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Well, good morning. I want to welcome you to this service—as well as those of you who are worshipping at *Fry Road*. Those of you online, we're really glad that you're here. We're going to be finishing this series called *Resilient*.

I want to take you back to a day earlier this year—the day is March 17. In China it was a cold, wintery day. The Tumen River, which separates China from North Korea, was frozen over. Two young, American-Asian journalists were in that part of the world doing a story on human trafficking. They had hired a guide from—he was Chinese and Korean and they thought he was safe. He was actually setting up an interview with someone who had been involved in the world of human trafficking and it was right on the border. He led them across the frozen river and they were standing on North Korean soil. These two girls began to feel uneasy and nervous; uncomfortable about where they were and the implications of being on North Korean soil. And so after being there just a few moments, they decided to head back into China where they had permission to be. But about half way across the river, they began to hear yelling behind them. It was two North Korean soldiers with rifles chasing them now over into China.

Well, when they were back on Chinese soil the North Koreans did not give up their chase. They grabbed them and dragged them across the river and at gun point marched them back to a nearby army camp in what began for them a 140-day nightmare. These two young women—Laura Ling and Euna Lee—were then put on trial and sentenced to 12 years of hard labor in North Korea. Later when they were released they said:

We can't adequately express the emotions surrounding our release. One moment, we were preparing to be sent to a labor camp, fearing that we would disappear and never be heard from again; the next we were escorted into a room with President Clinton, who greeted us and told us we were going home.

Laura Ling and Euna Lee  
*Hostages of the Hermit Kingdom*  
*The Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 2009

The day—August the 4<sup>th</sup>—[they] were going home and they would be restored to their families. I think all of us love stories like that sometimes. I remember watching the video when they got off of the plane on American soil and were reunited with their families.

There is something in us that loves to see people who've been separated brought back together. There's something in us—in our DNA—that loves to see relationships that have been fractured to be brought back together and restored again. I think one of the reasons that God has put that in us—in our DNA—is because that's what He's like.

In fact, the story of the Bible reflects that very theme: that God created Adam and Eve perfect, without sin, [and] places them in this paradise called the Garden of Eden. And yet in that moment when they sinned, the Bible says that sin entered the human race, the bloodstream of mankind was poisoned forever, and the relationship with God was broken. The story of the Bible is about restoring that relationship.

When Jesus would leave the Glory of Heaven and step onto earth and die on the cross, it was all about restoring that relationship. Some day (the Bible says) Jesus will come again for us and that restoration will be complete when we are with Him forever in Heaven. If there is one thing we know when we study the Bible—all 66 books—is that our God is a God of restoration.

*Isaiah, chapter 30, says:*

The LORD longs to be gracious to you; he desires and rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

*Isaiah 30:18 (NIV)*

Did you get that? He longs to be gracious to you—to your situation—no matter what’s going on. He loves to restore that which is broken and it’s a thread that runs through the entire Bible.

I think of the story of Job. After that long season of suffering when he lost his health and his wealth and his business, and every one of his children died in a freak wind storm—all 10 of them. As you wind your way through that wrestling match between God and Job—when you come to the end of the book of *Job*—the Bible paints a picture of God restoring to him. In fact in *Job 42* it says:

<sup>12</sup> [So] the LORD blessed Job in the second half of his life even more than in the beginning. For [now] he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 [female] donkeys. <sup>13</sup> He also gave Job seven more sons and three more daughters.

*Job 42:12-13 (NLT, 2004 edition)*

Now I know when you read that something inside of you says: Yeah, but you don’t ever really replace a child that’s lost. You don’t ever wipe away the pain of the first child dying by a second child being born. And that’s certainly true. But the point is that in spite of what’s happened God can restore joy, hope, and blessing; and that there can be life after the pain.

When you come to the *New Testament* and you read the story of the prodigal son, the story of the prodigal son is all about restoration—about a son:

- Who squanders his inheritance
- Who lives in immorality
- Who is rebellious against his family

And in a moment when he comes to his senses, the Bible says, he comes home and there is the father (who is a picture of God) and—

- He’s not angry (and)
- He’s not resentful (and)
- He’s not judgmental (and)
- He’s not condemning

But rather, he is restorational. He runs and he grabs his son into his arms and he said: This is reason for a party because you were lost and now you’re found. You have been restored. [*Luke 15:32* (paraphrased)]

In *Galatians, chapter 6*, Paul talks about believers—just like you and I: people who sit in this church and churches everywhere—who stray from the path, who drift in their relationship with God, [and] they fall into some kind of sin. Paul says:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

*Galatians 6:1 (NIV)*

Part of our job is to also be in the business of restoration; of helping people get back on the right track.

I think of (just) examples and testimonies of people I know. I think of a friend of mine named John Baker. He was on staff with me at the church I served in California. John is a self-described drunk in his earlier life. And then he had an encounter with Jesus. His life was changed. His marriage was restored. And now God has used John to launch a ministry called *Celebrate Recovery* that is in thousands of churches now all around the world helping other people—just like John—deal with their addictions and have their life restored in Christ.

I mean if there's one thing we know about God it's that He specializes in fixing broken things. In fact, that's the story of all of us in this room who are Christ-followers. We are all broken and yet Christ restored us.

Well we get the chance (in finishing up this story about the life of Joseph) to see what restoration looks like in a very positive way. So if you'll take your Bibles and open them to *Genesis 45*—let me just (kind of) recap and set the context for you this morning. Joseph as a young man had been sold into slavery by his older brothers. Then he was purchased by an Egyptian businessman named Potiphar. Joseph was a good employee—a good slave. He was responsible, hard working and moral. But one day Potiphar's wife came to try to seduce Joseph. Joseph resisted and she, being insulted, accused him of rape. Well, he was thrown into prison.

Again the Bible says that the Lord was with him, that God's favor was on him. Even while he was in prison he was very successful. In fact, other prisoners were put under his care. Two of them were a cupbearer and a baker, both who had dreams, and Joseph interpreted their dreams and they came true exactly as he said.

Fast forward two years. The cupbearer is back in the service of the pharaoh and the night before Pharaoh has had his own dream. He's looking for somebody to interpret the dream and no one is able to do so. The cupbearer says: You know, I remember this guy. He was a Hebrew. He was back in prison when I was there and he interpreted our dreams and they came true exactly as he had predicted.

Pharaoh called for Joseph and he said: I hear you interpret dreams.

Joseph said: No, I don't interpret dreams but God can and He's going to give me understanding. And so Pharaoh tells the dream.

Joseph said: Okay, here's the interpretation. There's going to be seven years of abundance; there's going to be bumper crops like you've never experienced before. But here's the problem: the next seven years there's this great famine coming. You'd better be wise about storing up grain during the seven years of abundance so you can survive the famine. Joseph says: My advice to you is [to] find your best person, your best leader and organizer, and develop a food-storage program so that you can survive the famine.

Well, Pharaoh is so impressed with Joseph he says: How about you? And in one day, Joseph goes from prisoner to prime minister:

- He has all the authority of Pharaoh.
- He's second in command to Pharaoh.
- He's put in charge of this huge government program.
- Now God is using him in a big way to help save the people of Egypt.

Now the plot thickens because the famine didn't just affect Egypt, it affected surrounding countries like Canaan where Joseph's family was from. And so Jacob, the father of Joseph, says to his other brothers: Why don't you guys go to Egypt [and] buy some grain so that we can live. So imagine the scene: God is orchestrating this story and Joseph's 10 brothers show up. They're standing in line waiting to buy grain. They get up to the front of the line and here is Joseph standing in front of his 10 brothers.

Now here's the tricky part. Joseph immediately recognizes them. They don't recognize him because:

- He's wearing Egyptian clothes.
- He's speaking Egyptian.
- He's the prime minister of Egypt.

I mean, this couldn't be their brother. It never even crosses their mind that it could be their brother.

And so Joseph is so caught off guard he goes into this (sort of) bad cop routine and he says: You guys are just spies and the reason you're here is to try to exploit some weakness in the land of Egypt.

They said: No, no, no, no. You've got it wrong. They said: In fact, we're all brothers. There're actually 12 of us kids in our family. Our youngest brother is at home with Dad and we've had one brother who died (which was of course a reference to Joseph).

And so Joseph says: You know to prove that you aren't spies I want you to go back home and I want you to get your youngest brother and bring him back here and let me see him so that I will know that you're telling the truth.

Well, in that moment the brothers turn and they had this (kind of) family meeting; but Joseph is overhearing it. They say to each other: Man, this is God's punishment for what we did to Joseph all those years ago. They even remembered back and they say: You know, I remember what it was like when we put him down in that pit and how he pleaded with us for his life. He was so

distressed and so panicked and yet we wouldn't listen to him. Now what we're experiencing is God's punishment because of what we did.

Well, imagine what it was like to be Joseph in that moment. They don't think that he can understand because they think he only speaks Egyptian, but he completely understands. And here they are recollecting what happened 20 years ago when they sold him into slavery. The Bible says that Joseph turns away from them and he begins to weep. [*Genesis 42:24* (paraphrased)]

Let me fast forward just a bit in the story. Joseph's brothers go back. They get the youngest brother named Benjamin. They bring him back to Joseph. Joseph still hasn't revealed himself. He's still scheming about how he's going to keep Benjamin there and he says: I'm going to keep Benjamin. You guys go on back to your dad and I'll give you some grain for your journey.

They said: No, we can't do that because you don't understand. My dad's already lost one son and if we show up and we don't have Benjamin, it's going to kill my dad. We can't go back without him.

In that moment Joseph has a meltdown. No longer can he continue the charade or control his emotions, so he tells all the Egyptians in the room to leave. And so here is Joseph with his brothers and he says to them: I'm not the prime minister of Egypt, I'm your brother, Joseph, who you sold into slavery. The Bible says that he begins to sob like a baby, so loud that the Egyptians in the other rooms can hear him crying. [*Genesis 45:2-4* (paraphrased)]

I mean, try to imagine the emotion of this moment and all that has been lost by Joseph because of what his brothers did to him, and now after all these years, he's seeing his brothers for the first time. That begins some lessons for us about restoration that I want you to see, because—

## **RESILIENT PEOPLE SEEK RESTORATION**

Here's the first lesson I want you to see:

### **RESTORATION MEANS... TRUSTING GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY**

Restoration means trusting God's sovereignty that even when things feel out of control, or even when I don't understand, that I trust that God *is* in control of my life. He is God, King of the universe, and He is aware of what's going on in my life. In fact, you could even say it like this: God is large and in charge of what's going on in your life.

Listen to what Joseph says in *Genesis 45*. He says:

<sup>5</sup> And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. <sup>6</sup> For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be

plowing and reaping. <sup>7</sup> But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

*Genesis 45:5-8 (NIV)*

Three times Joseph says: God sent me ahead of you. God brought me here. It wasn't you guys who orchestrated this. This has all been part of the plan of God.

How easy it would have been—just like it is for some of us who are here this morning—when you look back at your problems, you look back at the way you were mistreated or abused, and you can play the angry victim card which says:

- You owe me.
- You took from me.
- You hurt me.
- You are to blame for what's going on in my life.

Joseph doesn't do that. He just says: This is part of a plan that God is working. Even when it was hard and I didn't understand, it was still part of God's plan. There are two thoughts that come to my mind; one is: you've got to trust His purpose and His plan.

## **(1) TRUST HIS PURPOSE AND PLAN**

In other words, what He's doing in your life is not just a random set of events and actions; but rather, that God has a plan. You see, if you don't trust God's sovereignty, here's what happens: When you succeed you take too much credit for yourself; and when you are hurt you will blame others too much. But when you trust God it's okay, because He is in control.

The second thought that comes to my mind is: you've got to learn to trust His goodness, that He is a good father.

## **(2) TRUST HIS GOODNESS**

In *Matthew 7*, when Jesus is talking about prayer, He says:

<sup>9</sup> “Which of you, if his son asked for bread, will give him a stone?

<sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup> If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more {listen to that phrase: how much more} will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

*Matthew 7:9-12 (NIV)*

Listen, when I understand the character of my Father, it's easier to trust His plans even when I don't understand, because He is a good Father. For some of us that's really an issue for us. Because in your heart of hearts you're not convinced that God's really looking out for you, that He is a good Father, that as *Romans 8* [verse 28 (NKJV)] says that, "all things work together for good to those who love God" and "are called according to His purpose."

Trust in His sovereignty. That's the first step. Here's the second step—and by the way, each of these four lessons are going to get progressively harder for us to do. So the first one is: trust in His sovereignty. Number two:

## **RESTORATION MEANS... REFUSING TO SEEK REVENGE**

Again, when you fast-forward into the story, Joseph brings his brothers and their families and his dad, Jacob, to Egypt to live and they're going to have a great place to live. But when Jacob dies (near the end of Genesis) the brothers get a little bit nervous, because here's what they say: Now that Dad's dead, what if Joseph holds a grudge? I mean, there's nothing to hold him back now from really punishing us for all that we did to him. [*Genesis 50:15* (paraphrased)]

One of the things that I've notice when I read the story of Joseph is how much guilt plays into the lives of these brothers—this kind of nagging guilt—always wondering:

- When the other shoe's going to drop
- When the hammer's going to fall
- When they're going to finally (really) pay for what they've done

It sort of reminds me of this guy who wrote a letter to the IRS. In the letter he writes: I haven't been able to sleep because last year when I filed my taxes I deliberately misrepresented my income. So I am enclosing a check for \$150 and if I still can't sleep I'll send you the rest.

Guilt, it's a hard thing to deal with. But I love the way Joseph deals with their guilt. In *Genesis 50, verse 18*, it says:

<sup>18</sup> Then his brothers came and bowed low before him. {And they said: You know what? We're not worthy to be your brothers.} "We are your slaves," they said. <sup>19</sup> But Joseph told them, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, to judge and punish you?" <sup>20</sup> As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people.

*Genesis 50:18-20 (NLT, 1996 edition))*

What Joseph models for us, the Apostle Paul (in the *New Testament*) gives us crystal-clear instruction—about this issue—in *Romans 12*. He says:

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. {Then notice this next phrase.} <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

*Romans 12:17-19 (NIV)*

Let me say this as clearly and frankly as I can. It is never the prerogative of a believer to seek revenge—never. You say: Hey—

- You don't understand what they did to me.
- You don't understand what happened.
- You don't understand the circumstances.

It doesn't matter. Paul says: If you are a Christ-follower, it is never an option for you to seek revenge.

Now, you may not have carried it out, but maybe a thousand times in your mind you have a scenario, an anger fantasy, that's allowed you to pay them back for what they did. When you restore, you've got to trust that God has a bigger plan than you know. When you restore, you've got to choose not to seek revenge, and then thirdly:

## **RESTORATION MEANS...**

### **DECIDING TO FORGIVE**

It's one thing to not seek revenge, but it's a whole other step deeper than to say: I choose to forgive.

It's interesting that when Jacob dies and the brothers all get together; they come to Joseph and, we're not really sure whether or not they're telling the truth. In fact, it appears in the story that they are not. But they come to Joseph and they say to him: Hey, before Dad died he left some instructions that we want to tell you about. He asked that we would come to you and that you would forgive us for all the sins we've committed against you. And then, almost as in unison, the Bible says they throw themselves on the floor and say, "We are your slaves." And Joseph doesn't give us a hint of any kind of revenge or judgment. In fact, it is very clear that he releases them from any kind of unforgiveness or resentment and he just forgives.

Paul, again, tells us very clearly in *Colossians 3*:

Bear with each other [and] forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

*Colossians 3:13 (NIV)*

You have a choice you can make and it's about releasing them. It's about releasing that person to God to let God handle it. God is just and God will deal with things, but in His way and in His time. But it's not for you and I to determine the judgment and the consequences in the lives of other people.

So, it begins with trusting God's sovereignty—He's got a plan in my life, it's not random, He's a good Father. It means not seeking revenge. It means choosing to forgive others. But here comes the hardest part, because the last part of restoration means blessing those who hurt you.

## **RESTORATION MEANS... BLESSING THOSE WHO HURT YOU**

Now I can almost sense the response of some of you as you say: All right, I was with you till now. But, dude, you lost me here at this whole: Bless the people who've hurt me. I mean, it might be one thing—I can sort of see myself giving up the whole revenge thing and I might let them off the hook. But if you think:

- I'm going to bless them
- I'm going to do good to them
- I'm going to go out of my way to help them

—you're crazy. It's not going to happen.

When Joseph's father and brothers come to Egypt from Canaan, the Bible says that not only does Joseph give them food, but he actually facilitates them going before Pharaoh and making sure that they get the best piece of property in the whole area. And that all of their families would be provided for and that even though it's extreme famine, they're all going to have plenty to eat. Joseph blesses his brothers and makes sure that they're all taken care of.

Jesus gave us a similar command when He said in *Luke 6*:

<sup>27</sup> "But if you are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. <sup>28</sup> Pray for the happiness of those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.

*Luke 6:27-28 (NLT, 1996 edition)*

Now, let's just be honest. That is hard stuff—I mean really—it's so counter-cultural. Because the world tells us to do just the opposite when it comes to people who hurt us:

- You don't let people step on you
- You don't let people take advantage of you
- If someone hits you, you hit them back

Because that's the only way that you really have of protecting yourself from being hurt further.

But Jesus has a totally different model. He says:

- Not only do I want you to not seek revenge
- Not only do I want you to forgive (but Jesus said)
- If you really want the world to sit up and pay attention—to those of us who are believers—bless those who hurt you.

Because Jesus said: If you just love people who love you and are like you, anybody can do that. But you want to put the glory of God on display. You want to put the love of God on display. Bless people who hurt you. Pray for those who've wounded you. Help them when you can. Each step is progressively harder.

You know, if I were going to put an epitaph over Joseph's life, it would probably be *Romans [12]:21* and it says this:

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

*Romans 12:21 (NIV)*

That's the story of Joseph's life.

I would not pretend to stand here today and understand (maybe) some of what you have gone through. In a room this size and number of people who are here today, I know that in the closets of our secret lives there are some unbelievable pains and hurts and wounds. I can't even begin to imagine what some of that feels like. But I can tell you—based on the teaching of Jesus, on the example of Joseph—that you and I are called to overcome evil with good.

So my question to you is: Which of these four might God be speaking to you about today? I mean, where you are today, could it be that your next step is:

- You've just got to trust God, trust that He is sovereign. It doesn't make sense now, but you're His child and He is a good Father and He has a plan for your life.
- Maybe for some of you it's to give up your anger fantasy. Maybe it's to let go of the hatred and the resentment that resides in you that would like them to pay.
- Maybe it is just to choose to forgive; to move on, to let it go, to let the past be the past and let God deal with it as He may. You've been carrying around this poison inside of you that's actually like a cancer eating you alive and God says: Let it go. You can choose to forgive.
- Maybe for some of you it's the next step; it's to actually bless, to actually pray. When I say pray, it's not pray: God, get them. But it's: God, bless them. And mean it and want the best for them. That, my friend, puts the glory of God on display.

Listen! You are never more like Jesus than when you are modeling restoration. Let's pray together.

Lord, thank You for this day and for the chance to be together in this room. I pray for those who are hurting, those who are wounded, [and] those who are angry. Lord, the hurts are real. But I pray today that we would trust Your sovereignty, know that You're a good Father, and You have a plan; that we would not seek revenge, choose to forgive, release people from our judgment, and even bless those who have hurt us.

I pray that You would do a work of healing and restoring right now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Bill Norman, *Lead Pastor of Administration and Operations*, comes to close out the service:]

I'm going to ask our ushers to come forward as we get ready to take our morning offering. (Just as a mention) if you've made a decision today to follow Christ or you have a question or you need someone to pray with you or talk through an issue, I ask you before you leave today to—to your right, to my left—to go back to the *Encouragement Room* and visit with an encourager or a pastor today. Allow them to talk and visit with you and to pray with you before you leave this day. Let's pray God's blessing on our offering.

Father God, we thank You that first of all, You're the Great Provider and that You give us Your provision for all things. We pray now as we come and give our tithes and offerings, Lord, that You would bless it; that You would allow it to grow and to be used to grow Your kingdom and to help hopeless people and to restore hope in a mighty God. So, Lord, I pray that as we give we give generously and we give according to Your will in our lives. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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**So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed,  
you will be strong in character and ready for anything.**

*James 1:4*

*(New Living Translation, 1996 edition)*

**Legend:**

(words in parentheses) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[words in square brackets] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{words in curly brackets within indented quote} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*