

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: What To Do When You've Lost Your Cutting Edge, II Kings 6:1-7

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**INTRODUCTION:** I want to speak to you today about a man who lost an important object, but by way of a miracle, he got it back.

What if a person loses something and fails for no apparent reason? What if a person was living life responsibly? What if a person stumbled at no fault of his or her own or anyone else's? Have you ever heard of a "no fault" car crash? Think about that. Two cars hit each other, and no one is at fault.

I believe there are times when people fail but not because of any type of obvious sin or problem.

This morning, I want to preach to you about a man who is virtually unknown in the Bible. The first time I heard his story, I was a teenager at summer camp. I've only heard one sermon about this man and his situation. I hope your curiosity is aroused by now.

There are seven points to today's message. All of them follow the sequence of events:

1. The man lost his cutting edge.
2. The man admitted his loss.
3. He let the prophet help him.
4. The man's main concern was that his cutting edge was borrowed.
5. No one blamed anyone for the loss.
6. To find his cutting edge, he returned to the place where he lost it.
7. For his cutting edge to be restored, he had to reach out and take it back.

**SCRIPTURE:** II Kings 6:1-7 <sup>1</sup>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.”

<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. “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. <sup>7</sup>“Lift it out,” he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it.

### **First, THE MAN LOST HIS CUTTING EDGE.**

**SCRIPTURE:** II Kings 6:5a <sup>5</sup>As one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron axhead fell into the water.

**EXPLANATION:** At the edge of the Jordan River, men were cutting down trees. The only way an ax head would have gone into the water would have been if it came loose from the ax handle. A woodcutter must watch his ax closely to make sure it is securely fastened to the handle. Notice the scripture says, “As one of them was cutting down a tree...” Apparently the man was working so hard he didn’t notice he was about to lose his cutting edge.

The Bible narratives don’t hold back when telling about moral or ethical failures. We know about the failures of Joseph, Saul, David, and Solomon—to name only a few. In this case, we have no descriptors of the man’s character. There is no indication of personal failure. All we have is that he was working when the ax head fell into the water.

Notice— he lost it while doing his job. He wasn't neglecting anything.

**APPLICATION:** It's possible for us to lose our cutting edge if we are not careful. We can become so engrossed in work, we do not realize we are about to fail. Failure can creep on us ever so slightly we don't even see it coming. We must be mindful to take care of our best asset.

### **Second, THE MAN ADMITTED HIS LOSS.**

**SCRIPTURE:** II Kings 6:5b *"Oh no, my Lord!" he cried out.*

**EXPLANATION:** That's his admission of loss. It is an important fact that the man admitted his loss and that he did it suddenly. He didn't live in denial. He didn't try to fake it. He didn't lie about it. He didn't say someone stole it. He didn't blame the water, the weather, or being distracted by President Trump's tweets.

**APPLICATION:** Most of us don't want to admit it when we lose something, do we? We cringe at the thought of criticism, so while we search in silence, we act as if there's been no loss. I've done that. The truth is you can fake your loss but not for not very long. And how many of you eventually admit your loss?

Likewise, it's important to admit when you feel you are losing your cutting edge. Living in denial and faking it— neither are any fun, and both require lots of energy. Is there a place where you've lost your cutting edge? Do you find yourself slacking in your work? Do you find yourself being satisfied with mediocrity? It's best to admit you've lost your cutting edge.

### **Third, HE LET THE PROPHET HELP HIM.**

**SCRIPTURE:** II Kings 6:6a <sup>6</sup>*"Where did it fall?" the prophet asked (NLT).*

Since the man was honest enough and humble enough to admit his loss, he was in a good place to receive help. And since we know the rest of the story, we know the man got the right help.

**APPLICATION:** We can only get help when we admit loss. The only thing that keeps us from admitting loss is pride.

In the past, I worked with a few people who did not value professional development. They never attended conferences. They never read new books about their occupations. And while they thought their work was quality, everyone else saw it was not. I've told the church staff I expect them to be subject matter experts in their respective jobs, and if they need help, to please ask!

As your pastor, I ask for help all the time. I want my ax to be sharp and cut well. I know I can't do it alone. I've called some of our own church members to ask their thoughts on certain scriptures. I have a small group of pastor friends with whom I share ideas and get their input. I am regularly at a loss for answers—for new material and for insight on how to do things. I ask for help all the time. I am just being honest with you. There are no secrets to pastoring a church. Many pastors may do it better and more independently than I, but as you know, I continually ask for help.

**Fourth, THE MAN'S MAIN CONCERN WAS THAT HIS CUTTING EDGE WAS BORROWED.**

**SCRIPTURE:** II Kings 6:5b *“Oh no, my lord!” he cried out. “It was borrowed!”*

The woodcutter in the story represents the best possible steward. He was more concerned that the ax head was borrowed than he was about what others thought about him, losing his job, or anything else.

Perhaps the man was too poor to own his own ax. Perhaps he left his at home and borrowed one. Whatever the reason he had a borrowed ax, we do not know. But, his main concern was not for himself. Losing something borrowed would have been terrible.

**APPLICATION:** I want to borrow a phrase from a radio commentator you've heard me quote before: “Talent on loan from God”—that's what you are. Do you realize that? All your gifts, skills, talents—all of them—are God's. He distributes as he pleases. The question is, “Are you being a good steward of what he's given

you?” If you feel you’ve lost your cutting edge, you should be concerned because it never was really yours in the first place.

### **Fifth, NO ONE BLAMED ANYONE FOR THE LOSS.**

I don’t have a scripture reference for this point because there’s not one! The woodcutter didn’t blame anyone or anything for his loss. And, the prophet did not blame the man either. If their story had been a Facebook story, the blaming posts go crazy. “Dumb lumberjack! Doesn’t he know how to use an ax?” “Hey, what kind of prophet doesn’t confront a man about his clumsiness?”

**ILLUSTRATION:** During a time of crisis and loss, it’s so very easy to play the blame game. We heard news that the Lakewood Church in Houston, where Joel Osteen is pastor, was closed to hurricane victims. Then the criticism and finger pointing began. Only later, we find out they were cooperating with the authorities all along.

In our story, the woodcutter knew the loss was his fault. The prophet didn’t have to remind him – instead, he helped him. In this brief story, they did not waste time blaming each other.

When someone fails, it’s easy for others to point their fingers and speculate why that person failed. In sports, if a team fails, there will be many commentators telling us why. If a person has a moral failure or financial failure, it might not be too difficult to figure out why.

When Job had his struggles, his own friends gave him their reasons for his struggles.

**APPLICATION:** When you’ve lost your cutting edge, don’t blame others. Admit it, and ask for help. If you are the one who is asked to help, do your best to refrain from blame.

### **Sixth, TO FIND HIS CUTTING EDGE, HE RETURNED TO THE PLACE WHERE HE LOST IT.**

**SCRIPTURE:** II Kings 6:6 <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.*

The man went to the place where he lost his ax head. Of course, it all happened so quickly the man knew exactly where he’d lost it. If time had passed, it might have been more difficult for him to find that place.

**APPLICATION:** If you feel you’ve lost your cutting edge, return to the place where you lost it, and try to recount what happened. Like the man in the story, there was probably no moral or ethical issues with your situation. Were you just working too hard, taking on more and more responsibilities, or focusing on more projects and more deadlines? Metaphorically speaking, were you cutting tree after tree without taking the time to pause and sharpen your blade, when suddenly it dawned on you you’d lost your cutting edge?

If so, return to where you lost it, and seek to regain it. In your mind, go back to the beginning of your life’s work, or your volunteerism, or your marriage—whatever—and try to recall what was it that inspired you to take on whatever it was you took on. Try to recapture it, and dream again, but this time with a new dream— one that excites you more than your first dream.

**Seventh, FOR HIS CUTTING EDGE TO BE RESTORED, HE HAD TO REACH OUT AND TAKE IT BACK.**

**SCRIPTURE:** II Kings 6:7 <sup>6</sup> *“Lift it out,” [the prophet] said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it.*

Aren’t you glad we serve God of second chances? The woodcutter had a second chance; he could go to work again.

Notice—he had to reach out and take it. It wasn’t handed to him. And, an iron ax head without a handle wasn’t good for anything. This means the woodcutter had to put his ax back together. It wasn’t handed to him.

**APPLICATION:** If you get a second chance at anything, you'll have to put effort into your own restoration. Don't expect your second chance to be handed to you on a silver platter.

We know all too well, people who go to drug and alcohol rehab must want to change or it won't do any good. Any time any of us get a second chance, we have to be completely dedicated to that second chance.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
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