

Date: September 23-24, 2023
Title: Look Up - "Look Up for Restoration"
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:5-11
Speaker: Russ Brasher

Well, good morning, Orchard Hill. My name is Russ Brasher and I'm on staff here at our Wexford Campus, and I'm excited to continue in this series. This is a series that's going to take us throughout the entire fall season and during it, we're going to spend time looking at Second Corinthians. And this is a letter written by Paul.

I want you to hear how one commentator summarizes the heart and overall purpose of why Paul wrote this letter in the first place. I think it will help set the foundation for how we want to look at today's text. Here's what he says. "Second Corinthians is a gut-wrenching, heartbreaking, tear-stained, love-saturated personal letter from Paul that shows how overwhelmingly concerned and desperate he is and ultimately God is for the people of Corinth to experience the joy of personally knowing Jesus."

The reason Paul wrote this letter, every word in it, and why I love this summary, is that what's on God's heart is what is on Paul's heart. And that heart is being poured out into this letter so that when you and I, when the church and the people in the Church of Corinth, when Orchard Hill reads this letter, that we would believe it, that we would trust the words in it, that we would put faith in it and begin to live out these words, and in doing so, experience the joy of personally knowing Jesus.

So, as we begin to take a closer look at the text you just heard read in Second Corinthians two verses five through 11, which the focus is going to be on, look up for restoration. And we'll spend some time defining what restoration is. But as we know that this is our focus, here's what my hope is, that we will better understand this particular text. Not just in what Paul is saying about restoration, but remembering, and how important Paul's heart is behind why we need restoration. And we need it because otherwise, we miss out on experiencing joy, a joy that can only be found when you and I personally know Jesus.

So, as we look at today's text, would you join me in a moment of prayer? God, we thank you for today. We gather at this moment to sit under your word and ask you to use it to speak to us. Allow your words to captivate and transform each of our hearts so that we may know you and your love for us is a love that is overwhelmingly concerned and a love that is desperate for us to experience the joy of being in a relationship with you, our father. I pray that my words reflect your word and heart in tone and emphasis in a way that glorifies and honors you. And we ask this all in your name Jesus. Amen.

Let's open the Bible and look again at the words we just read together earlier. I don't think it would hurt any of us to take a double take at that scripture. But this time, as we read through it, I want you to remember Paul's heart for why these words are here. And each of us at the church, Orchard Hill, would know the joy and experience the joy of following Jesus. Here's what he says again. "If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for

him. Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”

And as we take a closer look at this text, again, knowing the heart behind what Paul is trying to say to us, here's what these verses say. Paul says in verse five I know that there is another believer, another member of the church in Corinth that has caused pain. He has caused grief among individuals in the church and the church as a whole. I know that this has happened, Paul says. In verse six, Paul then goes on to say that the punishment that the majority of you inflicted was sufficient.

What he is saying is that the way in which you chose as a church to confront this man and his sin was biblical and honorable. We know this because if you were to open your Bible, and I encourage you to do this later, but we don't have time right now. But if you were to open your Bible and read through Matthew 18, it actually lists out how believers should approach other believers, how a church should approach individuals and address or confront sin, known sin in someone's life, or an individual's or group's life that is causing pain.

And Paul says, the way in which you guys went about this was honorable. It was biblical. I approve of what you had to do. It stinks what you had to do. They did everything by the book. But this man would not respond in a biblical way. And so, they had no choice but to remove this man, to excommunicate this man from the church in order to protect the church and hopefully stir this man towards repentance. But he wouldn't. And so, the church had to do, the people had to do what they had to do, remove this man. And Paul says, as hard as that was to do, I want you to know that it was the right decision.

But this is where the story turns. In verse seven, Paul says, but now, as believers in Jesus, as the church, I need you to do something. I know this man has hurt you. I know this man has hurt the church. But now, Paul says, is the time for restoration. This man is hurting. Paul says that it is excessive sorrow that this man has experienced, meaning that he is becoming swallowed up by his sin. He's come to understand the pain he's caused, and it is breaking him.

Paul says in verses seven and eight, not only is now the time to go offer restoration, but I need you to do this by seeking this man out and forgiving him, comforting him, and even reaffirming your love for him. I need you to go extend grace and mercy to this man. I need you to go and remind him what the purpose of any biblical punishment or discipline is. To restore discipline is to restore people to fellowship, not to destroy people or fellowship. Again, what you guys did was the right thing. But now is the time to go forgive, to comfort, to love, to welcome this man back. Paul says in verse eight, that I'm not just asking you to do this as a church. I am urging you as a group of believers. The ESV says Paul is begging them to offer restoration to this man.

He says to remember for yourself what it felt like when you discovered for the first time how forgiven you were by Christ and what that did for your heart when you were restored to a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus. Remember that and go offer that to this

man because it's what he needs just as much as what you need so that together you can experience the joy of knowing Jesus.

And he goes on to say if restoration happens, if you go and do this, it will prove that your heart is obedient to God. It will show to this man. It will be shown to the church. It will be shown to the outside world. And God will know that you know in your heart what it means to be forgiven. That joy awaits those who are able to do this.

But then Paul says in verses ten and eleven, but if you don't, if you're unable to go and offer restoration, to go and offer forgiveness to those that hurt you, including this man, it says that Satan will gain an advantage. And what he's saying is Satan hates restoration. Satan loves bitterness and division. Satan doesn't want to see you restored to a right relationship with God. And if you can't prevent that, he's going to do the next best thing and look to destroy your relationships with others. Because he knows that the two are connected and you won't truly experience the joy of knowing and following Jesus if you don't know how to offer the things that Jesus offers you, forgiveness, and love to others too. This is what Paul is saying in this text. This is what we're being asked as believers to put our faith in.

And what Paul is saying is that as believers, there comes a time when you and I need to confront sin. We need to confront sin in our own lives, but we also need to confront sin in the lives of others, especially when we see and know that that sin is causing pain. Paul says not only that, especially if you know that this is happening in the life of another believer. If you follow Jesus, you need to be ready to confront sin in your life and in the life of others.

But he also says this, and this is the harder part. Paul says that as believers, there's also going to come a time when you've confronted sin, when you need to be ready to comfort the sinner by offering forgiveness and restoration, especially if it involves another believer. Comfort comes through restoration. Restoration, or to restore, can be defined in this way, to return something to its original intended purpose.

If you want an example of this that maybe some of us in this room can relate to, if you remember the show, American Restoration, does anyone remember this show came out in 2010? It's one of those shows that no one sets their weekly schedule to be like, I need to make sure I record that show. I need to make sure I'm home with nothing on my calendar. I need to see this. It's one of those shows where you're kind of bored and you're looking to tune out for a little bit. You're just scrolling through the channels, and you come across the show and before you know it, you don't even know how it happened, but you are at seven episodes, 3 hours have gone by, and you are watching these guys take things that everyone else in the world has disregarded, thrown away, looked at, and say that it's lost its value, meaning, and purpose.

But these guys, through fancy chemicals and tools, are able to restore things to their original intended purpose, giving them new meaning and value, renewed purpose. And for some reason, all of our hearts are drawn to that. We look at it and say, man, if it can be possible for a 1947 gumball machine, could restoration really be possible for me in my life, and the relationships that I have? But when you look at the text, when you look at what Paul is saying, Paul is saying that restoration is possible, but it doesn't require chemicals or special tools.

Biblical restoration requires forgiveness. And Paul is asking, urging, begging this group of believers, begging this church, asking you and me to offer forgiveness, to offer restoration, to follow the example of Jesus and choose to forgive those that have hurt you. Matthew 6: 14-15 says, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

So why is Paul asking this of us? Why is he not just asking, but begging and urging us to consider restoration, to extend forgiveness? Because we have to remember the overall purpose of why Paul wrote this entire letter in the first place so that we might experience the joy of following and personally knowing Jesus. Paul knows that without restoration, without forgiveness, there is no joy to experience. And this holds true in our personal relationships with God and our relationships with others. Paul knows that this man who has caused hurt, pain, and grief needs to experience the joy of forgiveness coming in the form of others offering it. But Paul also knows that those in the church, you and I, who have been hurt, need to experience the joy and freedom that comes from extending or offering forgiveness to those who have hurt us.

I love how one pastor put it when talking about forgiveness. He's not focusing on the person being forgiven. He's speaking to you and me that we need to offer forgiveness, even when the situation is hard to see how we can even begin to try. And we can come up with all reasons and excuses as to why we're not, we can't, we shouldn't, or it wouldn't be right to forgive.

Here's what this pastor says. "Forgiveness does not always change the person that hurt you. Are you listening to me? Forgiveness doesn't always change that person, but forgiveness always changes you. Let's be honest for a moment. How many of you desperately desire change in your life? Forgiveness changes you. Guess what forgiveness does not do? Forgiveness does not mean you forget. One of the craziest theories is that you forgive and forget. You don't always forget. Sometimes forget is not an option. But you do have the opportunity to forgive every time you remember. There are some things in my life and there's some people in my life that every time I remember I have to forgive them. Forgiveness is not a one-time fix-all. Forgiveness is a daily sacrifice that I have to implement so that I can receive what it is that God has for me. Joy. If I don't put into practice forgiveness for those that have hurt me and those that have impacted me in a negative way, then I hold myself hostage to a prison that God never intended for me to stay put in, and in doing so, miss out on the freedom and joy that comes from knowing Christ."

This is what this text is about. As believers, we are expected and need to be ready to both confront sin and comfort the sinner if we are to know the joy and experience the freedom of what it means to follow and know Jesus. This is what the text says, but I know what most of you, if not all of you, are thinking. I know you're thinking it because all week long as I was putting this message together, I was thinking the same thing. This is one of those yeah, okay, Paul, okay, Russ, I hear what you're saying, but it's a lot easier said than done type situation when it comes to forgiveness. Paul doesn't know how hurt I've been. Paul doesn't know how badly I've hurt other people. Doesn't Paul know that relationships can and tend to get really complicated? I think Paul knew this. We know this.

I was Googling on the internet, and I said how many people need restoration? That's all I Googled. And this study came up from a Barna group. And here's what the results were. 58% of the U.S. adult population, that means over half the people in this room right here. I mean, look around. Just real quick. Look around. If you're online, you know, look around your house. This is true of your house, too. Over half the people in this room alone have at least one relationship in their life that is not just in need, but in desperate need of restoration.

And when I saw that stat, the first thought that came to my mind was, I feel like that's a little low. I know this is already true of me. I can think of relationships in my life that are in desperate need of restoration. And then I remembered adults lie. We're really good at it. And if I had to bet, I bet you that number is more like 75%, maybe even 100%. Maybe every one of us in this room alone has at least one relationship in our life that is in need of desperate restoration. I know that I'm one of them. And even when I think of some of those situations in my life, and this is probably true of you, you're looking at it as the one experiencing the hurt or the one that's caused it. And you're thinking to yourself, forgiveness seems like it's out of the question. I'm not even sure that they want to be forgiven. They're not even owning what they've done. Or maybe restoration feels like it's just never going to happen. You've tried, but it's gone nowhere. But even if you wanted to try, some of us in this room don't even know where to look to begin.

Can I tell you this too? In my exercise with the internet and Google, I can tell you don't look to the internet for help. I tried for us, and I failed miserably. I googled how to fix broken relationships, and one of the very first things that popped up was an article titled "If You Want to Fix Your Relationships, This is What You Should Be Focusing On." And I thought, great. I don't have to do sermon prep anymore. I'm just going to take this woman's article and speak it word for word because I'm sure she's got it figured out. Why else would you title it, "This is What You Should Focus On?"

I couldn't even get through the first paragraph without realizing that this woman couldn't be any further from the truth. She got close, but then here's what she says. This is how it starts. And she gets you at first. "If you want to reset your relationships, if you want to be ready for a fresh start, that starts with deepening your understanding of your love, and it starts with accepting yourself." I was like, it's kind of biblical. I'm sure I can twist that to make it work. But then she has to go and say this. "Broken things can be fixed, but the fixing is often harder than the breaking."

And then this is where she asks the question to all of us, are you ready to fix your relationships? And if you're like me, I'm going to sit in my chair like, yeah, what do I got to do? Here's what she offers. "Then get ready to fix yourself." Her advice is, if you want restoration, if you want to restore your relationships, you've got to look within yourself. You've got to find a love that you don't know you have, and courage, and power to go do it yourself.

And we all know where that leads. It's impossible. We can't look within ourselves. It's never going to work. She's wrong. What we are being asked for in this text. Paul knows that this woman is wrong. Offering restoration through forgiveness seems impossible because it is in fact impossible for us to do it on our own. We need outside help. And this is what Paul meant in verse ten. He says, I need you to go offer restoration, and I know what I'm asking you to do

is crazy. But here's where you get the source of your power. "Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight."

ESV says, in the presence of Christ, for your sake. And this is what verse ten says, that Paul is trying to get us to see, that we need an outside source. We need something that's going to stir up our hearts to make us desire and give us the power to offer restoration and forgiveness. Because the ability, the reason our only hope to forgive someone is made possible, only when we first see just how forgiving and loved we are by Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. And allowing that love, that level of forgiveness to captivate and transform our hearts.

Paul says I know where to look for restoration. I know that you don't look inside yourself. Paul says that you cannot look to the world. And I'm telling you, don't look at the Internet. Paul says to look up. Look up at the cross. Look up at the cross and see Jesus. And when you do, Isaiah 53 five tells us that what you see is Jesus, a man who was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our inequities. The punishment that brought us peace and joy was on him, and by his wounds, we are healed.

Again, Paul agrees and says you're right if you're sitting here in this room thinking that you're never going to be able to genuinely offer forgiveness to someone who has hurt you or even truly receive forgiveness from someone that you've hurt until you experience first, until you know in your heart, and until you remember in your head how loved and forgiven you are by Jesus. That's what makes all the difference.

Paul says no one else may know your story. And I'm not going to stand up here to pretend to know your story. I have my own. And you have your own. But we all have hurt and pain in our life. But Paul says this. Jesus knows your story. Jesus knows what you're going through. Jesus knows your story because Paul says Jesus knew my story. And what you have to understand about the audience that Paul's writing to, this church, this group of believers, they knew Paul. He was a friend to them. He was a mentor. They knew Paul's story. They knew his testimony. And it's helpful that we do, too, because it proves Paul's point.

Paul says I know what it's like to hurt people. My story is that my name used to not be Paul. It used to be Saul. And when I was Saul, I caused more pain in the lives of others than any of you could ever understand. Paul says, when I was Saul, I used to think that I knew God and was in a relationship with him, and I honestly thought that I was doing what God wanted me to do by seeking out other believers and persecuting them, hurting them, punishing them, even executing them. You have no idea the kind of pain I've caused people.

In First Timothy 1:15, Paul self-proclaimed himself and gave him the title of chief or worst of all sinners. He says if you think you've hurt people, I've hurt people. But then he says, there is no one like Jesus because only Jesus, one day stopped me dead in my sin, as I was literally on a road to Damascus to seek out and persecute other believers, Jesus stopped me. He stopped me Paul says, of all people, me, and chose to love me and forgive me.

He says I didn't deserve it. I wasn't asking for it. I wasn't seeking it out. But out of love, Jesus stopped me and forgave me. Jesus reached down into my heart and made me feel fully

known and fully loved. He restored my soul by restoring my relationship with God and called me to a new way of life. And no one, Paul says, can offer you restoration like Jesus can. No one can both confront sin and yet comfort the sinner and shower you with love, forgiveness, grace, mercy, acceptance, and understanding as Jesus can. There's no one like Jesus.

Paul says, apart from Christ. You're right. The hope for restoration in our relationship with God or others is impossible. You can't offer forgiveness you've never experienced for yourself. But as Scripture tells us, with Christ, once you have personally experienced the joy of knowing Jesus, knowing that you are forgiven, that God sent Jesus, and by faith, you are restored to a relationship with God, all of a sudden with Christ, all things are possible, including restoration, including forgiveness. And Paul says now and only now, and only this way through faith in the one, are we able to begin to even think that we can live this way to offer this.

Here's what it means to know and follow Jesus. To follow Jesus is to walk in the steps of the one who wept over Jerusalem. The one who wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus. The one who sweat drops of blood at the prospect of having to die in our place. The one who went to his death and sacrificed himself anyway on our behalf. The one who is in the business of restoring relationships. This is the strong love that God calls us to and has shown us. This is the strong love that God asks us, urges us, and begs us to go show others.

The same commentator who summarized Second Corinthians as a whole says this about this particular text. One of the chief aims and marks of the gospel-shaped life, a captivated and transformed heart, is that we too love and forgive people. Love them enough to forgive them as God loves and forgives us. That the outpouring of our love and forgiveness would stir up and cause joy in the hearts of others, too. And once you have experienced the Gospel, you will be ready to do anything to help others know that same joy in your heart. You will be willing to refrain from doing anything that might deflect others from the gospel faithfulness that leads to joy. For this is what Christ-like love looks like. It's a love that understands that my joy, your joy, the joy of others, and ultimately God's joy are all organically connected." I love that picture. I love what it says.

This is the test that Paul is referring to in verse nine. It says if you are able to do this, if you have put your faith in Christ, what the cross means, experience the joy and freedom of being a son and daughter of the most high king. If you're able to do this, you will pass the test that believers, the church, this church, Orchard Hill, would be obedient to God and show that we really have grasped the Gospel in our own hearts and are living in light of the gospel message, experiencing the joy that comes from personally knowing Jesus. One of the ways that we do this and can demonstrate this joy, experience this joy in our own hearts, and offer this joy to those who need it, even those who don't deserve it, is by offering forgiveness, and hoping that when we do so, it will lead to restoration.

The only place we're going to find the strength, power, love, courage, humility, and desire needed to offer this is when we remember to look up. We need to look up and see Jesus. Know that we are loved and forgiven. We need to look up and see Jesus and remember that He offered it to us when we weren't asking for it, and we didn't deserve it, and out of that same love, choose to look and offer it to those that need it in our life.

We all need some type of restoration in our lives to experience joy. Maybe for you, this morning, restoration starts between you and the Lord. Maybe for some of you in this room, that restoration starts with the people that you came in the car here with because what happened in the car from home to here was not pretty. Maybe for some of you, there's some real hurt. There's some real pain. There's some restoration. That right now, even in this moment, you look at and say, forgiveness, not going to happen. Restoration - impossible. Remember that in Christ, all things are possible, and we need to look to him and allow him to do a work in our hearts that only he can do to give us the strength and courage to go do what he calls us to do.

I pray that we listen to God's Word today and remember that all restoration begins when we remember to look up, look up at the cross, and see Jesus. And it's only fitting that as we talk about forgiveness now, we would take time to participate in communion together as a church. And so, in a moment, the worship team is going to come up here, and they're going to lead us through one last song. And as we're worshipping together, you're invited. If you have put your faith and trust, if you know the joy, and experience the joy of being forgiven, putting your faith in Jesus and what He did for us on the cross by coming and paying the price of our sins, his body being broken, his blood being sacrificially shed to pay the price for our sin.

And you're invited to come and partake in communion to take the bread which represents his body and dip it in the wine which represents his blood as a sign to remember what Jesus has done for us. And if you're part of that 58% that has a relationship in your life that you know needs restoration, I pray that as you're coming forward, you would pray for them, pray for that restoration, pray for God to do what only He could do in your life and in their life to through restoration.

And if that's not true of you today, right now, I pray that during this worship time together you will continue to worship with us as a church. We love that you're here. But I pray that whatever is keeping you from knowing the joy of being in a relationship, being restored into a right relationship with God, you know you are loved and forgiven. And you have a God, a father, whose scripture tells us who Paul is begging us to see is overwhelmingly concerned and desperate for you to know him, to be restored to a relationship with him, that he desires to welcome you home.

Orchard Hill desires to welcome you home into the family of believers, brothers, and sisters in Christ. And you can ask for that restoration right now, partake in communion for the first time, knowing that you are forgiven and loved. And through faith in Jesus, we have new life. We are restored to our original intended purpose. So, would you all stand up and join me in prayer before we worship?

Father, thank you. Thank you for your word. Thank you that it reminds us to look up. Lord, we thank you that through the cross we have restoration. And only when we look to the cross can we experience it and offer it to others. May you give us the strength, the courage, and the humility to remember how important our relationship with you is, and only through it can we begin to repair our relationships with others by offering the same thing. In your name, we pray. Amen.