

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

RELATIONSHIPS TO DEVELOP | RE-IMAGED

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Alright. Well, today has been an incredible day for a lot of different reasons, but the primary one is that today we launched our Fishers campus location. So can we just celebrate with our Fishers campus? We've already had an incredible day there. I've been getting text messages and pictures all morning. And you can see... This is a live shot of their earlier hour. We had nearly 600 people at that campus just at the first hour. So, want to celebrate with you.

If you are at the Fishers campus right now, welcome to the family. If you live on the northeast side or you know somebody who is looking for a church, let them know about that campus. Campus pastor, Chad Lundsford, and his whole team are doing a just an incredible job.

If you've been a part of our church for a while, then you know our issues with this. We launched this campus, originally, back in 2020 about two minutes before COVID. And we made the really painstaking decision to push pause on that. Most of the reasons were outside of our control. We were meeting in a portable location, in a school.

So, we have just had a desire and a prayer to re-launch that campus. But, we ran into a number of obstacles and issues, mostly around facilities. And we just have an incredible one there now. I'm looking forward to seeing what God is going to do at this location in years to come. First hour we had two baptisms. So, it's already jumped out. It's really cool to see.

If you are joining us for the first time, whether at any of our locations or online, we are three weeks in to a series of messages that we started at the beginning of the year called Re-Imaged. And what we are doing is we are just going on a journey to discover God's purpose (sometimes the word is will) for our lives.

I think that most of us are interested in that. I know that I am. I want to know not only who I am but what I'm made to do. In fact, I would ask you to kind of finish this statement here on the screen behind me:

I was made to REVEAL ANSWER

Do you know what it is that you've been made to do? Some of you maybe right away you knew exactly how to answer that statement. You were like, "Oh, man. That's a no brainer. I know what I was made to do." Maybe you are doing it.



But others of you, maybe you are a little confused. Maybe you thought you knew but now you're not so sure. Or maybe you're kind of beginning a journey of discovery around that.

And I would just encourage you to take a picture of that, to write that down in your notes and to just spend a little bit of time between now and the conclusion of this series next weekend just asking God for clarity on what you were made to do.

I think that discovering God's purpose for our lives is certainly about fulfillment and really leaning in and enjoying life. But I think it's even more than that. I think that knowing God's purpose for your life helps you to endure through some of the difficulties of life.

It's sort of like the shock absorbers of life. If you know why you're here and what you're called to do, then you can go through some challenges, and some difficulties, and some trials, and some pain, and you just sort of weather that. But, man, if you don't know then that can be really disorienting and confusing.

So, in week one we actually looked at something that a prophet named Habakuk wrote. He said, "God," he actually refers to Him as Sovereign Lord, (and that word sovereign just means that God is in control) "would you please give me the feet of a deer." Remember that?

We said that oftentimes what we have a tendency to do... I know that I certainly have done this—when I bump up against some sort of challenge or trial in life, my temptation is to pray, "God, take it away." Take away the challenge. Take away the pain. Take away the difficulty.

And it's not that God won't do that. It's not that He doesn't have the power to do that, but sometimes there is just something that God wants to teach us, show us, develop within us that can only happen through that. It's kind of like a resistance or challenge that is going to produce some things in our lives that can't happen any other way.

Mountaintop experiences are fantastic. Mountaintops have great views. The problem is there is just not a lot of vegetation that grows on mountaintops. It's in the valley. And that's painful. But we got to begin to shift our perspective to say, "If I'm in a valley, if I'm in this difficult era of life, instead of praying, 'God, please flatten the ground under my feet.'" what if we said, "'God, please stable my feet for unstable ground? Give me the ability, give me the vision, to see what it is that You want to teach me.'"

When I look back over my life I just know that the things that I have grown from the most, the character that has been developed, the things that have become more rock-solid happened in the valleys, in the challenge, in the pain.

And I think that people know this. They see this more and more whether they want to acknowledge God or not. In the words of the great theologian former Navy Seal, Jocko,



who says... More of you this hour got that than in the other two hours. I am not giving up on it, though. I love what Jocko says. He says, "Hey, man. If you ever face a challenge, you ever have a hard conversation, you're ever in physical pain, your response needs to be: Good."

Good. This gives me the opportunity to grow. This gives me an opportunity to figure something out that I didn't know before. And I like that. I like that. It's this idea that God is doing something more than just giving us a comfortable life. He's trying to develop character within us that can handle whatever may come.

So, we've just been on this journey to discover God's purpose for our lives. And last week I alluded to this. I just want to circle back to it. I think it is so important for this conversation. We've got to be careful. In pursuing God's purpose for our lives, we've got to recognize that God is for you, it's just not about you. Man, if you're trying to discover God's purpose for your life and it's primarily all about you, then chances are that that is going to elude you. Many times we can end up making this life so much about us.

It kind of reminds me of my youngest daughter, when she was in preschool. She and Lindsay were running late to get to class one day for whatever reason. And so my wife very calmly says to her in the car, "Hey, we're going to be late to class so when you walk in you be very respectful of your teacher and your classmates and don't make a lot of noise and interruption. Just go over to your little carpet pad and sit down and be quiet.

And my daughter acted like she understood that but she had no intention of doing that. She ended up, as my wife tells it, walking into the classroom and she drops her bag, and she announces, "I'm here now!" That has been a story that has circulated around our family.

And I just thought, "You know what? There have been so many times that I just want to fall into that trap too. I just maybe make life too much about me. And here's the thing, if you make life too much about you, chances are that God's purpose for your life will continue to remain out of focus because it can't be about you.

In fact, in Matthew, chapter 20, there were a couple of Jesus' disciples, brothers by the name of James and John, and they were, very clearly, wanting to know what their purpose in life was. So, they had their mom go ask Jesus.

I don't recommend that. If you send your mom to go talk to your boss about getting a promotion, that likely means that you're not ready for one. I don't know. Just an observation.

But, she goes to Jesus and here's what she asked Jesus in Matthew, chapter 20. She's like, "Can my boys have the seats of honor at Your left hand and Your right in the kingdom of God?" Listen to Jesus' response. He goes, "You don't know what you are asking. And then He says this. Powerful words:

“...whoever wants to become great...”

It’s not a bad thing to want to be great. You were made in the image of God. You were made to make a unique contribution. You were made to make a difference. That’s another way to say, “Man, I’m living out the purpose for my life.” Whoever wants to find that, whoever wants to be that, notice what He says. It’s so counter intuitive.

“must be your servant...”

And then He says this:

“...just as the Son of Man,” that’s another description of Jesus, Son of Man, “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:26; 28 (NIV)

When I was in Bible College there was a building where I took most of my classes. And you would walk in and go down one set of stairs. Then there was a landing and another set of stairs to the classrooms. On the wall at the first landing of stairs was that verse framed. And every day when I walked to class I would read those words: not to be served but to serve.

That was the pattern of Jesus, that’s what it means to follow Him. It’s to recognize that I’m here to use whatever gifts, abilities, and callings that God has placed upon my life for His glory and for the good of others. When you begin to grasp that, God brings His purpose for your life into focus.

So, on week one we talked about the fact that every single one of us has been made in the image of our Heavenly Father. We are all different: different generations, different ethnicities, different personality types but we are all made in the image of God.

What happened when sin entered the world is that it fractured that image of God within us and we needed to be reconciled with God and we needed to be redeemed and restored.

So, when you give your life to Jesus, what happens is that Jesus took on your sinfulness on the cross and He imputed His righteousness to you. When you recognize your sin and you invite Him into your life, it doesn’t mean that you are perfect or that you’ve got it all figured out, it means that you have a standing now before God that is reconciled. From that standing, that place of security, then you can begin to grow.

And what spiritual growth is, it’s not head knowledge, even though it might involve that—what spiritual growth is, it’s a re-imagining where you’re getting back to that image of your Heavenly Father before sin fractured it. That’s what that is.

And then last week we talked about work, your occupation, career—whether you work inside the home or not, whether you get paid for it or not. It’s that thing that you’re



producing, you're contributing to the world. And for so many of us, work can be such a source of great satisfaction, but it can also be a source of stress, anguish, and anxiety.

We prayed with many people last week who were just dealing with work issues, whether that is a toxic work environment, or maybe an unreasonable boss, or maybe co-workers they were just not getting along with.

What we learned last week is that work is not the result of sin, sin has cursed the work. So, work came before sin and likely work will exist in the kingdom of God. That was last week.

This week, where we are going is I want to talk about the third thing that has been fractured by sin. And this maybe is affected by sin more than anything else, our relationships. A big part of discovering God's purpose for our lives involves the relationships that we develop. Just like anything else they have been affected by the fall.

It kind of reminds me of that married couple, they'd been married for years. And he isn't feeling well. He goes in for some tests. They get the results of the tests. They go to the doctor's office. The doctor walks in and is very solemn. And he says to her, "Hey, I'd like to speak to you first before I share the results."

So, he takes her into another room. He says, "Listen, you just need to know that your husband has got a deadly disease. At best, he's got about a year to live. You might be able to prolong that a few months if you do a certain number of things."

And she said, "Well, what are they?" And he said, "Well, you know, you need to make him breakfast in bed every day. You need to let him watch the game whenever he wants, go play golf with his buddies, give him a massage every night. And if you can do that, then he could live maybe a few months beyond a year."

And she goes, "Wow. I understand." So she leaves, goes back into the room with her husband. He looks at her and he goes, "What did the doctor say?" She looked at him and she said, "He said you're going to die."

I know that's an old joke. It's silly. But that's the thing about relationships. As soon as I say relationships were involved in the fall... Maybe you have a current rift going on right now in your life and it kind of makes you tense. You've got to kind of laugh about it.

Relationships are hard, and they are complex, and they are challenging. I think most of us know that. So, here's the thing. I would even go as far as to say this: The quality of your life right now is dependent upon the quality of your relationships. Would you not agree? Those are connected.

So if I say, "How's life going right now?"

"Oh, it's pretty good."

“How are your relationships?”

Well probably it's a reflection. When your relationships... If you've got a disagreement going on right now, or maybe you're locking your horns with somebody you love and care about, or maybe somebody just recently lost his temper, or any number of things—you've got a marriage that is struggling, holding on by a wire, then chances are that you don't have very much peace yourself because the two are connected.

In fact, when it comes to the relationships in our lives, I want you to just take a look at this diagram behind me, these concentric circles [like a Venn diagram]. You've got you at the center and then there are these spheres of relationships.

The first would just be family. I just want you to think about the names and the faces of the people who would populate that circle. The next would just be friends. So, these are just the people you enjoy hanging out with. They are not blood family, but you love them like family. And then the next would be frequent interactions. This could be neighbors, people you see in the coffee shop, people you work with, people you go to church with—frequent interactions.

Then the last one is flame. Honestly, I was just looking for a fourth word that started with f. And notice it is flame, not flames. So, this is your romantic interests, that's why it's just one of them. Maybe that's part of your problem.

So, you've got family, friends, frequent interactions, and flame. I want you to think, for a minute, who populates those circles. And here's the next question. How's it going? And if it's messy in one circle it's likely spilling out into the next. We were made for relationships. Relationships bring us so much joy and satisfaction. Yet, for so many of us, relationships can be so painful.

Years ago we had a couple of guests here at our church. Their names were Stuart and Jill Briscoe. I don't know if any of you will recognize those names. Stuart passed away a few years ago now.

When I was in college I had a subscription to a sermon club where they would mail me cassette tapes with sermons on them every month. I'm dating myself now. It was called Preaching Today. And I remember there were two sermons on side A, one sermon on side B. And Stuart was featured on many of those. He sort of like... He was one of the first preachers I listened to regularly to kind of teach me how to preach.

We had the opportunity, after his retirement (he led a church for many, many years up in Minnesota) to spend a couple of days with him here. And we jumped at the chance—just soaking up so much wisdom from both of them.

I will never forget here, on the second floor, we reserved a little classroom. We had leadership team people, elders, spouses, all pile into the room with Stuart and Jill. And he was doing a Q & A with us.

And I'll never forget that one of our elders raised his hand and said, "Stuart, in all of your years of ministry what was the greatest source of joy for you?" He didn't even have to think about it. He said, "People." People were the greatest source of joy, the greatest reward of all of those years of ministry. He said, "Okay, same question. What was your source of greatest pain and frustration in all of those years of ministry?" He goes, "Same answer."

Wouldn't you agree with that? Greatest source of joy in your life right now: maybe your marriage, your kids, your friends, your co-workers, your family. Greatest source of pain and frustration and you get so annoyed, it's the same answer.

Well, if that's the case, what happened? And just like in the previous two weeks, we need to go back to our origin story to understand what God intended and then what happened so that we might know how to move forward.

In Genesis, chapter 2, verse 18 this is what it says as God is creating:

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is,' circle these words here, "not good," It's not good, for what? "for the man to be alone." (NLT)

We can kind of camp out on that one statement for a while. And what does it mean by not good? Well it means that we are relational beings designed for relationships regardless of how we are wired. Some of you may say, "Well, that is true. I'm an extrovert. I love people." Well, the same is true for introverts, ambiverts, and anybody in between. That's just managing energy positions.

We are all made for relationships. And when you are cut off from relationships for an extended amount of time, studies are showing that that actually affects your physical health. Recent studies show that social isolation significantly increases your risk of death along similar lines as that of smoking, obesity, and lack of exercise. It's also associated with roughly a 50 percent increase of dementia. We were made for relationships.

C. S. Lewis said this years ago. He said:

"We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious, we discover loneliness." When a baby cries. "We need others physically, emotionally, intellectually; we need them if we are to know anything, even ourselves."

So we need other people in our lives for every reason. We could look at the Greatest Commandment that Jesus gave us. The Greatest Commandment—we talked about this a couple of weeks ago: love God, love people. Well you can't fulfill the Greatest Commandment without being in relationships with people. You can see all through the Scriptures that there is nobody who does ministry alone, by themselves.

Now there is a most definite benefit to a quiet time during the day, or maybe a season of self-reflection, or getting alone but most of the time the way in which we grow is with other people.

We could look at the life of Jesus. We see that Jesus modeled this. In His life he had various circles of people around Him. The Bible says that He had the crowds. So think about the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew. Jesus had hundreds of people around Him. He wasn't necessarily in personal relationships with all of them, but He had that connection to the crowds.

And then beyond that He had the 72 close followers. And then closer in He had the 12 disciples. And out of the 12 disciples He had three that He was especially close with: Peter, James, and John.

I've always been told that it's good for all of us to have a Peter and a Barnabas and a Timothy in our lives, meaning somebody who is a little bit older, a little bit farther along the line who could pour into you. And then somebody like a Timothy who is maybe younger than you or not as experienced as you who you can pour yourself into, because water that doesn't have any source and doesn't flow becomes stagnant.

So we need somebody older than us who will pour into us, invest in us, mentor us, but it can't stay with us. You can only do that through relationships.

Can I just say this? One of the challenges of leading a church of this size is just helping you to see that what we're doing right now, I'd call this the crowds, and there is a time and a place for this for sure. I think sometimes we want to minimize this, but I don't think we should minimize it.

I also think we shouldn't say that this is the end-all. What I mean by that is there is a unique thing that happens in a room of this size, and when I say a room of this size I mean if you're in a room with more than 150 people, there is something different that happens in a room with more than 150 people than when you are just one on one with somebody, or even one on 20. Meaning worship just is different.

I would say that teaching and preaching is different. I'm speaking right now at a volume, at a pace, and an octave that would be weird if you and I were in a coffee house. Don't you think so? If we had met at a Starbucks and I was like, "So," in a loud voice you would be like, "Calm down." Right? But in this room it is a little bit different.

What this is, this is where the Spirit of God works in crowds, but doesn't quite work the same way in smaller groups. There is something very powerful about that. I'm thankful for it.

I mean, there are times whenever I get done preaching and I'm walking away, somebody comes up to me and... I don't think I've done very well and somebody walks up to me in tears and is like, "Man, you said this and it was exactly what I needed to hear."



And I'm like, "Well, what did I say?" He tells me and I go, "I didn't say that." What is that? That is the Spirit of God taking what I prepared, for better or worse, and tailor making it for you. And that happens in a room like this.

However, with that said, if this is all that you're getting, you're not growing. Because discipleship doesn't happen in a room like this. You might get some nuggets, some wisdom, and some experience with God, but here's where discipleship happens. It happens in a living room, it happens around a firepit, it happens around a table.

Every Thursday I meet with four men in the same coffee shop and we study Scripture together and ask how it's going and confess sin. And we say, "Hey, could you hold me accountable for this? This is the thing that I think God is teaching me. This is what I need to do with it." Guys, that's where discipleship happens.

And roughly half of our church at best isn't in one. I just want to encourage you, if you just settle for coming to the crowd once a month, which is statistically what that is, you won't grow and eventually you'll lose interest and eventually you will leave.

But when you get involved in a relationship through serving or through group that's where growth begins. You just can't do it alone. You cannot do it alone. Your relationship with God is personal, but it's never meant to be private. It's got to be relational and you've got to invite some other people in.

So, this is what God intended and we see that Adam is alone. So, God said, "This isn't good for him to be alone." So, He sends a solution. Look at the end of verse 18:

"I will make a helper who is just right for him." (NLT)

I don't know how that hits you, but the word helper is not meant to be derogatory. It's not like she's an assistant or second chair or anything like that. The word helper means this idea, it is referred to as somebody who is suitable for the task of absolving the void. That's what it means. That's a mouthful. There was a void in Adam's life. He was alone. And God said, "I'm going to make somebody who is suitable to complete what is left empty."

That word for helper there, the original word is ezer, ēzer or ězer however you want to pronounce that. It's a powerful little word. Scholar R. David Freeman points out that it is the combination of two words: to rescue, to save, to be strong. So it always denotes strength and power.

By the way, it's the same word that is used for the Holy Spirit. So, it's not meant to be derogatory at all. The Holy Spirit is our strength. The Holy Spirit is our sustainer, our intercessor. That was what God had in mind when He brought Eve to Adam.

It says in verse 19"

“So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one.”

That’s amazing! Here’s a job that God gave Adam, “I want you to spend some time naming all of the animals.” I bet you that took a minute. That was a long shift. That was a long day. All of these animals you know, stacked up, coming through, Adam is naming them.

I’m sure that he was super creative at the beginning: hippopotamus, giraffe, cheetah. But by the end of the day a little bug was flying around: “Fly. I’ve got nothing.” I’m glad you laughed at that. That is not original with me. That is a joke as old as dirt. But it’s still good. It’s still good.

Here’s the thing, though. As Adam is naming all of these animals, you get the idea that it is starting to dawn on him how alone he really is. He’s surrounded by all of these living things, but he is like, “Man, there are none of them that I can have a meaningful conversation with. There are none of them that are like me. There are none of them that I can relate to.” And he’s feeling more and more and more alone.

In verse 21 it says:

“So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.” (NLT)

I love this imagery. Of all of the ways that God could have presented Eve to Adam—He could have made her from the dust of the ground just like He did Adam, but He didn’t. He could have made her from part of Adam’s body in the front suggesting her superiority over him, but He didn’t do that. He could have brought her from a bone behind Adam, maybe implying her inferiority to him, but He didn’t do that either.

It was a rib on the side. Ribs support the body, close to the heart, next to Adam. And it shows here, it’s pointing to Eve’s equality and the intended unity that they were supposed to have together. And I love Adam’s response in verse 23. These two little words, At last, exclamation point:

“At last!” (NLT)

And likely those two little words have left out of your heart multiple times throughout your life whenever you made a connection with someone. You meet somebody for the first time and all of a sudden you’re like, “Oh, man. We’ve got things in common and it’s easy to talk to this person,” and you make a friend and you’re like, “At last.”

I’ll never forget, I was in the sixth grade, I was so insecure. I was at my friend’s house. We were in the driveway shooting baskets. He was a really good athlete. And I said to

him, "Man, you are the best basketball player that I know." And my friend looked at me and he goes, "Man, thank you. You're my best friend for this year." And I was like, "At last! I've got a friend."

You likely felt this, fellas, when you got her number, when you went out on a first date, when there was a love interest. You were like, "At last!"

This sprung out of Adam when he saw Eve. And he goes on and he says:

"This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman', because she was taken from man.' This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one."

Quick little commercial, two weeks from today... Next week we will finish this series. Two weeks from today we start a new series called Adventures in Dating and Marriage. It is not just a series for married couples. It's a series for everyone, single people. We're going to talk about relationships, specifically this right here. I've already outlined the messages and I've been praying through them. And you don't want to miss them. I think it's going to be really, really important for us to walk through that teaching together. But this is kind of the emphasis of this.

In verse 25 it says:

"Now the man and his wife were both naked," and get this, he says, "but they felt no shame." (NLT)

I want you to just look at those verses and realize that this was the only moment in human history when relationships were perfect. No disagreements. No hurt feelings. No abuse. No arguments. Man, it was perfect. And this is what God intended. They were united and they had no shame. So, what happened? Well, just like our identity, just like work, relationships were impacted by the fall. Perhaps more so.

In Genesis, chapter 3, you can read that passage on your own, that's when sin entered into the world. And the very first thing that sin ruptured and affected was our relationship with God vertically. What was the very first question that God asked Adam after the fall? "Where are you?" He's been asking it ever since. It's not that God didn't know where he was physically, it was God saying, "Okay, there is a separation in our connection now."

And the second relationship, horizontally, is with others. Adam and Eve immediately threw each other under the bus. They weren't unified any longer. And they were sort of at each other ever since then.

So, what we are seeing here is that this has always been Satan's goal, to cut off relationship with God and cut off relationships with one another. That's his bullseye. He wants to separate us. He wants your relationships to be diseased. He wants your

relationships to be divided. He wants you to be stressed over that. He wants you to be angry over that. He wants you to be bitter over that. He wants you to be offended over things. He's trying to divide. And we just see that in the world all around us. We've become separated.

I'm just kind of curious right now. If you've got an interpersonal conflict going on in your life right now, whether it's major or minor, just slip up your hand. Just an interpersonal conflict. Don't be afraid to raise your hand. There are going to be a lot of them around the room. I've got my hand raised.

There is interpersonal conflict. There are issues right now in each of those concentric circles. Maybe it's your marriage. Maybe it's a friendship. Maybe it's a work related thing. All of us have interpersonal conflicts. And if you don't have it, it's likely coming.

Relationships are hard and crazy complicated. Even the best relationships can get pulled out of balance by the pressures and the demands of life. Marriages get tested with little kids at home. Maybe your work is requiring you to travel a lot more. Maybe you and your spouse have grown apart. Maybe friendships get tested because you just don't have the time to invest in them or maintain them anymore.

Relationships with your teenagers or your young adult children can certainly get tested. Maybe you've got opinions about how they are living their lives and they don't want to hear them.

And on top of all of this, no relationship is easy, no relationship is easy. Maybe the only time that it is easy is in the infancy of a relationship. Like those first few weeks of a brand-new friendship. Or maybe the first couple of dates that you have with somebody while you're still pretending to be somebody you're not. Or maybe like when your kids are between that golden age of four and six. Oh the golden age, because they still think you hung the moon, but not for long.

Relationships are not easy. Eventually every single relationship will get tested. Every relationship will struggle. Every relationship will develop hairline fractures that can threaten your connection.

Here's how Satan wants to get at us. He wants to separate you from God, he will separate you from others first. And this is why I think that church hurt is a real thing. I think part of the reason that it is a real thing is because he knows that if he can't get you to question your faith, he'll go after your relationships.

He'll make you weak, and he'll tear you down, and he'll frustrate you and discourage you. And what you end up doing is you end up sort of isolating yourself from community. And if you get isolated from community, he can pick you off. It's like a herd of sheep. If one wanders off from the rest of the pack, the wolves can take them out so easily.



I think it is important for us to understand this playbook right here. You might take a picture of it with your phone.

Satan's goal is destruction

The Bible says that he has come to kill, steal, and destroy. That is what his intent is. I don't want to over spiritualize things. I certainly don't want to blame Satan for everything. But, we do need to know that he's an enemy behind the scenes and he is trying to destroy. He wants to destroy you. He wants to destroy your kids, your family, your friends.

Certainly, if you are married, he wants to destroy your marriage. Why? Because marriage is a covenant that reflects our covenant relationship with God. He hates that. So he wants to totally destroy that.

Satan's strategy is division

Here's his strategy. It is division. That simple. It's kind of like if you can divide a country, that country will get weak. If you can divide a husband and wife, then the marriage gets weak. If you can divide friendships, that community grows weak. If you can divide people within a church, then the church grows weak, it gets off mission. People start making it about other things. He is the master of division and he's all about it.

Satan's tactic is offense

Here's his tactic though. This is a tool in his toolbox. It's offense. Here's what I mean. If he can get you offended, and then keep you offended, then he's won. Because when you stay offended, then inevitably what happens is—it's a process—where your heart eventually gets harder and harder and more bitter and bitter and bitter.

Can I say it this way? If you can develop thick skin then you can keep a soft heart. If you have thin skin, then you're going to have a hard heart. Don't misunderstand me. It's not like I'm saying you'll never be offended. Part of being a human being is being offended.

Getting offended is inevitable

Several months ago I was out in the lobby and walking by was this group of teenaged girls, which automatically makes me nervous anyway. I kind of broke out in a cold sweat. They were looking at me like, "Are you the guy? Are you the pastor?" You know, "Thanks for knowing." So I'm like, "Yeah, yeah." And they go, "You look so different in person." "I'm going to leave now."

I don't know, have you ever had somebody make a sideways comment about your clothes or your ears or whatever it is. Some people just have abrasive personalities. We're all sinners. We're all messed up. I mean, good luck getting through the day without being offended at least once. I probably offended you multiple times in the last 35 minutes. I don't know. We can all be offended. That's just human.

Staying offended is optional

What I want to challenge some of you with is that some of you got offended, some of you got offended by something somebody said, or maybe something didn't say. Maybe you got offended by somebody's decision. Maybe that person never even knew. You never gave him an opportunity to make amends or to talk about how you were feeling. You just kind of kept it to yourself, "I don't want to bother him. It's not that big of a deal." But you stayed offended.

And those offenses are kind of like a fence post in a fence. You just stuck one in the ground one after the, the other, the other and all of a sudden there is this dividing wall of hostility between you and the other person.

Can I just challenge you with this today? Do not stay offended. Now that doesn't mean that you're going to necessarily be reconciled to the person who has offended you. That doesn't necessarily be best friends again. It doesn't necessarily mean he'll be in your life.

It actually has nothing to do with the other person or his response to you. It has everything to do with your heart, "I refuse to have a hardened, bitter heart." And the only way that you can keep it soft and pliable is by letting go of the offense. Because when you hold on to an offense, you are knowingly giving Satan a foothold. When you let go of an offense, you send him running.

The only way... Some of you will be like, "Well, Aaron. That sounds amazing. Where do I find motivation to do that?" Well, I would just simply say this. It's supernatural. Jesus, Himself... I don't think there is anybody who has walked the face of this earth who has more to be offended by than Jesus because we killed Him.

The story that always comes to my mind is Peter. The night before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion Peter, who was one of His inner three by the way, one of His best friends for that year (Ha!), they're in the Upper Room and Peter is like, "Lord, I will never deny you." And Jesus was like, "Uh huh." And then it says later that night before the rooster crowed he denied Him three times. Can you imagine how painful that would have been for Jesus to hear that?

And after Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to hundreds and hundreds of people. Can you imagine being in Peter's sandals for a minute? He hears that Jesus has been resurrected, he's like, "Oh, man. This relationship is beyond repair."

It's always fascinating to me that it doesn't really seem that Peter went running to Jesus. Jesus had to go find Peter. And their first interaction post resurrection was at a beach. I don't know if any of you remember the passage or not, but Peter is fishing, he was a fisherman, it's early in the morning. He's gone back to fishing, by the way.

And Jesus is on the beach making breakfast. And He invites him to come and have breakfast. I don't know. It kind seems like a little bit of an unusual thing to do with somebody who has offended you, hurt you, betrayed you.

So, Peter comes and he has breakfast and they are walking along the beach and Jesus has this conversation where He restores Peter. He asked him three questions: Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me? What Jesus is doing is He is cancelling out the denials. He's restoring him, "It's going to be okay. I've forgiven you." He's not staying offended. He keeps the relationship alive. I kind of love that. That is maybe one of my favorite passages.

I always thought that the beach where Jesus restored Peter, I don't know, I just always thought it was maybe a few blocks away from where Jesus' Airbnb was. I don't know. I don't know why I thought that.

But then I went to Israel last year and we actually went to the beach and I realized that Jesus was in Jerusalem and the beach where Peter was was hundreds of miles away. Jesus had to actually go out of His way to make His way up to Peter. He went first to reconcile Peter, let go of the offense, in order to keep the relationship alive. That's the only way. That's the only way.

Now, I know some of you may be like, "Well, this other person doesn't want to be reconciled to me." Or, "He doesn't deserve to be reconciled." Or, maybe he is not even around anymore.

And it really has nothing to do with him. Are you still holding onto the offense? I want to just beckon you and encourage you by the power of the Holy Spirit to let go of that offense so you don't stay offended and imprisoned by your bitterness and give Satan a foothold.

For some of you, maybe the reason why God's purpose for your life, you don't know what it is, it's that. Some of you may feel stuck spiritually. You bounce from church to church to church thinking that a new church will somehow sort of revive your spiritual life. And none of it is working. Is it because you're offended?

God cannot move a hardened heart. And the first step to letting go of that offense, the only way to do that, is to ask the Spirit of God to soften it and do a miracle in your life. So realize that you're the one who needs to be set free.

We want to give you that opportunity today. We want to develop a prayer culture around here so that every week you just know that there are going to be people with lanyards on in the middle of the room and down in front who are just willing to pray with you every week.

The interaction can be very, very brief. Maybe here's how the conversation goes. You go up to somebody and you just say, "Man, I am holding on to an offense and I need to let it



go. Would you please pray that I can?" And he or she will be happy to pray with you. It requires a miracle. A miracle is what we need. So, let's ask for that right now.

Father, we come to You today and we're so grateful for the relationships that You've given us. We know that we were made for them. We know that we find fulfillment in them. And, yet, at the same time these relationships can be so painful when they go bad, when a marriage falls apart, when a friend leaves our lives, when a child doesn't want to talk to us anymore, when somebody we thought we could trust breaks that trust.

God, right now I just trust that I'm speaking to a lot of hurting hearts. I pray that Your Spirit would work a miracle in our lives, that even though we might be offended, we would not stay offended, that we would lean into the miracle of redemption and forgiveness that can only come through You.

We follow the example of Jesus who had every reason to hold a grudge, had every reason to be angry and offended. And yet, He chose to forgive. He chose to keep new life in His relationship.

So, God, would You please do the same for us today? Would You please meet us right where we are? Would You please...? I pray that literally there would be hardened hearts that would become hearts of flesh today. We ask this in Jesus' name.