was pretty good for a while, but then Easter came, we didn't open up. And then when we finally did open up, nobody came to church. Well, I say nobody, 20 people, 30 people. Maybe 35, 40 on a good day.

At first it was fine, you know, people are still watching online, it's going to be fine, and then they started not watching. You saw the online numbers just dip. No offense if you're watching online. And nobody was coming in person, nobody was watching online. And somewhere in that process there was a shift that happened where I stopped trusting in the Lord and started trusting in the flesh. It's somewhat natural. You get consumed with the to-do list and the daily grind, and I don't have time to pray about it. I just got to figure it out.

And that persisted for months. And months and months. And I remember when July something hit, I think it was the Sunday after 4th of July. It was going to be our big back-to-church Sunday. And then, like, everybody on staff got COVID. Or enough people did where we had to shut the church down. I don't know if y'all remember this. It's a huge kick in the gut. And spiritually depressing. And then not only were people not coming in person, not only were they not watching online, then many of them stopped giving.

And the financial numbers just tanked. And I remember October getting a little bit concerned, and I remember in November going, man, we're in trouble. And there was a crisis of faith, and I was perfectly poised for spiritual compromise. Too much confidence in the flesh, not enough prayer in the garden. And I remember being really frustrated and angry and wondering if I was even— you know, is my time here done? Do I have what it takes to be a pastor? Just where the enemy wants you to be. And the Lord in a whisper saying, are you done yet?

Are you tired of this? There is something better available if you will but walk in it. And through that moment and a couple of conversations with some mentors of mine, and because God opened my eyes to some moves of God in some other places, it was just a reminder to return back to the basics, to repent of your pride and pray. And I did, and I remember the Lord doing a special work in my heart over the last couple of months of the fall. And November and December— I mean, November, the giving was terrible.

December it got a little bit better, but things were really uncertain. I remember entering into January more excited about ministry than I'd ever been, even when I first became a preacher. I was like, we are about to win. The church is about to have a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God is for us. He has not left us. He wants to give. He wants to do a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He wants to bring about revival. It's not a question of whether he wants to do it or he's able to do it.

It's a question of whether or not we're ready and willing to receive it. And so I shared with the staff and the staff began to humble ourselves and pray and we started praying on Mondays, praying and fasting every Monday. Two hours would just fly by. The Lord would begin to move in these unbelievable ways. I don't even quite have words to describe it. There was a refreshing and restoration that began to take place amongst the staff who all of us were worn out, all of us. And then we opened it up to the church.

We started having these Monday night prayer meetings. We're two Monday night prayer meetings in. I thought for the first prayer meeting, you call a prayer meeting, nobody comes. You call a prayer meeting on Monday, nobody comes. But that first prayer meeting, 65 people showed up, which is like a full service by COVID numbers, blew me away. And then it was kind of a, you know, it was probably weird for a lot of people, weird for me, sensitive to the Spirit of God, letting him lead us in that hour. I thought it'll probably be lower next week.

Next week comes 75 people instead of 65. So we're growing. And I don't know how to describe it. There aren't really words to describe how God moves. He's present in a different way than even he's present now and he's present now. He's moving. But he began to answer specific, concrete prayers. He began to show up in supernatural ways. Just today we baptized somebody in our 9:40 service who's been a Christian for many years, but had been wrestling with God over his baptism. And the Lord said, you need to be baptized.

He said, no, I don't, no, I don't, no, I don't. For 12 years he wrestled. He finally surrendered to the Lord because of an encounter with God in one of those prayer meetings. And it's an invitation of our Heavenly Father to say, if you will return, humble yourself and pray. There's a breakthrough available for you. There is restoration that can come if you are sick and tired of being sick and tired. And so my question is, do you want your life to be a place where the Spirit of God dwells?

Do you want this church to be a place where God is in this place? You don't come to church and hear a nice sermon and good music, but you experience the presence of an Almighty God. That's available. It's not a question of whether or not God wants to give it. He wants to give it if we will receive it. But we have to wake up, repent of an overconfidence in the flesh. Renew our dependency on the Lord and commit to pray. I mean really, really pray. Could you not watch with me one hour?

And that may mean you have to give up some things. It may mean you have to get up earlier. It may mean you need to exercise some self-discipline. But if you're serious about it, I think God has a serious breakthrough He wants to bring in your life if you'll return to prayer. I asked the Lord, why is it that it takes so long? Why did it take me so long? What's the big deal? I try to think of myself as a decently godly person. I read the Bible every day. What takes so long?

And I think the reason why it takes so long is because not enough of us have gotten sick and tired of sin. And when I say sin, I don't mean necessarily big, gross immorality in your life. I mean, doing life your way instead of God's way. That's all sin is. It's missing the mark. It's not agreeing with God about the way things ought to be. And some of us haven't even asked the Lord, is this the way things ought to be? You've just been persisting in your way without a care in the world about what God's way is.

And maybe some of you are tired, tired, tired, but the question is, are you tired enough to pray? And so as we close, I just want us to, where you're seated, to bow your head, to close your eyes, and I want to ask a couple of questions about your commitment to pray. And so I'm going to ask Griffin to come back up. If you're here this morning and you're a father, I want to challenge you, your children need you awake in the garden. Your wife needs you to be awake in the garden.

If you're here and you're a mom, your husband and your children need you awake in the garden. And so if you've been asleep in the garden of prayer, would you just be honest with the Lord and say, Lord, I'm sorry? I was bragging when I should have been trusting, and I was sleeping when I should have been praying. Some teenagers here today, young people, and your parents, your mom, your dad need you awake in the garden. They need somebody who will stand in the gap and intercede. If you're a member of our church or a leader, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, we need you awake in the garden so that you can pray for a hedge of protection to protect us from our enemy who wants to kill, steal, and destroy, who prowls around like a lion seeking someone to devour.

Everywhere Jesus is present, demons will follow. If we want a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God, you better believe there will be spiritual opposition to that outpouring. So we need you awake to pray.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as Cassie Bernall answering "yes" when a gunman asked, "Do you believe in God?"; investigators later concluded that the student asked about her belief in God was Valeen Schnurr, who survived the shooting, so the account of Bernall's exchange is disputed. Source: Wikipedia, "Cassie Bernall." ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "verse 1"; Jesus' words "You will all fall away because of me this night" are in Matthew 26:31. Source: Matthew 26:31 (ESV). ↩