

TRANSCRIPTION | Sunday, August 11, 2024 | Grudge or Growth?

This morning, we're going to be launching a brand new message series entitled Hope After Church Hurt. It's going to be in partnership with one of my really good friends, Pastor Joe Dobbins. And transparently, he has helped me tremendously with understanding this subject and building content on this subject. And as we go into this series, you know, it's been planned literally for months that we kind of knew about this time of year.

We were going to launch this series. But obviously, you pray, you try to make sure that you're still in sync with the Holy Spirit, that you're definitely understanding God about his will for the church and the messages. I mean, what was really interesting for me is that as Joe's book was launched, it soared up the bestseller list, especially in the Christian category for Amazon.com.

In fact, it reached into the top 20. And what that really showed me is like, this is a subject that people are desperate to learn more about. There are a lot of people that have been hurt in regards to their church relationships, and this morning you may be a younger person. Maybe you're middle school, high school, college, and you're thinking, well, I don't know if this really applies to me.

You know, it's amazing how many young people I've sat with over the 23 years of pastoral ministry, and they've shared with me, they were wounded in a youth group, or they were wounded in a youth small group, or they were wounded in something that happened in a church camp. And so this really applies to all ages. And so even if it's not something that you're facing presently, I believe it's something that God wants to arm you with to help protect you as you continue your journey with the Lord.

Hope after church. Now, when you think about church hurt, I don't think that those are two words that should be fused together. It's like I think church hurt. That's something that should be diametrically opposed, that the church would be a place where you come to, to get healed, not hurt. But throughout the years, when you think about, Christian communities and churches, they're typically been kind of two categories that you classify people in.

There are believers and there are unbelievers, or you might say there are Christians and there are non-Christians, but there seems to be. Now the need for a third column. And that would be people who would say, I love Jesus, but I struggle with the church. And so because it's become such a real issue and such a real challenge and a real problem, I think it's something we need to talk about.

And one of the things that we want to do as a church is we want to create an atmosphere in an environment where we're not afraid to deal with hard subjects and to talk about things that can be challenging. So when you start to think about church, church hurt, it's actually not something that is new. It is something that humanity has been dealing with throughout the ages.

In fact, in the 1700s, there was a preacher by the name of George Whitfield. He led great revivals in the 1700s. In fact, some would say that he was even a part of initializing a great awakening within the United States of America. Some history even records him as a forgotten founder father. When he would preach, he would many times be preaching to thousands of people.

But when you study the history of his ministry, what is absolutely amazing and hard to even comprehend is that some of his greatest opposition came from the church. In fact, in his journal he actually records some things where he says stuff like it's not uncommon for people to throw stones at me, rotten eggs, or even dead cats.

In one instance, there was a local religious opposition that hired a drummer to drown out his preaching while he tried to share the word without modern amplification. There were even some religious orders that would release cattle and run them through the outdoor gatherings of his audiences. In one instance, there was this religious Pharisee ical type man that came on stage and attempted to urinate on him while he was delivering the message.

Church heard is not new, and at the same time, church hurt is something that is universal. It's something that many people have endured. And here's the thing when it comes to hurt associated with the church, we somewhat expect that there will be wounds that come from the outside. For instance, when you think about something like what happened with the opening ceremony of the Olympics and how that there were many Christians and people in the church globally that were wounded and hurt, you come to expect that what you don't expect is that there would be hurt from the inside, that there would be hurt that comes from the people that are seated on the pews alongside of you, or maybe even are part of small groups. And church hurt tends to originate within our own ranks. And again, it's universal and no one is completely protected from having to face it and deal with it. Like, obviously I'm a pastor and yet I grew up in church my whole life. When I was a teenager, I started serving in church.

When I was very young, I started preaching. By the time I was 20, I was in full time pastoral ministry. Still traveling and preaching, and I've dealt with church hurt. I can tell you about the time that one of my very best friends on planet Earth was found out to be involved in an affair, and I discovered that for an extended period of time, he had been betraying my trust.

And it hurts. I can tell you about the time that as a young pastor, I'd been preaching and I was doing these conferences and these revivals, and by God's grace, a lot of people got saved. And so I got invited to come to this, like, really large conference where I was going to be speaking to several thousand people.

And it was like this huge highlight for me, and I couldn't believe it was happening. And I remember I delivered the message to the best of my ability. And as soon as I walked out of the pulpit, there was this woman. She met me in the altar area as the service was concluding. Just, well, young man, I'll tell you, that was pretty good.

But you've got a lot to learn. I was crushed, wounded. I remember, starting to pastor the church, and we just had a handful of people and we were really struggling. And so I was still traveling, and I was traveling about 300 days a year preaching other places. And I was driving this little beat up Nissan Sentra that was held together with duct tape and Christian bumper stickers.

And, I ran into this family from several hours away that felt kind of, I guess, sorry for the situation I was in. And they felt compelled to try to help me get a vehicle. And so they blast Mandy and I with this incredibly nice vehicle. In fact, it was beyond anything I could have ever expected.

I didn't feel like I deserved it, I didn't think I was worthy of it. I was kind of stunned that the blessing and the first time I ever drove it to church, the church that I pastored, someone caught me after the service and asked for an impromptu meeting. They sat me down. They said, we'd like to talk to you about abusing church funds.

And I remember being hurt. In fact, I was so hurt that I got rid of the car, I didn't, I didn't even feel like I deserved it. I just got to go. Maybe you've been hurt. Those are some of my stories. I bet there's some of you that you've even got more than one story yourself. That there's several stories of where somehow, somehow, you were hurt.

Like some of you, you have endured the exclusion that clicks create. Some of you have been pierced by judgmental remarks. Some of you have found out that the person you admired was actually a fraud. Some of you were victims of gossip. Others of you were made to feel less than because of your past, others of you. You were used for your gifts, but you were never loved as a person.

Others, you were misled by leaders, or you were abandoned by people who you thought were your friends. Still, yet others of you, you were abused by someone in spiritual authority, and you were made to think that it was your own fault and your hurt. And so really, what we start to realize is that the details of each story are different, but the pain is the same.

And so this morning, what I'd like to share with you is that if you have been hurt by the place or the people that were supposed to heal, understand, I get it. There's even places where I can very much relate. And so it's out of that experience, that context, that understanding that we're trying to address this subject.

And I would feel an unction from the Lord. Something even my friend Joe helped me to see is that even though the people of God hurt you, the heart of God is to heal you. And for the sake of emphasis, I want to say it again. Even if the people of God hurt you, the heart of God is to heal you.

As a matter of fact, when it comes to the church, I want you to understand you hold a special place in God's heart. The Scripture says this in parable form. Matthew chapter 18 Jesus speaking. If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the 99 on the heels and go look for the one that wandered off?

And if he finds it, truly, I tell you, he is happier about the one sheep than about the 99 that did not wander off. In the same way, your father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish. Now that's a familiar story to many of you. It's a parable that's referenced a lot in preaching and in and even small group settings.

But what I want you to think about is the idea of that parable, because typically when we evaluate it, what we think about is that it's mentioning 99 believers, and then it's mentioning this one rogue sinner sheep. But I don't think that's the case because I believe if that was what was intended based on the full context of Jesus preaching ministry while on earth, he would have used different animals.

In fact, he probably would have said something like there are 99 sheep, but there is one goat instead, he says 99 sheep and one lost sheep. You see, according to the context of Scripture, in these parable formats, all sheep belong to the shepherd. So it's not about the saved and the unsaved. It's probably about connected sheep who love the shepherd, and about a disconnected sheep who loves the shepherd.

And what Jesus is saying is there's this disconnected sheep and I got to go find him. But what is it that would make a shepherd leave the 99 and to go find the one? I think it's because the shepherd is attempting to imply that there is great danger in being disconnected. You see, when you start thinking about being disconnected, especially in the analogy and the metaphor of a sheep and the shepherd and the flock, it can imply that you are uncovered.

You see, just because you're a part of a flock doesn't mean there won't be storms. But it's safer, and it's easier to endure the elements when you're not alone. And there's many of you right now that you're going through a storm. It's in your marriage, it's in your finances, it's in your physical body. And it's brutal because you're going through it alone.

You're not covered in prayer. You're not covered in encouragement. You're not covered by wise voices that help you navigate this season. And so what's happening is that you are under great difficulty, and the difficulty is even greater because you are alone, because the tactic of the enemy is that he will isolate you so that he can annihilate you.

Not only does it liken to being uncovered, but it likens to being unprotected. I'm sure you're like me at some point. You've had some encounters with National Geographic. My daddy, I affectionately call him 'The Don'. Together, we've watched a lot of National Geographic back in the days when I lived at the house. And so I can tell you about how the beaver builds its dam.

And I can tell you about how the hippo takes its bath. But I can also tell you about the predators and how they chase their prey. And it doesn't matter if it's a wolf or it's a lion. The tactic is the same separate one from all the rest. And that is exactly what the enemy has been up to in some of your spiritual lives, is he's been trying to get you into an increasingly vulnerable place while

he disconnects you, while he separates you, while he isolates you, while he makes you increasingly vulnerable because you can't overlook the fact that you have a spiritual enemy.

And all throughout Scripture, he's likened to many things, but he's likened to do a wolf and he's likened unto a lion. What that tells us is that his tactics are going to be similar. And what you come to learn is that when the lion and the wolf gets hungry, he's unrelenting. So there's never going to be a moment where that lion or that wolf has compassion for you.

Instead, he's going to pursue, he's going to pursue, and he's going to pursue, and he's going to try to steal, he's going to try to kill, and he's going to try to destroy you, get you disconnected. Now, the thing about being disconnected is that it can be likened to being unkempt, and that's one of the things that comes from it.

Let me explain that to you. In 2004, the world was introduced to a sheep named Shrek, and the story of Shrek is that he wandered off from his flock. He got disconnected. He wound up in a cave. He's in this hiding place and he's there for six years. When they found him, this is what he looked like.

And kept. In fact, what they discovered is that he had 60 pounds of wool on his body. 60 pounds. Couldn't hear well. He couldn't see good. What was happening is that he was carrying this weight. In fact, it was an enormous weight for a sheep of his size. And maybe what it says to you and I is that when the enemy gets us disconnected, it also leads to us being spiritually unkempt in our soul, because there's some stuff that would otherwise get cut off of us that we start carrying, and it's an unnecessary weight for some of us, it will be shame.

For others of us it will be stressful. For others of us it will be the consequences of sin. And it starts weighing you down because there's some stuff you can't shed on your own. In fact, the book of James says that to be healed, you must come into a relationship and confess your faults one to another. That healing might be released.

God has designed us for community. He's designed us to be a part of his church, and some of us are carrying weight because we're trying to do this by ourselves. And so when it comes to my own personal soul, like I've realized, man, I need some other people to help me keep it right. I need some leaders, some spiritual leaders who are going to use God's Word like a blade and cut away wrong thinking for my life.

I need friends whom the Spirit of God can use to wash my fear away with encouragement. I need mature people who can help me clear away guilt that would otherwise be blocking my vision. But here's the thing: as long as I stay at a distance, I stay weighed down and some of us are unnecessarily weighed down because at some point we got hurt, and now we've decided to just stay disconnected and hide out in the cave.

Not only will being disconnected lead to being unkempt, but can also lead to and be a result of feeling unsure of God's love, unsure of God's love. Many of us as kids have played hide and

seek, and most kids love to play hide and seek. And what happens though with hide and seek is occasionally there's a problem, and that is that one of the hiders hides so well that everyone gives up on trying to find him or her.

And so what happens is that the found moves on to other things, and then this one that was hiding emerges and is hurt because everyone stops looking for them. And so you think about how that can actually happen to us in our spiritual journeys. And I think it's a lot of how people feel. You get hurt, you pull back, you hide.

And over time that just compounds the pain, because then you start to be hurt by this feeling that you're forgotten, and then nobody's even looking for you and that everyone has stopped looking for you. And sometimes you even start to think that God has stopped looking for you. But I want to correct that misunderstanding with the help of God.

Scripture here Jesus will never be content with the 99. He is always going to be looking for the one. He will always be looking for the one Jesus is still searching for you. You know, one of the issues we have, especially here in Central Kentucky, is that we don't really have a good understanding in most instances of how sheep and shepherds work.

We think about cattle, and cattle don't have names, they're just numbers, and they're just waiting to go to the stockyard in most instances. But when it comes to sheep and shepherds, especially in biblical terms, the relationship was intimate. The bond was intense. In fact, a shepherd would nurse a sheep during its youth. A shepherd will carry a sheep during its sickness.

A shepherd will watch over a sheep while it sleeps. A shepherd, a true shepherd, will even sacrifice himself to try to keep the sheep from being harmed by a lion or a bear or a wolf. You see, because to a shepherd, no sheep is expendable. So when you think about the story of God and humanity, what it really comes down to is a story of hide and seek.

But what we forget is who it actually is. Think about it with me for a moment. It was God who was looking for Adam and Eve in Eden, not Adam and Eve looking for God. It was Jesus who went looking for the disciples in Galilee and said, come and follow me. It was the Holy Spirit who has been looking for you.

And maybe it's time to really have an internal examination with the help of the Holy Spirit and say, I'm done hiding. I'm done being uncovered and unprotected and unkept and unsure of God's love. Like I'm ready to be found so you can run and you can hide. But you cannot get God to stop searching for your heart.

He loves you too much to let you settle for less than his best. He doesn't want you to settle in isolation because he has a family for you. He doesn't want you to settle in pain because he has a purpose for you, and he doesn't want you to settle in your past because he has a future for you.

It's time to come out of hiding. It's time to tackle the problem. It's time to realize that God loves you unconditionally. He loves you obsessively, and he loves you eternally. So I need to say this to you. I need you to lean in for just a minute. You are loved by God. There is no doubt about that. But to be healed, you must choose to be led by God.

It's one thing to be loved by God. It's another thing to be led by God. And if you are going to be healed, you got to make the decision to say, okay, God, lead me. Lead me back into the flock. God lead me back into godly relationship. God lead me back into spiritual community. And the challenge with that is that a lot of us struggle because we will say stuff like, well, I want Jesus, it's his church.

I got a problem with. Some of us have heard that a thousand times. Some of us are guilty of saying stuff like that. And on the surface I suppose it sounds reasonable. But then you look at Scripture and in the context of Scripture, what you start to realize is that if we are believing stuff like that, Jesus probably isn't leading us because the truth of it is Jesus will always lead you to the church.

There's a lot of debate about the relevancy of the church. Is it essential or is it not essential? Many of even give up on the church and but I want you to realize something. Jesus is not one of them. And here's why. Because he died for his church. He died for history. He believed the church. That word was worthy of him dying for.

Look at this Ephesians chapter five. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, why would Jesus lead people away from something? He paid the ultimate price for? And not only did he die for the church, but he also introduced himself as the head of the church. In fact, Ephesians 5:23 Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the Savior.

Jesus is not resigned or pass the baton from being the head of the church, which tells us that Jesus still works through his church. And in the New Testament we learn that Jesus heals through the gifts he's placed in his church. Jesus guides through the leaders that he's placed in his church. Jesus cares through the members that he's placed in his church, and Jesus unlocks destiny by allowing people to serve in his church.

If Jesus is leading you, it's going to involve him leading you to his church. But the issue is that there's some of us that we attend, but we're not open to accept. And so it's possible that you can attend every week and still be spiritually weak, because at some point you have to make a decision that you're actually going to reengage with God's work because Jesus works through his church, Jesus is building his church, his hands.

Look at this. Matthew 16:18 I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Red cross, Unicef, habitat for humanity. They've all done some great things in the earth, but

there is no other organization throughout all of history that has done more for the earth than the church. It has outlasted the most gifted men and women and greatest empires.

It has endured intellectual opposition and cultural persecution. It has overcome tragedy both without and within. And for the last 2000 years, hell has never been able to overcome the church. Governments cannot contain the church. Culture cannot dismiss the church. It just keeps rising again. Why? Because it's not being built by the hands of man. Ultimately, it is being crafted by the nail scarred hands of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, risen from the dead.

If Jesus is leading you number two thing, I'd like for you to see is that Jesus will lead you to forgiveness. Jesus will lead you to forgiveness. When we've been hurt by people in the church, we often tell ourselves that we're going to keep on loving Jesus, but we don't anything to do with his people. And so, to ease our pain, we start to rationalize a grudge.

And the definition of a grudge is that it's a long held resentment that was born through a hurt. And so some of us have become pros at reasoning a way why we should get to keep the grudge. And so we rationalize it. We hide it, we spiritualize it, we ignore it, we excuse it. But we don't realize is that the grudge is first and foremost hurting you.

Here's what Scripture says. First John 4:20. Whoever claims to love God but yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. Holding a grudge keeps your relationship with God from growing. This is a doorstop, and I can take this doorstop and I can prop open a door and I can hold it open at the same time.

I can take this doorstop. I can put it behind a closed door, and I can keep that door from opening the difference. That's the difference between a grudge and forgiveness. When you choose to let go of that grudge, you open up that door and forgiveness holds. Open the door to relationships. You take that grudge, you decide to let it simmer.

You decide to let it fester. You close the door not only on what God wants to do in your life through earthly relationship, but even through your relationship with him. And so today, if you need to let go of a grudge, like I would challenge you to acknowledge first that you were hurt, just acknowledge it, admit it, and then choose to release the grudge to God and then refuse to pick the grudge back up and then reengage with God's family.

It's time to let go of the grudge because it's hindering your growth. You got to choose grudge or growth. Grudge or growth. Are you going to keep spiritually growing? Are you just going to sit there and fester in a grudge? God has called you to mature. He has called you not just to be a babe in Christ or a child in Christ, but to become a man or a woman of God.

The only way that can happen is if you grow, get rid of the grudge. Third thing I would say to you about being led by Jesus is that Jesus will always lead you to healing. Jesus will always lead

you to healing. So I realize there's a lot of you today that you're you're experiencing this message and and you're in this church service.

And like, honestly, for you, it's a huge step for you to even be logged in in church, online or to be in this building. It's a huge deal for you. Some of you haven't been to church in a very long time. You haven't tuned into a church service in a very long time. In fact, some of you, the only reason you're a part of the service today is because you're connected to a kid that was on stage.

Maybe it's your kid, maybe your guardian, maybe it's a grandchild, maybe it's a special niece or nephew family member. And what you maybe don't realize is that God was leading you. He was bringing you into a moment where you could experience healing from what has been hurting you for a long time. And I get it. You're thinking, man, how can a 30 minute message fix 30 years?

Well, my words can't. But when the Holy Spirit gets involved, God can impose his touch upon your life. And in an instant. Something supernatural can happen. And so. I've learned, and I've watched throughout the years, that the power of the Holy Spirit is so great that it can actually cause sworn enemies to embrace.

Jesus will always lead you to healing. And today, as they begin to play some music, I want you to think with me about the healing that Jesus is leading you to. I believe he's leading us all back to his cross. Some of us, we may come to the cross for the very first time because we don't yet have a relationship with Jesus, and we need to be invited and engrafted into his church.

But what we sometimes forget is that the cross was not only blood shed for our sins. The Bible confirms in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that it was also blood shed for our healing, and some of us were not physically sick, but we are spiritually and emotionally sick. We are sick in our soul because we've been hurt.

And today I believe Jesus wants to lead you to his cross. And you're not just going to find healing for your sin, but you're going to find healing for those places that you've been hurt. He is in the business of binding up the broken heart. Seven years ago, Max Lucado wrote a book which was entitled *It's Not About Me*, and in it he tells a story about a friend who was diagnosed with cancer.

And as his friend began to battle that cancer, there were some well-meaning Christians who came to him and said, if you'll just have faith, God will heal you. And yet it didn't seem to go away instantly. In fact, it seemed like the times, maybe even things were getting worse. And. And this man, what happened? He started to have a crisis of faith.

Felt like it was all his failure, all his wrongdoing. And Max went to pray with him and talk to him. And one of the things Max said to him is he said, it's not about you, this thing you're facing, this thing you're battling. Come to realize that your hospital room is a showcase for your maker, your faith in the face of suffering cranks up the volume of God's song.

And so I'm in no way saying that you were not hurt, that you were not wounded. In fact, you may have even had a moment where you were right about the things that happened and transpired. But what happens today? If you would say, Jesus, lead me in Jesus, I want you to lead me to your cross, and I want you to give me an opportunity to showcase what you can do in someone's heart when they yield.

Here's what happens when you show up at Jesus's Cross. Even while they're crucifying him. He prays stuff like father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. It wasn't just Roman executioners that put him on that cross. It was people of his own faith that put him on the cross. You might say it was the church of his hour that put him on the cross.

And he still prayed, father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Jesus wants to lead you to his church, to forgiveness, and to healing. Father, we bow our hearts and minds before you and we ask that you would take us by the hand and that you would lead us. We're coming out of the cave. We're coming out of the hiding place.

We're getting rid of the grudge. And God, for some people today, they're coming to you for the very first time. They they don't have a relationship with you up to this moment, but they recognize that they are lawbreakers. They didn't love you according to your command above everything else. They didn't love other people more than themselves. That, Lord, sin is the reality.

And we ask you, God, that you would set us free from our sin, that you would stir within our heart the gift of repentance and that. But we ask you, forgive us. We believe that you're willing to do it, and we ask you for the courage to confess to anybody and everybody that you are our Savior, that you are Lord, and that we are a born again new creature who's following you. But God, today we also pray for those who. Maybe you've been saved for a long time, or maybe even new to the faith. But still, there's hurt that the enemy's tactics have maybe even in some ways been successful at separating us and making us increasingly vulnerable. And so, God, today we're just asking you that you would show up, show out, and show off in our lives, that our life would become a showcase for healing, grace, God. There would be restoration, that there would be renewal in our lives, and that it would come as a result of only what you can do. Jesus lead us and they all start afresh in your cross today in Jesus name. This church said, Amen. When I see you in church online to stay leaned in.