

## Recovering what you may have lost

Good morning everyone. As a church leadership we have been away this weekend in Greyton. We spent time seeking the Lord, and praying for you...

But let's get into today's message. I have called this;

### Recovering what you may have lost

I've been a Christian for nearly 40 years, and I've discovered that it's very easy to fall into a spiritual slump. You go through what I call spiritual dry spells. Times when you don't feel close to God, when your heart is cold, when you feel empty inside, when you think your prayers feel like they are bouncing off the ceiling.

It feels like you have lost where you once were with the Lord.

Recently I felt like this. Like I was worn out with church. I was empty. Weary. Flat. And disconnected from God. Every one of us go through times like this. We can feel like David in Psalm 71;

**“Do not be far from me, my God.” (Psalm 71:12, NIV)**

The Message translation says; ‘Oh God, don't stay away. Don't be distant.’ We all go through these dry spells, and we recognise that we're not as close as we used to be, or should be, to God.

When you're going through a dry spell, when you're going through a spiritual slump you don't lose your salvation. But you do lose the joy of it. You lose the happiness. You lose the peace. You lose the confidence. You lose the closeness that you felt to God. And you feel, kind of dry and empty and dusty inside.

One of the things that causes you to go through spiritual slumps is what I call getting into a spiritual rut. That's when everything in your life becomes predictable, even your spiritual life. A routine replaces your relationship with God. You do things. You go to church because it's time to go to church. Whether you feel it or not you just do it. You read your Bible because it's the thing to do. You end up getting in this rut where everything in your life is predictable. You pray the same old prayers over and over. The same prayer at meals every day. You go to the same service and sing the same old songs. They're good songs. but you've heard them so much, you don't even connect to them any more.

Now perhaps you're not there - that's great! But I've got a feeling there are quite a few today who are, and even if you're not there today, I'm sure you will be at some point in your lives. So this applies to all of us.

So, when and if you find yourself going through this experience, what do you do?

Well, like me, you can start today, by being real. You can come to this service today, sit here, look real spiritual, do nothing, and walk out. And you'll remain the same person, in the same slump.

Or, you can choose to do something about it. Because here is the truth...

**You are as intimate with God as you choose to be.**

Allow me to use another analogy.

Every now and again when I get dressed, and I see myself, I wish I didn't have a couple of kilo's that I have. But I realize, as I look in the mirror, I have the abs I choose to have!

I might say, "I wish I had a nice six-pack." But the truth is, I don't want six pack abs. Why? Because I don't choose to do the things necessary to have six-pack abs.

I love to exercise, but not enough. I want to eat clean, but not enough. I go to the gym, I train hard. And then, I eat too much pizza! Too much chocolate!

So... by choosing, that pizza. By choosing, that chocolate. By choosing, those chips... I choose to have a couple of kilo's.

But don't laugh at me... so do lots of you!

Now, if I was a personal trainer at a gym, and you came in and said, you really want six-pack abs, I'd say, "Okay, well, there are things you can do that will move you in the direction of six-pack abs, and things you can do that will move you in the opposite direction. Doing these exercises, sticking to this diet, will move you toward your goal. But eating too much chocnut brownies, will move you in the opposite direction." Right?

Well, the same is true of intimacy with God.

Some things will help you become more intimate with him. Other things will destroy the intimacy and move you farther away from God.

King David was known as a 'man after God's heart.' In Psalm 27 he said; "One thing I want! One thing I seek! I want to know you Lord. I'm serious! I am after your heart."

You see my friends, if we want God to awaken our hearts, to revive our hearts, to recover what we may have lost, we have to be after his heart.

You will be as intimate with God in life, right now, as you choose to be. If you want him to start the journey of renewal in your life – then you have to start the journey of seeking him with all your heart.

How do you do that? Start praying in the Spirit. Start worshipping in the Spirit. Start singing to Him in worship. And don't say 'I can't sing!' We can all make a spiritual, joyful noise! You don't even have to hit the tune. Some of us are like prison singers – behind a few bars, and we never have the right key! ... Maybe you're that way. But try anyway. Worship the Lord!

What do you do when you feel disconnected with God? What do you do when you've lost your spiritual passion? What do you do when you've lost something of great value like that?

Well, there's a story in the Bible in 2 Kings chapter 6. It's the miracle of the lost ax head. It's a very bizarre story, but like a lot of the stories in scripture, it has some spiritual truths that I want to look at this morning. Because often, the miracles in scripture are there to teach us things. When God puts miracles in the Bible, He wants to teach us spiritual truths.

So let's have a look at it together.

2 Kings Chapter 6; verse 1;

**The company of the prophets said to Elisha, "Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us. <sup>2</sup> Let us go to the Jordan, where each of us can get a pole; and let us build a place there for us to meet." And he said, "Go."**

So this group of God's people, who were a group of prophets, found their meeting place had got too small. They needed a bigger venue! They decided it was time for a Reno. A new build. And Elisha said - "Go for it!"

Verse 3 continues;

**<sup>3</sup> Then one of them said, "Won't you please come with your servants?" "I will," Elisha replied. <sup>4</sup> And he went with them. They went to the Jordan and began to cut down trees. <sup>5</sup> As one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron axhead fell into the water.**

So very simply, as they were gathering the building supplies, and chopping down trees for poles, an ax head flew off the handle, and went flying into the Jordan River, and sunk. Not good.

And this really upset this guy for a couple reasons. One, in Bible days, iron was very rare. This is not a Minecraft game! An iron tool was extremely rare in that time. And two, it was borrowed. So he was not the owner. Naturally, he was very upset that he had lost something so valuable. Notice what he did...

**“Oh no, my lord!” he cried out. “It was borrowed!”** <sup>6</sup> **The man of God asked, “Where did it fall?” When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float.**

Now, you’ve got to admit, that’s pretty bizarre! It’s crazy. Iron ax heads sink. They don’t float. This was a miracle. And in verse 7, we read;

**7 “Lift it out,” he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it.**

Why is this story in the Bible? The story of a floating ax head. What is this doing in the Bible? Well, I believe it teaches us four spiritual truths on what to do when we’ve lost something very valuable. Prophetically, I want to say it is almost like when we have lost our cutting edge. An ax head represents power. While I know this is a real ax head, it also represents spiritual power. It’s a symbol.

What do you do when you’re in a spiritual slump? Or when you’re going through a spiritual desert, a dry spell. You don’t feel close to God. You don’t feel His presence in your life. You feel like your prayers aren’t getting above the ceiling. You feel empty inside. You’ve lost something so important. What do you do? You do the four things the man did in this story;

Number 1;

**You admit you lost it.**

You just stop living in denial, and you face reality. You admit you’re just not as close to God as you used to be. Notice what this man did in verse 5;

**“Oh no, my lord!” he cried out. “It was borrowed!”**

The first thing he does, is he admits it. He confesses it to somebody else. He brings it into the light. He didn’t have to do that. When he lost the ax head, which represented power, and his ability to get the job done, he could have done a couple things.

First, he could have used it for an excuse to quit working all together. “I lost my ax head. I’ll just let somebody else do the work!” I’ve met Christians like that. “I’m not as close to God as I used to be. I’ll just let somebody else do the serving now. I deserve a break. I’m tired. I’ve done my part. I’ve been close to God in the past.

Now I'm just going to back off, and coast along, and let somebody else be on fire for God. Let them do some of the hard work in ministry." He didn't do that.

The other thing he didn't do, which he could have done, was he could have pretended that he still had it. He could have been chopping with no ax head. "Maybe, if I keep moving up and down nobody will notice that I've lost my ax head. My cutting edge. I'll keep on going through the motions and pretending it's ok and not let any of my Christian friends know that I don't have it any more. I've lost it. But I don't want to admit it. I don't want to admit that I'm not close to God anymore, that I've lost the power in my life. I'll just keep on working furiously and frantically going through the motions," which is a lot of sweat, and no productivity.

The saddest thing, the most tragic sight, is a Christian who's lost their connection to God, and they are still going through the motions. They're pretending like they're close to God when they're not. That's tragic. In fact, I think the saddest verse in the Bible is the one about Samson where it says, he'd lost all his power but he didn't know it.

So what about you my friend. Have you lost something in your walk with God? Are you in a spiritual slump? How do you know when you've lost your cutting edge? A couple things:

One, you start losing your love. Things don't move you any more. They don't touch your heart any more. Your heart grows cold. You can set through service after service and it's not touching you, it's not moving you. Your heart has grown cold. You've lost the fire. You've lost the spark in your life. You've lost your first love for Jesus Christ. Jesus said this in Revelation 2 *"The love that you had at first is gone. Remember how far you have fallen. Return to Me and change the way you think and act and do what you did at first."* He said you've lost your love for Me. What happens when you're in a spiritual slump? All of a sudden, serving God becomes not a delight but a duty. You do it because it's the right thing to do but there's no joy in it, there's no energy in it, there's no excitement in it.

The second thing I lose is my faith the longer I'm in a spiritual slump. David said, "I had almost stopped believing. I had almost lost my faith." What do you do in a spiritual slump? You stop taking risks. Your vision shrinks. You lose your vision for what God wants to do in your life. You stop taking risks. You start playing the safe side, being predictable, settling for second best. You're not stretching, you're not growing, you're not reaching out in faith. No, you just kind of back off, and live this comfortable little existence. "I'm a Christian but I'm just not close to God."

Some of you are like this right now. You've nearly lost all your love or you've nearly lost all your faith. You may feel beaten up. Circumstances have beat you up. Other people have beat you up. Problems have hassled you. And you have just lost the joy.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were closer to God than you are right now? If the answer is yes, my next question is, What are you going to do about it? Are you just going to settle for second best?

“If you know you’re not where you ought to be. You’re not close to God. You don’t feel His presence in your life. You’re just settling for second best.” What a lousy way to live!

The first step in reconnecting with God, getting out of that dry spell is just admit it. It’s the most difficult step. To humbly say, “I’ve lost it. I’ve lost my connection to You God. I’ve lost the power. I don’t feel close to You any more like I used to.

I’ve lost the joy. I’ve lost the enthusiasm. I’ve lost my cutting edge and I need it back.” If that’s you today, then you need to start by saying, “God, please revive my heart, re-ignite the passion in my heart. I’ve lost the passion for the Christian life, living for You. Re-ignite the fire. Light the fire again. Warm up my cold heart. I’m begging You. God! Light the fire again in my soul.”

Admit it. That’s the first step. God, I’m not as close to You as I used to be. My heart has grown cold. Things don’t move me like they used to. I need You to light the fire again in my heart. I need the passion back. I need to feel Your presence in my life. Admit it.

### **Acknowledge where you lost it.**

This is the second step to reconnecting with God. Did you notice, the man in this story identified the exact spot where he lost his ax head. Elisha asked him, “Where did it fall? Where you lose it?” and the man pointed out the spot.

Do you know where or how you lost your closeness to God? Do you know why you don’t feel close any more? There are many, many reasons that cause us to disconnect from God. Here are a few:

Distractions and busyness. When I get busy with other things I tend to forget God. Even if they’re good things I tend to forget God. Sometimes I can go hours or even days in a spiritual dry spell not really thinking about God. One of the easiest times to do that is the summer time, because there’s lots of stuff going on, I want to spend time with family - I want to swim with my kids - I want to ride my mountain bike - I want to go surfing - you’re trying to get caught up on things you couldn’t do the rest of the year, you’re relaxing or you’re enjoying the weather outside. Those are all good things, but you could go days without even thinking about God.

And you get distracted by busyness. Serving God can keep you from loving God. You could even be so busy doing good things, but you don't focus on simply loving God.

Disobedience – not doing what you know God wants you to do. When God tells me to do something and I ignore it or I wait on it or I delay it it's an automatic disconnect.

What have you been procrastinating on? What do you know God wants you to do and you still haven't done it? You plan to do it one of these days, but you still haven't done it. "I know getting into a small group would be good for me... I know reading my Bible would be good for me... I know I should talk to God in prayer all the time but I don't. I keep putting it off." What do you keep delaying? "I know I should go ask forgiveness from that person... I know I should offer forgiveness to that person."

Resentment is the major thing that causes you to disconnect from God. If you hold on to unforgiveness, if you hold on to anger in your heart it's an automatic disconnect and you're going to go through a spiritual slump. When God tells you to do something, you ought to do it now! Not tomorrow, not next week because any disobedience like that – procrastination – is going to disconnect you from God.

Relying on your own power and pride. When I get presumptuous and I stop depending on God, and I think, "I can live this Christian life without praying every day... I'm a pretty good guy, I can make it on my own." I get arrogant. I get prideful or presumptuous. I'm automatically disconnecting from God. I'm not meant to live this life on my own power. I'm meant to live it on God's power.

Carelessness or laziness. When I get lazy or when I get careless in my spiritual life and I stop doing the things that I know that keep me close to God. I stop fellowshiping with other Christians. I slow down, and slack off from attending weekly worship. I'll go this week, then I'll take a couple weeks off. I slack off on that kind of thing. Or I get lazy with tithing or serving or sharing or any of those things that I know help my heart stay warm and close and tender to God. I'm automatically going to be disconnected.

Step two in coming back to God, if you want to get out of your spiritual slump – First, Admit: "I lost it, God. I'm not as close to You as I used to be." Second, I Acknowledge where you lost it. You get honest and you be specific. Check which of those apply to your life. If it's none of these, write down the cause of your spiritual dryness? It could be anger. It could be fear. It could be fatigue. You could get so tired you say, I just don't have time for God. I'm not making any time talking to Him or letting Him talk to me through His word. You need to be specific. The good news is if we confess our sins to God, He can be counted on, He is faithful to forgive us, to cleanse us, to restore us back to Him.

Maybe you feel so disconnected from God and it's been so long you don't have the slightest idea what caused the disconnect. You haven't the slightest idea why you're not close to God any more. Maybe it was a relationship that kind of drew you astray. Maybe it was a hobby. Maybe it was a goal. Maybe it was making money. I don't know what it was. All you know is that you're not where I used to be with God. You've lost something important, and you need to recover it. What do you do when you can't even figure out where or how you lost it?

You come back to God and you cry to Him and you say, "God, I need Your help! I can't find my way to You. I'm so confused. Will You find Your way to me?" You can say that to God. You say, "I can't see You but I need You. I want You to bring me back to where I belong."

If you're tired of living the way you've been living you need to Admit it. Then you need to Acknowledge where you lost it. I've lost my spiritual spark. I've lost my cutting edge. I don't know or maybe I do know what drew me away. You acknowledge it and then you come to step Three.

### **Expect God to restore it.**

Expect God to give you back what has been lost. This is the faith step. I must believe that God can and will and wants to bring me back to Him in a close relationship. I've got to believe it, I've got to have faith, I've got to expect Him to give me back what I've lost.

Verse 6 says; so "Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float."

That's crazy. He does something very, very odd here. He cuts a stick, and throws in the water, and the ax head floats to the top of the water miraculously.

What is the significance of that stick? What is the spiritual power in that stick? None! It was just a stick. It had nothing really to do with the story, except it was a visual demonstration of faith. He could have thrown a stone. He could have thrown a R2 coin. It was just publicly saying, I'm going to do something, that shows I believe God will restore what this guy lost.

Elisha is not Houdini. He's not a magician saying, "Watch me pull a rabbit out of the hat! It's just a demonstration of faith that says, "I expect God to give this guy back what he lost."

You may have a problem with this miracle. Scientifically. Iron does not float. I don't have a problem with it. I figure if God created all the iron in the entire universe, He could make a little bit of it float if He wants to. And if God created the law of gravity, which He did, He could reverse it in one instance, which He did.



And if God created all the laws of nature, He can reverse one whenever He wants to. Which, by the way, is the definition of a miracle – the reversal of nature.

The lost ax head came back. And floated to the surface. The point of the story is this: God specializes in doing the impossible. Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.

What seems impossible in your life? “I’ll never be close to God again.” You’re wrong. “I could never be blessed by God. You don’t know what’s happened in my past.” You’re wrong. “I could never be used by God. I could never have His power in my life. I’m just one tiny person, insignificant.” You’re wrong. I could never see God pour out His grace, His strength, His mercy, His power, His presence in my life because I’ve really messed up my life. That can’t happen to me. It’s impossible.” You’re wrong.

God specializes in the impossible recoveries. God can set people free in miraculous recovery from all kinds of problems. He’s a specialist in that.

In Jeremiah 15:19, God says;

**“If you return to me, I will restore you so you can continue to serve me.”  
(Jeremiah 15:19 NLT)**

God says, if you return to him, he WILL restore you, not MIGHT, not HE WILL THINK ABOUT IT... He WILL restore you.

What a promise! If you’re a believer, are you tired of flailing around with an ax handle and no power? Have you been going through all the motions in your life and pretending like you had it together but really you’ve been kind of dead inside, empty. Doing that takes a long time to chop a tree, and you get really tired. It’s no wonder you’re tired! You’re depending on your own power. You don’t have God’s power in your life. You weren’t made to do it by yourself.

Did you notice when he mentioned the ax he said, “And it’s borrowed.” Did you know that everything in your life is borrowed? It all belongs to God. None of it really belongs to you. God loans it to you while you’re alive. You’ve brought nothing into this world, and you’re taking nothing out of this world. But while you’re here, for 60, 80, 90, 100 years, God loans you some of His stuff, and He lets you use it. When you die He’s going to loan it to somebody else. You don’t own a thing. It’s all God’s. It’s all His creation. He just lets us use it. Even the power you have in your life, it’s borrowed power. It’s not your own power it’s God’s power in you. You weren’t meant to live the Christian life on your own strength, on your own might, on your own power. You were meant to live it in God’s Spirit inside of you.

The good news is you could reconnect to God this morning. You can break out of that spiritual slump. How do you do it? Today, you come running back to God. Not walking, not skipping. You come running back to God with all your might. He has the grace and the power and the energy and the mercy to restore you.

The final step to restoring what you have lost, breaking out of the spiritual slump is to...

### **Reach out and receive Him.**

You admit you've lost it, you admit where you've lost it, you trust God to give it back to you, and then you reach out and you receive it. You accept what God wants to give you by His grace, because it's all by grace anyway.

Verse 7, Elisha says;

**7 “Lift it out,” he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it.**

Do not miss this important point. The God who did this miracle – who made this piece of iron rise up from the depths and floats on the water, could just as easily have taken it another bit further, right through the air, and put it in the guys' hand if He had wanted to. But He didn't. He just brought it to the top of the water and said, Now you reach in and grab it.

What's the point? You have to do your part. You have to do your part in coming back to God. You've got to reach out and receive it.

Look at Revelation 2. Here's how you reach out and receive it. Jesus says, “The love you had at first is gone. Remember how far you have fallen. Return to Me and change the way you think and act and do what you did at first.” Three things. If you've been distracted and disconnected from God do these three things.

First you remember. What was it like when I was close to God? You think about how good that felt and how great it was to be in the centre of God's will with a clear conscience and knowing the joy of being connected to God. You remember those good times. You remember how far you've fallen.

Return. Take the steps back to Me.

Repeat. Do the things you did at first.

Did you know that these three steps work in any relationship? It's not just a relationship to God but it's the key to restoring love in any relationship.

How do you restore a lost love in a marriage that's gone dead? You do the exact three same things here. You remember what it was like when you first got married, when you first started dating. Why did you fall in love with them in the first place? What attracted you in the first place? What excited you and what was it that you found so appealing and attractive? You remember those good times when you had the good times. And then you return to that relationship. You don't wait for them to come back to you. You go back to them. Take the steps to move forward. Then it says you do the things you did at first. You know why you lost your love for that person? You're not doing the things you use to do. You don't send flowers any more. You don't make the phone calls. You don't spend time together. And if you want to restore the love in a relationship you need to do the things you did at first. Buy little presents and act in loving ways and do loving things. That's what brings the love back.

And that's what brings the love back to Jesus Christ. You need to do those things you use to do when you were so in love with God, when you were close to Him.

If you don't get anything else I say I want you to get this. You are as close to God as you want to be. You can't blame it on anybody else – your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your husband, your wife, your parent. You are as close to God as you want to be. If you're not close to God, guess who moved?

People who are connected to God, people who are blessed by God, people who have God's power in their life, people who are used by God, do you know why they have that? It's because they want it! They desire it! They crave it! They long for it! They want it more than anything else in the world. I want to be close to God.

Do you know why God uses me? You want to know why God's hand of blessing is on my life? It's because I crave it. I want it more than anything else in the world. I want to know and love God.

That's my choice. And it's your choice too. Do you want God to bless you? Do you want God to do miracles in your life? Do you want to sense His presence and His power? Then you need to just make the choice. Because people who are blessed by God desire it with all their hearts. And they reach out and they grab it.

David says, "I long to be able to enter Your courtyard and come near to the Living God." Do you? Do you long to be that close to God? Or is it just kind of a "If I can fit it into my schedule between Tuesday and Thursday at 3 p.m. then God I have a little room for You in my life."

God will not play second place to anything in your life. He deserves the best. He made you. He loves you. He has a plan for your life. He wants to take you into heaven and He will not take second place to anything else. He will not play second fiddle to any person or anything or any desire or any dream. If you're going to be

connected He's got to be number one in your life. Otherwise you have missed the entire purpose of your life and that's sad.

Have you made that connection with God? Maybe for you the issue is not to reconnect, you've never connected to God in the first place. Today's could be a very special day. I'm going to lead you in a prayer right now if you've never opened your life to Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Credit. Adapted from a message by Rick Warren.