

Regaining Your Cutting Edge (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, friend. I'm so glad that you have joined me today. And we're going to be looking at something that is, in my estimation, absolutely profound, necessary, and it will be eye-opening. So if you have a Bible, grab it, you can follow along with me, or if you've got a Bible on your electronic device, open that up and let's give our whole heart and soul to God for the next 30 minutes. You will be blessed.

I would like to read to you from the book of Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes 10:10 NKJV. Just like the book of Proverbs, this was written by King Solomon, and he said,

¹⁰ If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success.

An old friend of mine, his father, was a logger for a living. He cut down trees and was in timber sales, but this was a bygone era. He was actually a lumberjack in the days when men were still swinging axes. There wasn't much power equipment in the area he was and in the era that he was in.

It's interesting, my friend's father, I met him when he was an old man many, many decades ago, and he wasn't a big man. He wasn't a particularly muscular man. But my friend told me about his dad. He says, "You know, my dad was a logger. At the end of the day, even though he wasn't as big as many of the other guys on the logging crew, he always at the end of the day managed to fell more trees than anyone else. He was always more productive than anyone else." He said, "This is why." He said, "Every time my dad would cut down a tree with his axe, he would sit on the stump, and then he would take out of his pocket, back pocket, a little file, and he would sit down on the stump—" Now, I happen to have an axe head here.

"He would sit down on the stump with his axe, and he would sharpen that axe head. The other guys would just keep swinging, and it seemed like they were getting ahead, but he would take the time, sharpen that axe head till he got it razor sharp, and then he would get up off the stump, go to the next tree, and cut it down, and then do the same thing. He'd sit on that stump and sharpen his axe head, and the other guys, bigger, more muscular, probably had more stamina, but they didn't have as much wisdom, and at the end of the day, he always had cut down more trees than they had because he kept his axe head sharp."

That's what Solomon said, "If the axe is dull and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom brings success." The question is, does God really care that much about axe heads, the blade of an axe? Or is it a metaphor for something else? He's actually talking about other things. He's making a point using this as an analogy to teach us. Some have lost their cutting edge spiritually, that spiritual sharpness that allows us to go forward and to cut a path into the spiritual realm, to go forward and to be growing in grace, growing in God, growing in sensitivity, and in so many other areas.

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Some of us, and some of you watching, from time to time, we will lose our cutting edge. We lose our spiritual sharpness, but God wants us going forward in the Kingdom. There should be growth, not stagnation, in our spiritual lives. When we become spiritually dull, when we lose that cutting edge spiritually, it generally shows up in two areas. Now, certainly, there'll be more, but there's generally two areas where that shows up. Two characteristics, if you would, that show when someone has lost their edge spiritually.

First, there's a loss of sensitivity to God's voice and to the impressions of the Holy Spirit. I can't discern God moving like I once did. I am not as sensitive to the impressions of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says the Spirit bears witness with our spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks to us, but if my heart is dull, if I've lost my cutting-edge spiritually, I'm not going to be sensitive to those impressions, to that inward witness, or may not even recognize His voice when He is talking to me. Listen to these words from Jesus. This is Matthew 13:14–15 NKJV. Jesus said,

¹⁴ “And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive;’ ¹⁵ for the hearts of this people have grown dull.”

That the hearts of the people have grown dull as opposed to sharp. It says,

“Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.”

There's a similar passage in the Book of Hebrews. It's Hebrews 5:11 ESV; the writer of Hebrews it's talking here about Jesus and His priestly ministry. He says this,

¹¹ We have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

The Amplified Bible puts it this way. “You've become dull in your spiritual hearing and sluggish in achieving spiritual insight.” Jesus talked about people whose hearts and that's the part of us God speaks to. The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord. When God speaks to us, He speaks to us in the hidden man of the heart, but Jesus spoke of people that their hearts had become dull.

And they were not hearing, and they were not seeing, they weren't perceiving God. This writer of Hebrews talked about the same basic thing. Any preacher would understand this. Sometimes you have to exert much more strength just to get a little bit of truth across. It seems like sometimes people are dull of hearing, that they're not grasping and comprehending what's being conveyed. They become sluggish. That's what the writer is talking about.

That's the first characteristic. When we lose our edge spiritually, we're no longer sensitive to the Holy Spirit like we should be. I just want to ask you, and let's just be frank. Have you not heard or sensed God moving in a long time? Maybe at one time in your walk with God, you had this closeness and an awareness and a sensitivity. Maybe you felt like John there at the Last Supper. He had his head on the chest of Jesus.

That's where I want to be spiritually. I sense that the smallest stirrings within Him. When somebody else is wandering around out in the dark say, ‘Well, I have no idea what God wants.’ If there's just the slightest sense that I somehow pick that up, that I have that closeness like John did there as they sat at the table together. If you have lost that, listen—and I know what it's

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like; I've lost it as well. I think all of us, at times, we can relate. Yes, I've lost my spiritual sensitivity, and it may be to a lack of prayer and a number of things. We're going to talk about some of those.

If that's where you are, I want to tell you, you stay tuned, don't go away. I'm going to bring some hope your way. There's a second area where this really shows up. When we've lost our cutting-edge spiritually, it results in a loss of usefulness in fulfilling kingdom goals. We're no longer an effective instrument in the hands of the Lord. In Revelation 14:14-16 Scripture talks about this. Let me read it to you. Revelation 14:14-16 NKJV. It says,

¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

Alright, well obviously, Jesus is the one on the cloud. He has a golden crown on His head, and in His hand, it's not just a sickle, but it's a sharp sickle. This is a sickle that has not lost its edge. A sickle is an instrument used for reaping. There would be a long handle and, at the end, a long blade, and it would be used for harvesting wheat, harvesting other things. Here we have a picture of Jesus on a cloud, a crown on his head. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the risen Savior, and in His hand, a sharp sickle.

¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." ¹⁶ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Friend, there is coming a mighty harvest, a mighty global harvest. I think we might be on just the front end of that. I'm very expectant, and I'm very hopeful. When Jesus, by His Spirit, brings this mighty harvest, this ingathering of souls into the Kingdom of God, what is the instrument that He uses? He uses His church. He uses you, and He uses me. He's commissioned us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. The one that believes will be saved, the one that doesn't believe will be condemned.

We are carriers of the Gospel. We are, I am. As a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ, you are. As a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ, you are, I am, we are the church's, the sharp sickle in the hands of Jesus. When He reaps this end time harvest, when the harvest of the earth is reaped, He will do it through His church. Now, everything in the Kingdom, in one way or another, translates into souls being saved. That is the most important business of God. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost.

I'm talking about the evangelist that's preaching to thousands. I'm talking about the pastor that's giving an invitation in his Sunday service or his Wednesday service or whatever and throwing out the nets, but I'm also talking about the hairdresser that's witnessing to the distraught woman that's sitting in her chair and sharing about her own relationship with Jesus.

I'm talking about the businessman and the carpenter and the football player and the neighbor that's sharing with another neighbor over the fence. I'm talking about the student that is sharing the Gospel with someone else. I'm talking about us one-on-one, sharing to see people won to Christ. As well, I'm talking about the person that gets on their knees and prays and that faithfully supports the evangelistic outreaches of the church with our hard-earned income.

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All of these things and so many more that they should all funnel down into this one thing that we are reaching people for Jesus. There's no more important thing for us to do as members of the body of Christ. There's no more important business for us to be up to or more important thing for us to be involved in. But if I lose my edge, if I'm not sharp spiritually, I'm not going to be winning people to Christ. I'm no longer that sharp instrument in the hands of Jesus. I'm no longer an effective instrument in His hands.

So question, have you lost your cutting-edge spiritually? I want to share with you a most interesting story. It's a story about a man that lost his cutting edge. It's actually fascinating, but before, let me just give you a little bit of background if I could on this. The story is found in 2 Kings 6, and we're going to be reading about the school of the prophets, reading about the sons of the prophets. They were students or pupils of the prophets that were being trained in the things of God and the law, in the history of God's people, about the Spirit of God. There were several schools of the prophets dating back to the time of Samuel.

He is the one that began them, that they were like training centers for these young ministers. In the days of Elijah, he was the head over several schools at Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and possibly other places. Then Elisha, when he came after Elijah, he took on the same mantle and became the head of these schools. They grew under his ministry, as we shall see. I want to read you from 2 Kings 6:1-7. This is very pertinent to what we're talking about regarding our cutting-edge. It says, 2 Kings 6:1-7 NKJV,

¹ And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us.

They'd outgrown things. This school of the prophet was increasing. It was expanding; it had blessing on it, with Elisha at its head. Elisha said, 'Please let--' Or the man said,

² Please, let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell." So he answered, "Go."

Elisha said, 'All right, go.' He gave them permission.

³ Then one said, "Please consent to go with your servants." And he answered, "I will go." ⁴ So he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. ⁵ But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, "Alas, master! For it was borrowed." ⁶ So the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick, and threw it in there; and he made the iron float. ⁷ Therefore he said, "Pick it up for yourself." So he reached out his hand and took it.

What an interesting story. This pupil, this guy that was part of the sons of the prophet. He is chopping wood with an axe. His axe head flies off and goes into the water. He lost his cutting edge. What can we learn from this? There's a few things I'd like to share with you. Number one, if you have lost your cutting edge, as you're sitting, and honestly, I don't believe it's a coincidence that you're listening to my voice right now. If you have become dull spiritually, you've left your first love. You're not passionately in love with Jesus as you once were.

You've lost your fire; you've lost your edge. You don't have that sensitivity. It's been the longest time since you've actually been used by God to influence and impact another person. You've

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just become dull spiritually. I would say, first of all, don't condemn yourselves. Good people sometimes lose their cutting-edge. This guy that lost his cutting edge, he had dedicated his life to the service of the Lord. He was one of the sons of the prophet. He was studying for ministry. He was actively employed in doing the Lord's work. You could even say he was in the will of God.

Elisha had given him and the other guys permission to go and to expand their facility. You could even say they were working by divine permission. They had the go-ahead from the man of God. As I said earlier, there's been a few times in my journey that I have lost my cutting edge, and I had to get it back. Now, the key is, once you realize it's gone, you need to stop and be honest, 'Where is my cutting edge? Have I lost my cutting edge?' If you have, take responsibility. Listen, between you and me right now, take responsibility.

There was 50 people chopping wood there, according to 2 Kings 2 tells us there were 50 sons of the prophet, 50 guys chopping away, 50 guys working, but only one guy lost his cutting edge. Only one guy's axe head flew off. That would've been a bit dangerous. Now, there are some people that are unaccustomed to using an axe, and it may have been done to misuse. I myself—listen, you may not think it looking at me right now, but I have chopped my fair share of wood in my lifetime. I have cut up many cords of wood in my day. I still have hatchets and axes. In fact, this is just one that I took out of my garage, one of a number that I have.

I used to have to cut all my own wood. I cut wood for other people when I was living in a fairly wooded state, Oregon, that sits right above the state of California, where I live now. Anyone that actually is actively involved or knows anything about chopping wood, you know that axe head needs to be on tight. You need to examine it. The axe handle fits up into here, and then in the top, you'll drive down a wood wedge, or sometimes they have little metal wedges, and it expands the top of that axe head there so that it's tight and it won't fly off. If it's loose, you need to check it out. You need to put a wedge in there.

I even had a friend, that before he would go out and chop, he would put that axe head in a bucket of water and let it just soak in there for a little while. The wood would swell up, and it would guarantee that that thing would be on tight. This guy he's the only one that lost his axe head. It was his own fault. He couldn't blame, 'Well, the guy I borrowed the axe head from, he should have made sure that thing was on tight.' No, no, no. Once it's in your possession, you are responsible for it.

Some people they blame others because of having lost their edge spiritually. "Well, I'm this way because so-and-so did this to me, and that's why I'm this way, or, the church failed me, and that's why I'm this way." Listen, don't blame somebody else. Maybe somebody did something to you they shouldn't have done. Maybe they didn't do something for you that they should have done. Maybe the church failed you. I don't know, but only you determine how you respond to what people do or don't do for you or to you. If you've lost your sharpness spiritually, we've got to start this thing by saying, 'You know what? It's my fault. I did it myself.' Take responsibility and repent. As long as we blame someone else, we will never regain our cutting edge.

I remember there was a man many years ago he worked for me, and at one time, God used him in a significant way. I would say he was very sharp spiritually, but before he left, he just, for the last—I'm going to say six months that he worked for us, worked with us, that spiritual sharpness was gone. He had an attitude, and the arena that he worked in and that he served in in the church, he just wasn't having an impact anymore and was actually, instead of it growing, it started to shrink under his leadership.

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I talked to him one day, and I said, 'What's going on?' He said, 'Well, I know I'm this way, and I've got an attitude, and I know things aren't going well.' He realized that his time had come to an end. I said, 'What happened to you?' He says, 'Well, it's because of so-and-so.' I said, 'What do you mean so-and-so?' 'They offended me.' He talked about something that someone had said to him like six months, eight months before, and he'd allowed that to become an offense in his heart and to grow and to fester, and he'd never forgiven that person. He blamed his own spiritual dullness on the fact that he didn't forgive, but he blamed it on what someone else did to him, what someone else said to him.

Listen, you need to forgive. You need to move on; you don't want to be a prisoner to the past. Stop blaming someone else. Take responsibility. Then we come to a second thought here, and it's this. Once you realize it's gone, stop chopping. Don't just go through the motions. Stop. There are some that have lost their cutting edge, but then they go through the motions for days, weeks, months, even years. They've got an axe handle, no axe head on it.

That son of the prophet would've been so foolish to just stand there and to just keep going through the chopping motions. He's not making any progress, nothing's happening, but he's going through the motions. He doesn't have a sharp edge at all, and sometimes people do that. It's good that you keep coming to church and you keep doing things, but, hey, if you've lost your cutting edge, stop, examine yourself. Are you growing? Are you still bearing fruit? Are you still in love with Jesus?

The fact that this happened to a guy that was in training for ministry, if I can right now, if there's a pastor or a minister watching me, I know, and you know that we can go through the motions and have lost our edge spiritually. Pastor, my dear friend, dear fellow minister, stop, stop. Examine yourself. Are you still on fire, or are your sermons like Sunday's dinner, nothing but leftovers and a little too long away from the fire? Have you lost that edge spiritually? Don't keep going through the motions. You need to stop, and then you need to do the next thing that this man did. He cried out, and he said, 'Alas, master, I've lost my cutting edge.'

He went to the right place, and the only place you can get that cutting-edge restored is you've got to go to Jesus. If I'm talking to a pastor right now, if I'm talking to a minister, listen, don't carry on just doing what you're doing. You need to get on your knees and go back to the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, and say, 'Lord, I've lost my cutting edge. I've lost my sharpness spiritually, and I need it to be restored.' My friend, He will restore you. He will restore your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and His spiritual things. He will open your eyes again so that you can behold wondrous things out of His law.

That what you're preaching; it's not just a bunch of stale leftovers, but it's fresh bread out of heaven's oven, and you know you've been feeding on it yourself, and God's been speaking to you, get into the pulpit, and you deliver this fresh bread, and people are growing, and they're increasing, and chains are being broken. It's what we want, but we won't have it if we don't go back to the Master and say, 'Lord, I've been going through the motions. Help me to regain my cutting edge. Use me as a sharp sickle in your hand. Give me understanding, give me insight.' My friend, He will restore you.

I've got so much more to say about this, but we just don't have time, so you're going to have to join me next broadcast, next program, the next show while we finish this up and talk about how can we regain our cutting edge. There's some other key elements in this story that you're not going to want to miss, but let me pray for you right now.

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Heavenly Father, I pray for my friend watching me, for the housewife that's sitting there at her kitchen table, for the minister that's lost his edge, for the businessman, for that follower of yours, Lord, that somehow lost their edge spiritually. God, I pray that you would help them. As they turn their hearts towards you, God, I pray that that sharpness would come back in the mighty name of Jesus.

Dear friend, if you've never called on the name of the Lord, call on Him today. He is a wonderful savior, and whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. God bless you. We'll see you next time.

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