

Good morning. How is everybody? I'm glad you're here. We're going to talk today about something rather deep, rather personal. I want us just prepare for it, like God, whatever this time holds, whatever I may be dealing with in my life and in my heart, maybe even things that I haven't thought about in a while, help me to deal with those things in a healthy way, in a holy way.

This past weekend was rough for the world. It was difficult for the nation of New Zealand, for a community called Christchurch, for a couple of houses of religious faith. The world was shocked by all that occurred. This past weekend, I thought a lot about the condition of the world in which we're in and how we, as human beings, struggle to know what to do with pain. We struggle to know what to do with fear. We don't know what to do and how to process the things that go on inside of us sometimes that are very negative, sometimes very dark, sometimes very shrouded in secrecy. We don't know how to deal with a lot of those things. I want to talk about that today, about how we deal with pain.

I want us to just again ask God to help us to see what it is in my life, in your life, in our individual lives not to look around at everyone else in the world around us, but to ask God is there something in my life, is there something in my past, that I need to deal with today, that I need to think through, that I need Your healing touch with in my life today. As we dig into the scriptures in just a moment, I want us to be focused on that and to let's just pray once more. Father, focus me on Your word and Your truth and Your grace. Bring to mind, bring to my heart anything I need to confess or confront, anything I need to deal with and just let this be a time when I really change through Your truth. God, we love You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to take a poll real quick as we start this morning and just see where we are as an audience and so on this side, I want to give you two options and let you vote as a church. We don't vote on things normally, but we're going to vote today on this. In this bucket over here ... Pretend I'm holding a bucket and on this side of the stage, I have an option for you that is pleasure, success, significance, intimacy with people, it's connection, it's security, it's all the things that you think people would want or need in life. On this other side of the stage, I have this other option that contains pain and failure and heartbreak and destroyed relationships and diminished foundations and problems. Okay.

Now you get to choose whichever one you want to have for the rest of your life. How many of you vote pleasure? Anyone vote pain? I want to see who needs the most help today. Okay. It is our basic human nature to flee from pain and to seek pleasure. Now, I'm talking about at the deepest natural part of how we are when you strip away all the things that we add to life. We're not talking about relationships. We're not talking about thinking deeply. We're not talking about improving myself or growing myself. I'm just talking about the root and core raw humanity. I try to avoid pain. I try to experience pleasure.

I go through life that way. That's how I am naturally. That's not a bad thing. That's not the result of sin. That's the result of creation. In other words, God wired us so that we would seek to avoid pain and achieve pleasure. In other words, He gave us these basic senses of humanity by which we would live in the world and be productive in the world, in which we would protect the world and govern the world and all those kinds of things.

The problem is that sin enters into the human race and messes up the whole picture. While we're made in God's image, now we tend to seek pleasure and avoid pain in ways that sometimes are costly to other people. They're costly to ourselves. We make unhealthy choices so that we can get out of pain. We make unholy choices so that we can get out of pain, so that we can experience pleasure, and so we've

got all this brokenness that works its way into this basic instinct of trying to avoid pain, trying to experience pleasure. It now comes from a place of selfishness. It now comes from a place of sinfulness and it's hard for us to get over that. It's hard for us to change that.

We're in a message series called Healing in which we're talking about how to overcome our hurts, our habits, and our hangups. How do I experience the healing and the wholeness that God wants for me? How do I achieve that? How do I sustain that in my life? We're in week three. We're talking about this big truth of getting your story straight. That's what I want to focus on today is this healing choice of speaking and believing truth instead of speaking and believing error, but we're going to do that by talking about the role of pain in our lives.

If you hang with me for just a second, I think that while most of us seek to avoid pain and to experience pleasure instead, that what we've wound up doing as humanity is pursued pleasure in ways that are broken, unhealthy, unholy, sinful and we wind up in pain because of it. Then we seek to escape that pain because we don't like the way that feels and so rather than dealing with it, we go the other direction.

I believe that pain is a big part of my story and your story, that the pain that we have experienced in life from birth until now, all the things that you've walked through that are difficult, it may be rejection, it may be physical pain, it may be an experience of trauma, it may be a moment of abuse or a lifetime of abuse. There are all kinds of things that we go through in life that cause us pain and how we deal with pain is key to whether we're going to experience real healing or not. Okay. Whether we experience real healing or not is contingent on how we deal with pain. We all tend to try to avoid it.

I was reading this past weekend about some of the stories of people involved in what happened in New Zealand. I read about one guy who was at one of the mosque who saw what was going on and grabbed a credit card machine and took off running toward one of the perpetrators of the crime. He's trying to distract him. He's weaving between cars. He's making noise. He's trying to buy time for the people who are inside the mosque. Eventually, he throws this credit card machine at this terrorist and picks up one of the weapons that the terrorist had dropped. It's not loaded. It's not working, but then he throws it at the terrorist's car like an arrow, like a projectile, and the guy drives off. Okay.

This guy did something that was different and unique in that he moved toward potential pain to spare others from pain. That intrigues me because I think we are more than animals. I think we're more than just fight or flight and that's all there is to it. I think there's more than that to us. I think that by virtue of creation, by virtue of us being made in the image of God and being shaped by Him and crafted by Him as unique individuals, as a special role in His creation, that there's something more to us, that there's the potential to do things differently.

I want to draw that out today. I want to talk about how God draws that out today. We're going to talk about pain. We're going to talk about your pain and my pain. I want you to just be thinking about the things that you have dealt with in your life that are hurtful. I don't want us to dwell on those for a long, long time, but I just want you to think about the life-shaping experiences that you've had that were unpleasant, that were difficult, that were hard to walk through. Think about those things for a minute and then ask God how do You see those things? How do You see those experiences and how do You want me to process them in the healthy way?

I believe that there are two basic responses that we give when we approach pain in our lives, when we are dealing with pain. Whether it's pain in the past or pain in the present doesn't really matter. We all try one of these two things. First of all, we try to escape our pain. We try to escape our pain. That is, if I'm feeling stuff, I try to numb the feeling. I try to get past that. A lot of people who struggle with addiction to alcohol, addiction to pornography, addiction to drugs, addiction to eating, addiction to all kinds of things, when we struggle with addiction, a lot of times, most of the time, the reason why we go to that addiction is not because it's good for us. It's not because it helps us be better in life. It's because for the moment, we escape the pain. We medicate. We numb. We don't have to feel that or deal with that. If I'm incredibly lonely or if I feel rejected or I'm dealing with feelings of worthlessness, whatever it may be as I reflect on my sin, my pain, my brokenness and it gets me down, I can go to an addictive tendency and behavior and I can escape the pain for an hour, for a night, for a week. I can try to escape it.

That's not the healthy way to deal with it, but that's what a lot of us do. I think all of us do it to one degree or another, so when I talk about we're all broken, what I mean is some of us may do this to more of an extreme than other people, but all of us to one degree or another, at one time or another, we do things to try to escape our pain. Okay.

The second approach that I want us to move toward today is that we need to embrace our pain, that God wants us to embrace our pain, that He gives us a pathway for embracing our pain. I believe that most of what we're talking about boils down to the way in which we achieve happiness in life, that for most of us humans, we have this order of things that we think about and what God wants for us and what we want for us are sometimes two different things.

I tell people a lot of times when people ask, "Why can't I be happy"? Or, "Why can't I be happy all the time?" and I will say, well, listen. I believe God wants you to be happy. I do. I believe He wants you to be blessed. He wants you to be filled with joy, but it's not His first priority. It's not the biggest thing He wants for you, that if you look at the way God orders our lives and what God wants for us, He first wants us to be holy. He wants us to be like Jesus. Then I believe He wants us to be healthy. Okay. Holy is like Jesus. I'm in line with God's teachings. I'm lining up with His truth. Secondly, He wants me to be healthy. That is, He wants me to be relating to other people in a healthy way, to be thinking in a healthy way.

Then the result of being holy and being healthy is this kind of third desire for us of being happy. It flows out of a healthy life. The problem is sometimes over here on the holiness end of the spectrum, I have to go through pain and suffering and hardship in order to be made holy. God has some things to teach me and they're hard to learn. Sometimes I walk through some chastisement. Sometimes I walk through moments of silence. Sometimes I go through things that are difficult and God uses every bit of that to shape me into the image of Christ, to make me more like Him so that I'm holy.

When I am holy, then I tend to live healthy. I tend to relate better to others. I tend to do things in a wise way. I tend to follow the teachings of scripture more. All of that results in a life that longterm is happy in the sense that I have more peace. I have more fulfillment. I understand God's purposes. I have a greater confidence and a greater assurance in my life and so pleasure is something that often follows the pain.

Now, what we do as humanity is we flip that around, right? What we seek first is to be happy and so moment by moment I want to know what do I do to feel the best I can feel in this moment. If something is painful or difficult, even though it might help me or shape me, I'm going to withdraw from that and

draw back from that and find a way to be happy because that's my sort of broken human priority. I want to be happy and then if I'm happy, then I figure I'll be healthy. If I feel good about myself and I feel good about life and I'm not experiencing pain and I'm not walking through anything hard, then I will easily get along with other people. I'll easily make better decisions and that surely if I'm really happy and I start to be healthy, then maybe I'll ultimately wind up fitting into God's plan and I'll find holiness. Our value system is just flipped from what God wants to do in our lives.

Jesus said this in the Sermon on the Mount. We've said that our healing pathway is found in the beatitudes that Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. Last week, He said blessed are the poor in spirit, right? That means those of us who own our sin and we own our brokenness, well, today is the second beatitude in verse 14 or, excuse me, verse four of Matthew 5, Jesus says this, "God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Now, each of the beatitudes we have said comes across as somewhat paradoxical. It doesn't make sense. If we were writing the sermon for Jesus and He hands us His edited notes and it says I want to talk about how people who want to be happy, right, that's our goal, if you want to be happy, if you want to be joy filled, you need to mourn. We would take those notes and we would grab a red pen and we would say, "No, Jesus. I think You need to turn this around." If you want to be happy, you got to be entertained. If you want to be happy, you got to find things that make you feel good. You got to have the air conditioner or heater set on the right temperature. You got to be comfortable in life. You got to make sure you're not doing anything that might be painful in any way whatsoever and Jesus says if you want to be happy, you have to mourn.

Now, what does it mean to mourn? Well, to mourn is to willingly embrace pain. When I speak at a funeral, one of the things that I almost always say is to the family I will say it is okay to grieve. It's not just okay. It's the right thing to do. It is healthy to grieve. If you don't grieve, if you don't deal with this now, you'll deal with it later. You'll deal with it in different ways that are unhealthy later. You need to own this moment and acknowledge what it is.

Now, a lot of us are afraid to talk to God in real terms about God, I hurt. God, I don't like this. God, I don't understand. I don't know why You did this. I don't know why You let this happen. We're afraid to say things like that to God, but I think God is fully capable of handling those kinds of questions and concerns and so when you're in pain, I think He fully expects you as His child to say, "Father, I'm in pain. I don't know what's going on. I don't understand this. I don't know what to do. I don't know why You would allow this to happen."

I think He fully expects those questions. They're not an assault on who He is as God. They're an acknowledgement of where I am as a human being, as a child of God, and they're an appeal to Him because Jesus ultimately knows that if you want to be happy in life and He wants you to be happy, He says blessed are those, so that's what I want for you. I want you to be blessed. I want you to be joy filled. I want you to be happy, but to be happy, you sometimes have to mourn. You sometimes have to embrace your pain. You sometimes have to in the moment go this is hard.

I don't think that our role as the church is just to bring people in on Sunday and say, "Let's just all be really happy." I used to hear this phrase. I grew up in a church that was kind of rural, a little country. People would say things like, "All right. Put your smilers on, everybody." What does that even mean? Sometimes in church life, we say things like that, just leave your problems at the door and just come

worship Jesus. I'm going no, no, bring the problems with you. We can deal with those in here, but we can't if all we're focused on is let's make everybody feel good and make everybody feel happy and almost provide an alternative kind of temporary medication for everyone. Instead, let's get real and let's mourn some stuff.

Now, what is there to mourn in my life? Well, there's the pain that I've experienced as a result of what other people have done to me. We said a couple weeks when we opened the series, we said all of us have hurts, habits, and hangups. Habits are things I do. Hangups are things I believe. Hurts are often things other people have chosen to do to me or, at least, the world around me or even nature itself sometimes causes me pain and I didn't choose it. I didn't invite it. I didn't make a decision to get into it, but here I am hurt by what someone else has done or by what the world around me has done or whatever it may be. I have to deal with hurts. I have to mourn that pain and mourn those hurts in order to be holy, in order to be healthy, in order, ultimately, to be happy.

Now, how do I do that? I want to give you a process today to walk through when it comes to owning your pain, embracing your pain, and dealing with your pain. I believe that a lot of this boils down to what I believe about pain, that we have some false beliefs about pain, not just pain in general. I sometimes have some false beliefs about what specific experiences I have been through actually mean to me. That is, I've gone through something and I start to tell myself a story about what I went through. Out of that comes this belief in my mind. That belief determines how I'm going to live on a daily basis.

I look back at my pain, back at my experience, and if I tell the wrong story about that experience, if I'm understanding it wrong, if I'm using my human, my broken, my limited perspective to make all the assessments about pain and I'm not tapping into God's perspective and trying to understand what God has to say about my pain, then I'm going to have a limited, one-dimensional viewpoint on what that pain means for my life. The journey that we're going to take today is all about weeding out the lies and the false beliefs about pain and getting to a place where we can mourn our pain, where we can embrace our pain, where we can deal with the difficult things and understand it all in the right possible way.

I was reading this past week a little something about Viktor Frankl. Frankl was not a Christian, but he was a Jewish man that lived through two concentration camps. He would counsel people in these concentration camps. Now, from what I understand of history, there's very little that you can give to someone in that situation that is hopeful about their circumstances. You can't say to someone it's all going to be okay. It's all going to get better. We're going to get out of here. It's all going to be fine.

Most of the people who found their way into concentration camps in those days knew that the future did not hold much promise for them, that many of them would die. They knew the rumors. They knew the stories. They knew what they'd heard about those places and so then when they were there and they were often allowed to be suffering and allowed to be dying, these are people who were dealing with tremendous amounts of pain and you cannot give them a temporary false hope or a quick answer to make them happy.

People would talk to Viktor Frankl and this one particular gentleman who'd been in the camp for a while said to Viktor Frankl, "I just want to end my own life so that they don't have the power to do that." Frankl had to deal with this situation. How do I counsel this person about the pain that he is in and so what he said to the guy was, he said, "I don't think you should do that. I think you should wait and I think you should make them kill you. Make them kill you." The guy said, "What do you mean?" He says, "If you

make them kill you, then your life stands as a testimony of the evil done here and you have the power to do that."

Now all of a sudden, this guy changed his perspective. Doesn't mean he's happy. It doesn't mean he's experiencing pleasure, but the story that he's telling about his experience and about his pain all of a sudden, his life, even in the worst of possible conditions, all of a sudden, he sees meaning in his life. He sees value in his life. He sees worth in his life.

I'm convinced that a lot of us look back on our experiences of pain and we have written a story that continues to write itself out and it's not told in an accurately biblical way. Instead, it's all about how mean God is and how bad He's been to us and how worthless I am and how nobody around me likes me and they're all bad people and I can blame all the rest of the world. I want us to strip all that away for a second and start to embrace some real truth. I want us to get our stories straight. Okay.

Now, you can hear what I'm saying today about what scripture claims about these things and you can accept it or reject it. That's up to you, but I want to tell you from God's perspective, from the Bible's perspective I want us to get real about the story, to get our story straight this morning. Here's the first thing I mean by that. I want you to get your story straight about God, to get your story straight about God.

When you're talking about mourning and you're talking about embracing your pain and you're talking about looking at the difficult experiences that you've been through in life, you have to get your story straight about God because what a lot of us have done and what we seem to make popular as a society is to say that pain means that God isn't good. Pain means that God isn't there. Pain means that God isn't in control. We say that to ourselves. We say that to each other. People write books about it and it's the idea that if there is human suffering, then that reflects in some way on the nature of God, on who God is. We have ruled, so to speak, in our minds sometimes that if I've gone through hard things, either God doesn't love me or God doesn't want the best for me or maybe God isn't there. He's not paying attention, so what I need is to get my story straight about the identity and the character of God.

Here's what the Bible says about who God is. In the Old Testament, in Psalm 86, verse 15, the Bible says this, "But You, oh Lord, are a God of," what, "compassion and mercy. You are slow to get angry, filled with unfailing love and faithfulness." Now, that Psalm echoes scripture from elsewhere. This is first uttered in Exodus. It's repeated in Deuteronomy. It is mentioned by the prophets. It is quoted in the New Testament, as well, this theme, this idea that God is a God of compassion and a God of mercy. He is slow to get angry. He is filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

Now, as one who follows Jesus, let me give you my logic behind all of this. I follow Jesus because Jesus rose from the dead. He came back from the grave. Not only did He rise from the dead, He predicted that He would rise from the dead. He told people before it happened. He said to people, "This temple is going to be torn down. Three days later, it's going to rise again. The sign of Jonah will be given to this generation. I'll go away three days and then I'll come back."

Here's a religious leader named Jesus who predicts His own death and resurrection and then He comes back from the grave and you've got 2000 years of church history where thousands, millions of people attest to the power of the resurrected Lord Jesus. They have met him. We've experienced Him. We

know Him. The people that were immediately around Him were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus. They went to their deaths to defend their testimony of what they saw in Jesus being alive.

Now, if Jesus could predict His own death and resurrection, if He would die on the cross in that way for me and then rise again, I will believe anything Jesus has to say. I will trust Him. To trust Him means that when Jesus looks at the Old Testament and affirms it, I am trusting that the very word that Jesus pointed to as authoritative is authoritative for me. In other words, I don't understand everything about the Old Testament. I don't understand everything about scripture. I don't always have all of the answers for some of the tough questions that come up, but this is what I know. My king, my leader, the Lord and director and savior and redeemer of my life believes the Bible, so I believe the Bible, that Jesus believes certain things about God and because I believe in Jesus, I'm going to believe what He believes about God. When Jesus says blessed are they who mourn, I'm listening to an authoritative source say that. This is the king of kings who is alive from the dead.

When I look in Psalm 86:15 or any of the other passages, I put authority in God's word over my own experiences, over what the culture says, over what popular opinion may be, over my interpretation of the history of my life. To me, this word from God has authority over me. It dictates for me. God's word dictates for me the truth about who God is and so now when I walk through pain, I get to go this is awful. This is terrible. I don't understand it. I don't know why God is allowing this, but I believe He's good. I don't get it. This is awful, but God is still good. He is still full of compassion. He is still full of mercy. He is slow to get angry. He is filled with unfaithful love and faithfulness. That's just who God is.

You have to decide what is the authority over what I believe about God? Is it my philosophy, my painful experiences, popular opinion, what others are telling me, or do I believe Jesus rose from the dead as king of kings, that He's my savior, and, therefore, I believe what He believes about God because He's god. Okay. If that's the truth, now I get to walk through my pain with a worldview that is rooted in something much bigger than me, something more timeless than I am, that I'm temporary, but this word is eternal, that I'm an American, but this word is global, that I'm thinking about the here and now, but this word from God is something that is much larger in scope than my perspective could ever be and so I need to get my story straight about God. If you want to know who God is, this passage tells us. He is full of compassion and mercy. He is slow to get angry. He is filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. It's just who He is.

Here's the second step. Get real about yourself. Get your story straight about who you are, about who you are. Now again, if you strip away the God aspect of this and you treat humanity as purely just the product of complete random chance, then you're not going to see this from the perspective that I would see it from. I think it diminishes the worth and value of humanity to subtract our creator from the equation. Instead, because I have this authoritative God, this God who sent His son who died on the cross and rose again, this God who's in tune with us, this God who is full of compassion and mercy, who is slow to get angry, who's full of unfailing love and faithfulness because a God like that has spoken, has created us, has crafted us, then I know there's something special even about broken human beings because we're made in His image and we reflect who He is.

When you go back to the early chapters of Genesis, He tells us we're made in the image of God. We're made in the likeness of God. We think. We feel. We decide. We do. We can have compassion for each other. We can network and connect and get to know each other. We can have intimate relationships with each other. All of that is a reflection of who we're made to be by God, by God.

Then it goes even further. I believe that in every human life there is inherent dignity, value, and worth because we're made in God's image, so every human being from conception to the tomb, we are made in the image of God. We possess inherent dignity, value, and worth because God crafted us. He put His personal touch on us. That's who we are as humans.

I also know that we've sinned and we've messed up that image. We've marred it. We've broken it and that every single one of us has gone astray. We've walked away from that. We've sinned and, therefore, we have broken our brains in the sense of how we evaluate ourselves. We don't think straight anymore because we have allowed sin to come into the picture and so I think selfishly, I think sinfully, and because of all that, I no longer reflect perfectly the image of God. A lot of it is still there, but I'm like a cracked mirror. I show off some of what God is like as I am naturally, but I need to be healed, saved, redeemed, fixed, forgiven of my sins, broken and restored. I do all that through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now knowing that, here's what Ephesians chapter two says about you, says God saved you by His grace when you believed. Obviously, I'm talking to people who have placed their faith in Christ. If that's you, then this is your story. If you have followed Jesus, this is who you are. You can't take credit of this. It's a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done. Thank goodness because I have not collected enough of them. It's not the result of my goodness. No. Salvation is not a reward, so none of us can boast about it, for we are God's what? Masterpiece. We are God's masterpiece.

My five year old showed me this. He'd done a bunch of colors on a piece of poster board. He held it up the other day and he's like, "Dad, look at this." I said, "That is awesome. Is that a pink koala bear?" Then I knew I was wrong. "Dad, it's a pig." "That's the most beautiful pig I've ever seen. That pig is a masterpiece because you made it." God made us as masterpieces. He crafted us. He makes us into something that He desires us to be. Now, don't take my son's artwork and make any implications about who are as humans and the pig koala. Just drop all that. Move on.

Here's what God does as He remakes and reshapes and recreates us out of our brokenness into the image of Christ, says He has created us and He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago. Let me settle on two things here. He says He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so I believe that God created people good. We sinned. God comes in and offers a redeemer and when we receive that redeemer, Jesus, we are born again and He begins to recreate us, to renovate us, to reshape us into His original intention to look like His son Jesus. He creates us anew in Christ.

Then a lot of us kind of stop reading there. We get the miracle of salvation and the miracle of creation and the miracle of all of that, but the rest of the verse matters. He says so as a new person in Christ, we can do the good things He planned for us long ago. Because of God's interaction in my life, because of His salvation of me purely by grace, I can do this. I'm up to this. I have what it takes to live the Christian life.

Now, does that mean I have it in me naturally? I don't need God? No, it's just the opposite. I have it in me because God is in me, that I have this ability because I'm saved and redeemed and recreated from the inside out. It is 100% credit going to God. It's a work of God in my life, but I get to stand here and say because of the work of God in my life, I can do this. Some of you are believers. You are followers of Jesus and yet, you've convinced yourself that you just can't be a good mom or a good dad. You just can't be a

good husband or a good wife. You just don't have what it takes. Maybe those other people do, the rock stars that you see on Instagram, but you seem to get life wrong. You just can't seem to get it right. You got to take that story and throw it in the trash because the truth scripturally is that when you are redeemed, you can do the good things that God has given you to do. You can do God's will.

We don't talk in that kind of language enough as Christians, but I'm talking about the fact that first of all, I'm created by God and so that explains, I think, why humanity is able to rise to some level of goodness. There's this common grace. We can do heroic things at times, even though we may not know Jesus, but we're still all broken and sinful and lost. When I come to know Jesus I'm saved. I'm found. I'm redeemed. I'm recreated. I'm reshaped and I can do this. I can do this. I've shared with our staff many times that as Grace Hills has grown from our little office building with 30 people and gotten to where we are here, that there have been a lot stages and phases through there and at each new phase, I face that new phase with a little bit of self-doubt creeping in and I go I don't know if I can lead through this next thing. I don't know if I'm up to that. So far it's been okay, but this just I feel sort of incapable, sort of inadequate, and at each of those stages at the end of the day have been able to say but God called me. God will equip me. God will carry me. He'll handle this. I just got to lean on Him more and so I lean on Him and we're able.

I'm not telling you to just go out and think positively about yourself as a human being. I'm telling you that when God has redeemed and recreated you, you have within you because of Him what it takes. John said greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world, that overwhelming victory is ours because of Jesus Christ. We need to think in those terms and so you are never worthless. You are never hopeless. You are never helpless. You are never incapable of doing God's will. You are never disqualified while others may seem qualified. You are never unable to do God's best for your life. You are up to this because of the work of redemption in your life, so get your story straight about God. He's a God of compassion and mercy. Get your story straight about yourself.

He says this in Romans 3:24. God treats us much better than we deserve and because of Christ Jesus, He freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins. It's just one of many verses that as a believer I can claim today because of my faith in Christ, that I've been saved entirely by the grace of God and the result of that is I am set free. I am free. While you might convince yourself I'm worthless, I'm trapped, I can't overcome this, I just can't do better, you get to declare scripturally no, I am set free. If you believe that, say it with me. I am set free. That was a 40% good attempt. Let's one last time. I am set free.

I am set free.

That's who I am in Christ. That's an acknowledgement not of my goodness, but of His great work that He's been willing to do in us. Here's the third thing. Get your story straight about your pain. Get your story straight about your pain. I really believe that one of the choices we get to make, the power that we get to have is what story am I going to tell about my pain? What meaning am I going to attach to what I went through?

For some of us, we walk through a moment of abuse and for years and sometimes, sadly, a lifetime, we attach to that the meaning I'm not worth protecting. We go through rejection and the meaning that we attach to that, the story that we keep telling about it is I'm not worthy of loving. I'm unlovable. We fail in business. We blow it maybe in some big area of our life financially. We walk through something like

bankruptcy and in that moment of pain, we continue to look back and attach a meaning to it and the meaning is I'll just never be successful. I just don't have what those other people have.

Someone tells us in the third grade that maybe we have some special need and someone mislabels it as you're just disobedient or you're just slow and we carry it our whole lives. Maybe there's a deep intelligence there, but we keep attaching a meaning to that pain that isn't fair and isn't true. You get to decide what meaning you attach to pain. You can't change the pain. You can't always change your circumstances. You do get to change how you interpret them.

Philippians 2 says this about us. God is working in you. He's working in you giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him. Throughout your life today, God, the God of creation, the God of the Universe, the God who made all of this, that God is working in you so that you can do what pleases Him, so that you can rise to the occasion. When you start telling a story about your pain that says I'm not worth anything or I'm not good at anything or I'm not smart enough or I'll never be lovable, I'm just incapable of having a successful relationship or anytime you tell yourself those things, you're negating the work of God in your life. You're ignoring what God is up to and what God is willing and able to do. There's a true meaning and a true story that goes along with that and I believe there's tremendous power in how we tell that story and the words we choose and the thoughts we think and the lies that we believe versus the truth that we believe.

I was sharing with Angie just yesterday we were talking about something and the word overwhelmed came up. I was saying I learned something recently from a guy who was teaching about the power of language and the power of words. When I go back to moments in my life where I really walked through depression at a heavy way, I think back and I used to say all the time I'm just overwhelmed. I'm just overwhelmed. There's so much pressure. I'm just overwhelmed.

I'm listening to this guy teach recently and I don't say that that much anymore. I used to at that time, but this guy that I was listening to said there's a big difference between being overwhelmed and being overloaded. He said when you look at your life and you go I am overloaded, that says something about all the stuff you've got going on. When you declare I am overwhelmed, that declares that you are incapable of handling this and so the story that I might tell about my circumstance about my pain is I am overwhelmed, meaning I cannot do this. I'm overcome versus I'm overloaded. I got a lot of stuff. Doesn't affect who I am. It's still difficult, but I can do this. I can weed through this. I can work through this.

Again, some of us will say things that are statements of our worth and value and those statements disagree with God. They disagree with God. When you declare that you just can't do this, that you just couldn't be lovable, you can't be worth anything, when you keep believing those things and saying those things and declaring those things, when you say things, "I'll just never recover from this. I'll just never get over that," you are declaring a disagreement with God because what God says is, "No, I am working in you. I am working in you. You have this potential because I'm here. You can rise above this because I'm here. You can fix and repair this because I'm here. You can do this parenting thing. You can do this spouse thing. You can handle this career. You can handle this role you have in your community. You can handle this influence that I'm giving you. You can handle the affluence that I've sent your way."

You can do this because God is here, so get your story straight about God. He is full of compassion and mercy. He is slow to anger. He is filled with long suffering and faithfulness. That's who He is. Get your story straight about you. He made you in His image. He likes you. He smiles on you. He likes His kids. He

has remade you in the image of Jesus and if you don't know Jesus yet, He wants to do that in you. I promise you. I guarantee you He wants to do that in every single lost person on this planet. If you don't know Jesus yet, He wants to do work in you and you haven't even begun to imagine how amazing and powerful that work is. Okay. Everyone else agree?

Amen.

Amen. You got to tell the right story about your pain. Your pain doesn't mean that you're worthless or incapable or that God doesn't love you or people could never like you or you just can't do anything right or any of those things. Your pain doesn't mean life is all bad and everything's just going wrong and there's no light at the end of the tunnel. It doesn't mean any of those things. The fact is, pain from God's perspective means that you get to grow, that you get to change, that you get to overcome, that you get to learn, that you get to rise because pain is His pathway to making me holy and healthy and happy, blessed, but blessed, happy are those who are willing to mourn, to embrace their pain.

Let us bow our heads. Father, I pray that in this room, those of us who are dealing with pain and it comes back up, someone says something, we read something, there's something familiar and it just brings back to our mind the pain and we've been telling a story about our pain, that it means that I'm worthless, that I'm incapable. It carries labels with it. God, we need to lay those labels down and I'm asking You to bring those to our minds right now.

God, in this room, in this room, what have we as individuals been saying about you that is incorrect? Correct us through Your word. What have we been saying about ourselves that is wrong? Correct us, God, in how we see ourselves. Help us to honor You by believing the truth about who we are. What have we been saying, God, in this room about our pain? God, help us to tell the right story. Help us to tell it from Your perspective, that You love us, that You heal us, that You grow us, You change us, You walk us through this, that You're getting us ready for eternity with You. God, help us to see it from Your side, to get our story straight about You, about us, about our pain. Let us grow from it and have Your healing, Your healing, God. I pray for that.

If you're in the room this morning and you don't know Jesus, you've never trusted Him, you've never met Him, you've not asked Him to be your savior, you have a choice. You can not believe it. You can decide I can't believe that and that's you. That's your choice. You have the freedom to do that, but I can promise you if you're willing to put your faith in Him, He'll change your life. He'll heal you in ways you never imagined. He'll begin to work in you in ways that you have not even thought about yet and all it takes is for you to say God, I don't get it. I don't have all the answers. I don't always understand it, but I believe Your son Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I believe that. I believe that, God. I ask You to save me. I ask You to change me. I ask You to be my Lord and my God. I give my life to You. I receive Jesus. I trust Him and I receive You. I receive You.

If you're a believer, you might just say God, I've been holding back. I've hung onto this pain. I've not been willing to submit it to You because it's easier to just keep telling the false story. God, I repent today and I acknowledge Your goodness and my redemption. I acknowledge that my pain is Your pathway to my holiness. God, we love You and praise You. In Jesus' name. Amen.