

## Introduction

Good Morning. We are continuing today our series called "Freedom Story." Over the last several weeks we've been hearing stories of people in our congregation, how God has brought them freedom. So today I'm excited to introduce you to Amy Delaney. Amy has been part of our church for some time. She and her husband Taylor and their children have a great story. I'm really excited to let Amy share that with us today, so we can hear how God's grace is powerful and delivering in all circumstances.

Pastor Steve: So, Amy, we'll just jump right into it. As we have been talking this last week, you've been sharing just some different circumstances that you guys walked through; some of them prior to you and Taylor being married, and others of those happened after you guys were married. Could you just share some of those with us and kind of tell us how that affected you spiritually.

Amy: Sure. Probably the first one was whenever I was in high school and I was a senior. I was 17 and I was in a head-on collision that left me in a coma for eight days. When I came out of that, I was completely bald, and the right half of my forehead was gone. They had taken it out because it was crushed and glass was there. I couldn't walk; my leg had been broken and had exited my body and severed my muscles, and so I had to relearn to do all of that again. It was devastating because, of course, it wasn't my plan. I didn't return to school after that. I did graduate; I finished school at home, but college and what I wanted to do was far out of my realm of what I was focusing on at the time. For about two years I had several other surgeries and along with that were psychological and social and emotional difficulties. God did bring me through that. I clung to Him. I was a Christian; I had become a Christian when I was 13, and so I knew what a miracle it was that I was alive and that I was well and healthy. I clung to Him and His power is what brought me out of that. Then I went on to go to college and stayed and got a Masters. That's where I met my husband and we got married. We had our first daughter, and when she was three months old my older sister who was 35, she passed away. She had a heart and lung transplant surgery and as complicated and risky as that sounds, for her it was a pretty straight-forward surgery. It was the way that she would prolong her life. She felt really led by God that this was how He was going to heal her. There were complications during the surgery, and so she didn't survive the surgery. I think the difficult part was that she was in California to have this done. I had been out there in August, and the surgery was in September. The organs came when no one was out there. She went into surgery with none of us there, and we couldn't get a flight out there to get there until that morning, after she had already gone in. It was really devastating. I share that part of my life because that was the first time that I really questioned God and His Word. I questioned, "But Your Word says this... such as in the Parable of the fig tree, or where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead..." and several other places where Jesus says, "If you believe, whatever you ask in My name you shall receive." We have lived on prayer. We've lived on that hope and faith. When she didn't survive the surgery, it was kind of like, "What happened God? What's the deal?" I wasn't mad at God, but I did search. It just raised doubts. Someone in the church had counseled me and told me about how sometimes when we get something that is not what we wanted but it's God's will, that ultimately we pray for His will, and that's better than anything, that He will transform our wants to be His desires and not our desires. That was very good for me to learn because in the following years when I was pregnant with my fourth child, we lost him at 30 weeks. He was stillborn and it was very sudden. I was at home after having been at the hospital just to stop contractions, but the baby and his viability never was a concern. It was more, "Let's stop those contractions." So, they stopped them and I was sent home. It was the second day that I was home and I didn't feel him move. I went to the hospital and sure enough there was not a heartbeat. I can remember just crying out, begging God to bring him back and believing "You raised Lazarus; bring my son back!" That was not God's plan, and that was a very difficult time. Obviously, having three children, it

was difficult to grieve properly for myself or my husband. Through each of those, as strong as I clung to God and relied on Him, my identity was lost; my identity became, "The girl who was in the car accident and is messed up and is ugly and is not worthy or is stupid and dumb. She didn't go to college." You know, that became my identity, and all the lies that Satan tells that go along with that crept in, and I unknowingly believed those and they grew and they grew. The Bible verses that I would memorize, that I would claim and I would stand on... those voices that Satan had lied and put in my head that I was giving power to, they were louder and I believed them over God's Word.

Pastor Steve: So, if you're in this place where... Wow, you've walked through all this... I mean, lost a child, lost your sister, you had a pretty devastating accident... all those things, even though you were a believer, you start to say, "God, why am I going to walk through these things?" It starts to affect the way that you view yourself. So, what did God do to change that? If you started to think that you weren't worthy, that He was maybe even out to get you or punish you, how does that change?

Amy: Well, life keeps on going, so you pick up and you gather up and you move on down the road. You try to push those things aside and keep going and focusing on God. Your series that you are teaching right now actually is what changed it all for me. God taught me about the idols that all of the wrong thinking that was going through my head, "I'm not worthy" or "I don't measure up" or "I'm not good enough" or "I can't do this well enough..." All of those things were idols, and I had never thought of them as idols. Idols, as you said, are meaningless and worthless until we give them power, and I was worshipping them above God. In doing that, it was putting me in prisons of shame and blame, and I was kept from bringing glory to God because I was in those prisons and I was carrying all that junk around with me and shame. Even though I was saved, I was not walking in His grace.

Pastor Steve: How did that change for you then? If you say you understood that, what began to change in your heart?

Amy: I mean, everything. The Bible stories and the Bible verses that I had memorized and read, those had all new meaning to me. The freedom and breaking the chains, that was real. God had done that. I knew that when He looked at me, He saw me blameless and pure, but it didn't connect for some reason to life here. I thought...

Pastor Steve: You were thinking like in heaven one day.

Amy: In heaven, when I get there, I can go to heaven. He is going to see me blameless and pure, but while I'm here, I've got all these dings and dents and pieces of me that have been stripped away, and I didn't feel worthy of anything, of anyone. Ultimately it was leading to social anxiety, to where I didn't want to go anywhere. I didn't want to go to the grocery store. I didn't go have lunch with my kids. I was in a prison until I realized that I wasn't accepting His grace and walking in it. I wasn't free, and now I'm free. Now to say that God's grace is sufficient for me has completely new meaning... completely new meaning.

Pastor Steve: Amen. (Clapping) That's awesome.

Pastor Steve: So Amy, if there's somebody here right now who is struggling with that same thing, what advice would you give to them? What word would you say to them today?

Amy: The first thing, before you can start turning off those wrong voices in your head or wrong lies from Satan, is to be aware of them, to realize that you are thinking those or that you are hearing things through

that wrong filter that Satan has planted. It's a battle every day. This is new to me and some days I'm on a mountain and some days I feel like the old self, so I have to choose... what lie am I believing? Right now I'm still learning to recognize when Satan is lying to me and whenever I'm giving him power over my life and to stop that power.

Pastor Steve: That's pretty awesome. So walking in freedom seems pretty great then.

Amy: It's changed my life; it's changed my marriage and everything.

Pastor Steve: So, at the end of this what we've been doing is people have been saying, "Hey, this is my name... and this is my Freedom Story." We just want to give glory to God for that. Would you do that for us?

Amy: Of course. My name is Amy Delaney and this is my Freedom Story. (Clapping)

Pastor Steve: Thank you, Amy.

So how do we walk in this freedom? I mean, this is really kind of the crux, right? We spent weeks looking at the first four chapters of Galatians. When really Paul says, "Look; there's grace and there's religion, there's freedom, there's law." Then we reach this moment over the last two weeks we've said, "Well, this is what freedom is," and we looked at chapter 5 and there's really this description of what freedom in Christ is. Now we come to chapter 6. Chapter 6 is now where Paul says, "But this is the nitty-gritty. This is how you do it." He's going to give us some examples of ways that we can walk in freedom, and I want us to really focus on these today and understand them. If you have your Bible, I want to invite you to open with me to Galatians chapter 6, and we're going to examine and see how it is that we can walk in this freedom. What does that look like? What is it practically, if we are walking in the freedom of Christ?

### 1. Freedom To Restore. (v. 1)

Galatians chapter 6, starting in verse 1: *"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load.*

*One who is taught the Word must share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, especially to those who are of the household of faith."*

Doing good. Being free. What does that look like? How do we do it? Verse 1: *"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual..."* so those of you walking in the Spirit, the spiritual ones, *"...should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."* Restoration. If you are free, the first thing that you will seek to do is you will seek to restore people in sin. Now look, we all know people in sin. I mean, right now you know someone that is in rebellion. Maybe it's yourself. Maybe it's someone that is in your family or friends, someone in your Life Group, maybe someone that you know personally at work... they are in

rebellion. What the Bible says here, what Paul is getting at, is that when you are free, you now have a new responsibility, and it seems weird because it seems like it's judgemental. Right? Judgemental people go around and they tell people, "Hey, you're in sin." But actually what Paul says is, "Once you're free, you don't go around condemning people but you restore them."

Restoration. The Greek work there is "katartizo." What does that mean? It's the same word that's used in the Gospels when the disciples are mending their nets... okay, it's fixing nets. It's also a medical term. It's the word used for setting a broken bone. Have you ever broken a bone or seen someone have a broken bone be set? A physician puts their hands on that person, and then they have to move it. Now, to get the bone set back, it hurts. It is temporary pain but if you don't set it right, what happens? Then the bones grow past one another, and then there's deformity that sets in. What Paul says is this: "There needs to be a moment spiritually where someone resets the bone because in that sin things are broken, and a deformed spiritual nature will begin to take root unless the spiritual bone is reset. It has to be reset. Most of us, when we see people that are in rebellion... most of us choose, rather than going through the time and the trouble of resetting the spiritual bone, do you know what we do? We discard it. "I don't have time for that. That's too much trouble."

A couple of weeks ago, I got really angry. I don't know if you guys ever get angry. (Laughter) Okay, good; some of you do, that makes me feel better. I got angry. It was a special kind of anger. I felt that these people were questioning my intelligence and my ability. I kind of took it personally. If you ever get angry at someone you kind of internalize it. You take it personal. I found myself, in my mind, making plans on how I could be vindictive toward them... like take revenge on them. No; no one here does that? (Laughter) Alright. So I was getting angry and I was thinking, "How could I get back at this person, basically. How can I just eliminate their issues from my life." Right? I mean... I was just angry. God just convicted me. "Look at what you're doing! You're so angry right now that you're just trying to hurt people, push them out." On Tuesday mornings, every Tuesday morning at 6:30, I pray with the elders. We were praying for one another. One of them said, "How are you doing?" and that sort of thing. At first, I kind of lied; I said, "I'm great." Then I was like, "You know what? I'm not great. You know what's wrong? I got mad at some people, and I tried basically to think of ways that I could get back at them." I just confessed that. Do you know what those men did? They reset the bone. They put their hands on me and they prayed over me. They said, "This man is broken but Lord we want to see him restored spiritually. We want to see him fixed." You see, here's the thing. It's that from a spiritual perspective, the church is supposed to be a hospital. Right? Not a graveyard. You see, a graveyard is where you just go and bury the dead, but a hospital is the place where you go to get fixed. The Church is supposed to be a spiritual hospital where you say, "This is my brokenness... may I do this?" If you are a brother or a sister in Christ to someone walking in rebellion, there may be an uncomfortable moment where you have to go to them and you have to say, "You have a broken bone. Let me help you identify it and pray over you to reset it." The goal of the spiritual one, Paul says, "...is not to discard them, but it is to restore with a spirit of gentleness." You see, some of us are really good at pointing out the flaws, but the "spirit of gentleness" part, we're kind of out on... Right? Like... "You stink," and lay it out right there. We'll just be really open in it. This is what Paul says: "Restore that with gentleness." Why? Why would that matter? Because... listen to me... when we restore and we confess and we put our brokenness out there, when that happens, do you know what happens? We portray the Gospel of grace. Every time that happens, we show who Jesus Christ is. If we are a church that gets rid of those who are sinners rather than restoring those who are caught in transgression, guess what? Then we are unfaithful to the very grace that has been extended to us in Jesus Christ. So, in verse 2, "*Bear one another's burdens.*" Romans 15:1... "He who is strong should bear with the one who is weak." There are people

around you who cannot carry the sin load that is in their life. C.S. Lewis said it best; he said, "Be mindful of every person whom you encounter and speak to them with gentleness, for every person you talk to is going through some type of battle." Every person here is walking through trouble. You think you are the only one. No. We're all going through it right now but here's the thing. You can't carry it by yourself. This is the weird, crazy thing that I can't understand about the Church, but when I tell you my burden and I put it out there and other people help carry it, it makes it lighter. Now it doesn't make sense, right, because what you're thinking is, "I can't carry your burden and my burden too." The weird thing is that when we carry one another's burdens at the same time, that's when the Holy Spirit reaches down and He picks it all up and He makes it light. *"Bear one another's burdens,"* and in doing so you *"...fulfill the law of Christ."* Just as Jesus carried the cross, whenever you reach down and you pick up the burdens and the Holy Spirit carries it, it makes it lighter. Somehow all of this weakness and all of this sin that's exposed, you'd think, would drag it down. Instead, in that confession moment, in that place where we carry it with one another, the Spirit picks it up and it makes it light. It lets the church float and say, "Look at all this brokenness but still we can move in the midst of it."

## 2. Freedom to Be Humble. (v. 3)

Now this is the crazy part about this. In that moment we think, "I would love to do that, but how in the world am I ever going to be able to do so?" Verse 3: *"For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."* How can you help someone who is broken? You know how you go in a spirit of gentleness? This is how: Because you tell them, "I'm messed up too." You see, if you show up saying, "I've got it all figured out," nobody wants to be helped by a know-it-all. But if you say, "Look, I've been messed up. I've been broken, these are my broken places. These are my bruises; these are the places where my bones had to be reset. Let me come alongside you and help you carry your burden." I am no longer something, I am nothing." By the way, Paul does not say, "You're not as important as you think you are." Right? He says, "You're nothing." I know... that hurts your feelings; I can feel it. I didn't say it; Paul said it. "You're nothing." I am nothing. We are nothing. Right? This is the thing that is hard for us to understand. We got a Participation Ribbon at field day, and so we think that we are special, but instead God says through His Word, "Actually you are nothing." In fact, listen to this. Psalm 22:6: *"I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by people."* You're a worm. (Laughter) Why are you laughing? That's what the Bible says. Right? Job 25:6: *"How much less man, who is a maggot."* Okay, worm or maggot... you pick. And the son of man who is a worm. Psalm 8:4: *"What is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?"* Job 34:15: *"All flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust."* You're dust, you're a maggot, you're a worm, you're a vapor, you're a breath; you're a moment. You are inconsequential. The most influential human that has ever lived outside of Jesus Christ is just a blip. Nothing. Right?

Now, I can understand that you don't get it. I'm going to show you. I've got a picture that we're going to put up here. We've got some slides. I want us to understand how small we are. Let's start with a picture of the earth. We're going to put a picture of the earth up here. This is the earth. You are one of eight billion specks on this planet. I mean you feel pretty small, right? Let's zoom out just a little bit. The solar system... You can kind of see, there in the middle... there's a little bit of red ink. That's where earth is in the solar system. You are one of eight billion specks on the speck in the middle of that bunch of specks. Let's zoom out a little more. The red ink there in the middle is your solar system. This is your solar interstellar neighborhood. This is like Mr. Roger's Neighborhood with fewer puppets. This is your solar system in the middle of a cluster of solar systems. So you are a speck, one of eight billion specks on a speck, on a speck, in the group of those specks. But let's zoom out some more. This is the Milky Way. You can't even find your

speck now. That's how tiny you are. Let's zoom out some more. This now is your local galactic group. The red ink in the middle is the Milky Way. Those are other galaxies out there around your galaxy. Let's zoom out some more. This is your Virgo Supercluster. Okay. So your galactic group is in the middle of the Virgo Supercluster. Let's zoom out some more. This is the local supercluster. So in all the superclusters that we can see, your supercluster is kind of there, just to the left of the center. Inside of that is your galaxy, inside of that is your interstellar neighborhood, inside of that is your solar system, and inside of that is your planet. Let's zoom out again. This is how much of the universe we can see right now with telescopes. And you... can you see it... there's a little tiny bit of red; that is your Virgo supercluster. I hate to break this to you... I mean, you're nothing. (Laughter) Right? You're nothing!

Now that you know that you are nothing, Count Zinzendorf... You may have never heard of Count Zinzendorf. He led the Moravian church in Germany. This was the way that he put it: "Preach the Gospel, die, and be forgotten." You say, "Wow! That sounds really hopeful." (Laughter) Look; this is the truth. We are absolutely nothing. But the day that you come to grips with that, that you're dust, you're a worm, you're a maggot, you will be forgotten the second that you that you are gone... guess what? The world will keep spinning; people will keep moving; life will keep going on. So why do we care? That, my friends, is the beauty of the Gospel because you are a speck, a worm, a maggot, dust... nevertheless, God chose you anyway. Wow! Right? So you are a speck on a speck in a group of specks that is nothing, and God, out of all of the observable universe said, "I'm going to choose one race of specks to give my image to. I'm going to choose one race of inconsequential worms to take on their form so that I might proclaim My glory through the Gospel and He picked humanity. Why He did it, I don't know, but He loves worms, He loves nothings, and so He chose people. Guess what? The way that you can be humble is the day that you wake up and realize, "I am nothing yet God picked me anyway." Now, when that happens and you get that through your thick skull, you will stop strutting around like you are God's gift to humanity. Instead, you will understand that God is the gift to you. Right? (Clapping) So now, on that day and in that moment, you realize, "This is a miracle and so therefore I no longer need to puff myself up." When you meet people that have a self-inflated view of themselves, you can detect it immediately, can't you? Do you know why? Because you do the same thing, right? So you say, "Well, I've done that before." Typically we tend to deny it, "Now, I've gotten over that, but these poor people...they're really struggling with it." But what Paul is saying is, "Look, you think you're something but you're nothing. And when you understand that you are nothing, guess what happens? Then you can come alongside the broken and say, "Look, I don't have to pretend. Do you know why people act to be prideful? Because they hope that people will agree with them and say, "You're right; you are important. You're right; you are valuable." Do you want to be free from that? Understand that I don't need you to tell me that I'm valuable because Jesus Christ has declared that this maggot is worth His blood on a cross. You see, I don't need other people to make me feel good because Jesus has already declared it. (Clapping) So, in that moment, guess what? I can now be completely free to say, "I don't have to make myself feel important; I don't need you to tell me that I'm important." I can come along beside you and say, "I am broken, I am needful, I am a shameful human being, a piece of dust, a worm, a vapor, a breath... and let me tell you, my friend, that God loves you as well." You can come alongside them. You cannot do that apart from the grace of God because you will always be trying to make yourself feel bigger and more important than you truly are.

### 3. Freedom To Share. (v. 6)

So Paul then says, "Look, do you want to walk in freedom? You restore with gentleness. Do you want to walk in freedom? You understand that you are nothing. You are free now to be humble." Then in verse 6 he says, "You're free to share." *"One who is taught the Word must share all good things with the one who*

*teaches.* "Now, this is kind of an uncomfortable verse for the preacher because it says, *"One who is taught the Word should share all things with the one who teaches."* Basically, Paul is saying, "If you are being taught the Word of God, you should give, and you should take care of the person who is teaching you." Now, I'm very blessed to be at a church that takes care of me and my family; so, thank you church for doing that. The reason that Paul is getting at that is this. He says, "Look, sometimes we struggle with walking in freedom because we have convinced ourselves we cannot be generous... because if we are generous, we will run out of things for ourselves." Have you ever thought that? If I give you too much, then there won't be enough left for me. Have you ever thought that? Yeah.

My mom, whenever she remarried... the man that she married, my dad, he had two children from a previous marriage, so our house went from being two kids to four kids, and then we had mom and dad there at night, so we had six people around the dinner table. Four kids... we never wanted for anything but we weren't a wealthy family by any stretch of the imagination. I remember that the great gift in life, in my mind, was an invention that came along called the "Grands Biscuit." I don't know if you guys remember this, but they came five to a can. I think they still do come five to a can... butter flavored. Thank you, Jesus, for that. My mom, when she would make them, would make two cans... ten biscuits, six people. You see, you're already thinking the same thing that I'm thinking. Right? (Laughter) So six people, ten biscuits; we already know what's going to happen. Some people are going to get two biscuits... (Laughter) and some people, slow people, are going to get one. So you had a very specific strategy because, you see, we held hands when we prayed. So you were not allowed to touch the food until my dad said, "Amen." So what happened is that I would kind of move my hands onto the table, and the second that my dad said "Amen," I just threw my brother's and sister's hands back (Laughter) ...and then I kind of did the Michael Phelps butterfly over and I grabbed two biscuits. (Laughter) So, it was like "boom, boom, Boom." Why would I do that? ...Because in that moment of grabbing the biscuits, I know there is a limited number of biscuits to go around. "I've got to get what I can get while the getting is good." That's the way that I would think. This is the thing about this. Many of us have transferred that sort of principle and that way of living to the spiritual realm as well. We have convinced ourselves there is only so much of God's goodness and grace to go around. We have convinced ourselves, "There's only so much goodness inside of me. I can't give it away to other people because if I do there won't be enough left for me to give to other people." But Paul actually says the opposite. Paul says, "The more that you sow, the more you will reap." It's kind of crazy. Look at this. Verse 7: *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."* If you sow a hundred seeds, when it's time to reap, you've got a hundred plants. If you sow a thousand seeds, when it's time to reap, you've got a thousand plants. The more you sow, the more you reap. Paul says, "I know that you think, naturally... your natural inclination is that you've got to keep it all to yourself." Paul would say, "You guys think that this is an episode of 'Spiritual Hoarders.'" But that's not what it is. Instead, it's "Sow as much as you can and reap as much as you can." So he starts with money and he says, "Look, if you'll be generous, it's kind of crazy but the more generous that you are, then guess what? The more generosity comes back to you. So he says, "You give but God will provide for you in ways that you can't understand." But then he changes it and he said, "You know what? It's not just about money. It's about life. The more than you sow in the Spirit, the more that you will reap in the Spirit." He says, "The more that you sow in the Spirit, you will reap eternal life and the more that you sow to the flesh you will reap corruption." In other words, whenever I try to feed my own desires that are selfish, that are just for me... guess what? I get exactly what I plant. I get selfishness. Whenever I feed the Holy Spirit's desires and sow in that, in due time, guess what happens? I reap in the Holy Spirit. Now this is the crazy thing. Some of us have convinced ourselves, "I don't have time to do that." In fact, we're sort of the reflection of... I

believe it's verse 9: "...let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap..." Why do some of us not want to do good? ...Because we don't want to have to wait for the benefits that come.

Have you ever had a garden? Do you plant and then the next day you come out and everything is grown and you bring it in. Right? Oh no... that's not the way it works! You plant and then you wait, and then you water and then you maybe worry a little bit, and you wait some more and you water and you wait... and then there's some tiny little sprigs. One day you go out and there's two leaves, and then you water some more and you wait some more. It takes weeks... months for that to grow before you're ever able to receive a harvest at all. Do you know why some of us don't enjoy sowing in the Spirit? ...Because the flesh has quicker returns. Right? But when you sow in the Spirit, you get a bumper crop. It just takes a long time for it to show up. "Don't grow weary of doing good." I know... some of you are tired of being nice to people. "Don't grow weary in doing good." I know, some of you are thinking, "I don't have any more money to give." "Don't grow weary in doing good." I know, some of you are thinking, "If I have to show grace one more time, I'm going to claw out my eyeballs." No. Guess what? Don't feel that way, "...for in due season we will reap." He doesn't say, "It might happen." He says, "*Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season, we will reap.*" It will happen. Sowing in the Spirit eventually allows a bumper crop of reaping in the Spirit. If you plant tomatoes, you grow tomatoes. You don't plant tomatoes and grow corn. Right? You see, a lot of us too are like, "Well, I'm going to sow in the flesh but then hopefully reap in the Spirit because God will love me." No, look. He gives you His grace, sure... but if you want to walk in freedom, you get to choose where you are going to sow. That's the crazy thing about freedom. You are now free to pick. I can either be free to sow in the flesh, or I can be free to sow in the Spirit, even if it takes a while.

#### 4. Freedom To Sow. (v. 7)

When I was 23 years old, a church in West Texas called me to be their pastor. It was pretty dumb of them... (Laughter) I was in seminary. They were all retirees. I would go every week to visit every church member in their home. So, it was a small church. Right? You kind of gather that. Mostly all retirees, and there was this one man. His wife was a member of our church, but he was not a believer. His name was Durwood. Durwood was in his eighties. His wife was convinced that I was going to lead him to faith in Christ. So she had this very subtle plan: I would show up to visit her. We would sit down. She would bring me a glass of ice tea, and then she would say, "I'll be right back; I've got to check on something," and she would never come back. (Laughter) You know, the first time you think, "Well maybe, that will... it's kind of weird." But on time twelve you're like, "Okay, I'm starting to pick up on what's happening here." So every time, she would leave the room, and I would talk to Durwood. You know, Durwood was a very, very kind man, but he thought that basically I was an idiot because I believed not only that God was real but that Jesus Christ was His Son. He would ask me questions about it. We would talk kindly about it, but he would always try and steer the conversation other places. One day Durwood said to me, "Do you think I'm going to hell?" I said, "Well Durwood, I think that if you reject Jesus Christ, yes, you are going to hell." He started cussing me up one side and down the other. He said, "You get out of my house right now," and he threw me out of his house. I always went to Durwood's house on Tuesdays. So the next Tuesday rolls around. You know, I've never been really accused of being intelligent, so I just went back to his house... (Laughter) ...so I just showed up, and I even think he was surprised at how dumb I was. Right? (Laughter) He was so flabbergasted that he let me in, so I sat down; I went back every week after that. I just kept telling him about Jesus and kept loving him and kept talking to him. Several months later I got a phone call that Durwood was dying. He was at the hospital, and he asked to see me. So I loaded up in the car and I drove to the hospital. I got there to his bedside. He could barely breathe. It was labored, labored breaths. He said to me, "Is it too late for me to say 'Yes' to Jesus?" How many of you are willing to be cussed at? How many

of you are willing to wait? How many of us are willing to say, "I will not grow weary in doing good; I will just keep sowing and sharing the Spirit. I won't say to myself, 'I don't have enough to go around.' I won't say to myself, 'I don't have enough time.' Instead, I will just say, as John Wesley did, 'Let me do as much good as I can, as long as I can, to as many people as I can, in as many ways as I can.' I will just keep sowing the Spirit and then one day I will reap."

Walking in freedom in Christ... it's an interesting thing. It's this idea that I can confess my brokenness and help others be restored instead of just throwing them away. I can be humble instead of believing that I have to build myself up. I can just declare that I am nothing and yet Jesus Christ has made me everything. It means that I can be generous and share, and it means that I can sow in the Spirit and serve other people. I can do all those things. Why? I mean, you get to the end of the day, I know that some of us hear that and they go, "Well that's a really neat idea, but why would I ever be able to do that?" And here's the crazy thing. The answer is always the same, isn't it? It's the grace that comes from the cross of Jesus Christ. The reason that you are able to restore the broken is you say, "I've been broken but God restored me through Jesus." The reason you are able to be humble is you say, "I'm a speck and I'm nothing, yet God has declared me to be His beloved child through the cross of Jesus." I can share and give you everything that I have because I will never want for anything because my God will supply every need through the cross of Jesus Christ. I can sow in the Spirit every single day and not demand a return on my investment because I have already been given the riches of the kingdom through the cross of Jesus Christ. It is the grace of God and the completed and finished work of Christ that does everything and gives me everything that I need. Period. End of story. That is the place from which it comes. It's grace. I cannot earn it. I do not deserve it. God just freely gives it: Unmerited, undeserved, yet free. Through that free gift, then I am able to embrace it and walk in that freedom. So when Paul says, "Walk in the Spirit..." In fact, if you go back and you look at the end of chapter 5, verse 25, Paul says, "*If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*" In other words, you've got to walk in the truth that God gave you, and so you say, "Not only do I know it here and not only do I feel it here, but now I'm going to put feet to it and now I'm going to step out and I'm going to live it, every single day. I know He's given me a new identity and now I live in it. When that happens, things change.

Some of us today have not though said "Yes" to it because we have yet to understand and potency and the power of grace. Listen to me. Once you have tasted the grace of God, everything else is a cheap substitute. Right? If you haven't tasted the grace of God, you're confounded by everything that I'm saying because you say, "I would get tired of being nice to that many people." Guess what? I get tired of it too... but the grace of God. Then I go, "But, man... look how messed up I am and He loves me anyway and so I can love." You see, the thing about grace is that it is so shocking and is so beyond anything else that once you begin to understand it, you thirst for it, and you want it more than anything.

I read this great quote this week from an Anglican priest. His name is Robert Farrar Capon. This is what he said in his book called "From Noon To Three." Listen to this paragraph... maybe the greatest paragraph written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century on grace. Listen to this: "The Reformation..." that's John Calvin, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli... those guys back in the 1500's, "The Reformation was a time when men went blind, staggering drunk because they had discovered, in the dusty basement of late medievalism, a whole cellar full of fifteen-hundred-year-old, two-hundred proof Grace—bottle after bottle of pure distillate of Scripture, one sip of which would convince anyone that God saves us single-handedly. The word of the Gospel—after all those centuries of trying to lift yourself into heaven by worrying about the perfection of your bootstraps—suddenly turned out to be a flat announcement that the saved were already home before they ever even

started. Grace... it has to be drunk straight: no water, no ice, and certainly no ginger ale; neither goodness nor badness, just grace."

Now listen; when you taste grace, you cannot help but walk in freedom. If you are walking in bondage right now, it's because you haven't understood the new identity and the new person that Jesus has declared you to be. When Paul says, "Behold, He's making all things new," what is that about? That is about Jesus declaring once you understand the grace that's come through the cross, delivered and sealed through the empty tomb, and given to you in the person of the Holy Spirit. Once you understand that, you now are free. Forget what other people think about you. Jesus tells you who you are. Forget about the expectations that are put on you, because God tells you what it is that you're supposed to do. Forget about what culture says because the Scripture breathed by God tells you who you are to be. All of these things are suddenly freeing because no longer do I measure myself by any standard except the standard of the cross. And in that day... in that day, then you walk in freedom. So now, today, if you want to walk in freedom and you say, "I want that. I want to be able to restore and to serve and to be humble and all that. I don't have to build myself up anymore. How do I do that?" You say "Yes" to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. You say "Yes" to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. If you have yet to receive Jesus Christ, today is your day. If you have yet to simply understand that it's more than an intellectual belief or even a feeling in your heart, but it is a pursuit and a reception of the grace that has been given to you. If you are ready for that, you can say "Yes" to that today. Today is the day. Leave behind Law, leave behind an idea of religion and instead embrace living the law and the life of purity that walks through the freedom in Jesus Christ. Say "Yes" to it today. Say "Yes" to grace. From broken to restored, from a hoarder to generous, from a worm to a child... that's the power of grace. Let's pray.

"Father, thank you for those that are here today. God, thank you for your Word... that we're free now to do things that the rest of the world can't. Apart from your Spirit, people don't want to restore, they want to just move on. They talk about things like, 'Well, I've got to be healthy, so I've just got to leave this broken person behind.' Father, now in the world we no longer have to build ourselves up because You have already declared who we are. So we can have true confidence. It's not an over-confidence. It's a confidence of just knowing that You have said that we're your child and so we can walk in it. Father, we can be generous because we know You have given us everything we need. God, thank you for that. Thank you for your truth. Thank you for your Son. And thank you for the fact that today we can say 'Yes' to Him. God, we pray this in the name of your Son Jesus. Amen."