



Poets & Saints – Redemption through Brokenness

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Well good morning, and warm welcome to our other campuses. My name is Jamie George. My first visit to The Chapel was in the 1960's. To be precise the middle of December 1969. I was a week old. It's really impacting service. Our family stayed. They had just start visiting, I think a month earlier, and my mom and dad and me. And it wasn't long after that that my father came on staff as youth pastor. And then he was I think the minister of education, then he was associate pastor, counseling pastor. He's been on staff here for almost 40 years. What a pleasure and privilege to be back home.

I grew up.. Thank you. Thank you. For those of you old-timers, you know, like I grew up in the era where there, it was the era of like big church production, so I grew up we had like a Christmas production, I was the little drummer boy. Then we had like a big July fourth thing. There usually were explosions, and American flags would unfurl. And I'd be like a Vietnam guy. And then there was the Easter thing. I hung on a cross for Easter. But to be clear, I wasn't the guy in the middle. I was the thief. And

Ruth Adams was the casting director. So I was the thief that went to hell. Just to be clear, the selection in the casting.

So I like, just grew up here. And I was listening one of the songs that I think you guys wrote here about, you know, the son's inheritance, the daughters heritage. I'm one of your sons, so thank you for investing in my life. The Chapel was significant in laying the foundation of faith for me. And it is with deep and warm affection that I think about this place.

I was on staff here for about four years when the Bills used to win SuperBowls, that era. And I moved away, went to South Florida. And my wife and I we have four children. We've been married 25 years next summer by the way. People clapping or those who are married. You know. Twenty-five years, like come on. So we've been married 25 years. Thanks everybody. We have four children. Our boys were born in Florida. Then we had a... they'll be 21... a daughter, she was born in Missouri. We lived in the midwest for about 10 years. And she's 17. And then I have a ten-year-old daughter. She was born in Nashville.

So we've been in Nashville for 10 years. We moved to Nashville about 10 years ago, compelled with this vision. We wanted to plant a church for the wounded, the skeptical, and the brokenhearted. But we didn't fully understand was that we were planting a church for ourselves. We very much fit that category. And there were two values that emerged pretty quickly. The first was what would it be like to be in a church where you could be honest about your struggles and doubts and questions, and express those, along with this wonderful goodness of God. Like to hold

them both. And then the second thing, the other value was, what would it be like to really engage this idea of being co-creators with God? That God has made us to express His love uniquely through who we are.

And it wasn't long in the early days of our church we met two people that really embodied these values. The first was a young lady, she just graduated from college, and she become our babysitter. It was the early days of a church plant. And for those of you guys who have been a part of a church plant, you know you're just trying to keep it together. And the guy that was leading worship was out of town, we needed somebody. And everybody's looking around. Who's gonna lead? I said, well I think my babysitter can sing. And they're like, your babysitter? Yeah, give her a shot. She taught my daughter the guitar. So maybe she can play and sing. So Leslie Jordan led worship that morning. And we kind of had our minds blown. And we wound up hiring her on staff as one of our worship leaders.

And it wasn't long after that, I met the other young man you saw on the screen. His name is David Leonard. He was playing with a band called NEEDTOBREATHE. He'd come off the road, and just said, I just feel like I'm meant to re-engage with the church. And I'm willing to write. And so, because we had a church full of wounded brokenhearted, skeptical people, we needed some songs.

And so, they began to write these songs. All the Poor and Powerless. Great Are You Lord. Rising Sun. Brokenness Aside. And they formed a band called All Sons & Daughters. And then, were just really writing the songs of

our people. And pretty soon we found that these songs are resonating across the country and around the world.

So we've been writing music and now books and publishing. And so last summer, we went to our publisher and we said, hey we have a really good idea. Leslie came across this line by Madeleine L'engle about poets and saints. And that they're the people who figured out how to really be present. And we just did a series on church history in our church. We think it'd be really good idea if you would send us to Europe and let us do a research project on the most influential Christians of our faith. Well, they surprisingly said yes, and so off we went last summer.

And I discovered something. You know, when it comes to this, a lot of the people who have influenced our faith, both Protestant and Catholic, it's easy to forget what their lives were all about. One Sunday, I got up in front of the church and said, it was St. Patrick's Day. St. Patrick's Day. Hey, how many of you will take, will set aside some time today, St. Patrick's Day, to celebrate the fact that he was the first person to take the gospel to an unreached people group without bloodshed, and watch a whole culture converted to Christ? How many of you St. Patrick's Day will pause for a moment to really celebrate that? There weren't many hands that went up. How many of you will take some time on St. Patrick's Day to wear green and drink beer? I won't tell you how many hands went up.

So I realized, you know, like, there's a lot of these stories that have been lost. And what would it be like to go and capture some of these stories? So we did. And what we did was, we said we want to make resources for our

church and other churches. So here's what came out of it. The first thing that came out of it was a participant guide. It's seven weeks of daily devotions. And they're really like prompts. Like there might be a quote, or there might be a little snippet of a story, or it might be a Scripture passage, or maybe it's a picture to meditate on, like a piece of art. And it's seven weeks. And it pairs with a DVD, because we took a film crew with us. And we filmed in the moment in Normandy, London, Milan, Rome, all these places, where these poets and saints lived and died, where they served and loved. And we just created a small group curriculum or maybe for your family to go, hey how do we look at the lives of past believers and see how they can affect our own lives? And so we created a small group thing.

So you've got the curriculum and you've got the participant guide. Then I wrote a book which is a bit of a memoir, kind of a travelogue, on the whole story. And each chapter is just kind of the short version of each of these poets and saints. So if you're interested, you go, I've heard the names, but I don't really know who they are.

And then David and Leslie, they are just incredibly gifted musicians. They brought all these ancient writings and wove them with melodic form into an album. So it's an album full of really ancient writings set to this kind of folk style music that they do. So this was our project. We were like, man this is amazing. If we can somehow serve other people with it.

People have asked me, what's the biggest takeaway from spending really the last year studying, researching, writing? And there's a couple of takeaways. But my first big takeaway was this. All these people we call

saints. They were messed up. They were really broken. Most of them struggled for a lifetime with their stuff. And as a quick rundown, I'll give you a few of them. So, St. Therese - she was obsessive-compulsive. St. Augustine - sexual fixation most of the first half of his life. William Cooper and John Newton, they wrote really the first hymnal. It's where Amazing Grace is found. William Cooper struggled with depression throughout his entire life, suicidal thoughts. One of England's greatest poets. C.S. Lewis called himself the most reluctant convert to Christianity in all of England. John Calvin - unruly grass and judgmental. Martin Luther - really into social media. Kind of started a thing with social media. I mean these guys were all, they all had their like this nuances to who they were. But all just major points of struggle. And somehow God took their brokenness and used the brokenness to heal the world.

One story in particular, I don't know if you know the story of Francis. I think his name is on some buildings in Buffalo. If you've heard this story, Francis grew up in Italy, a little town called Assisi. Francis grew up, he was the son of a wealthy merchant. He grew up in a home with major expectations. I don't know if you've experienced this, expectations from a father and mother, maybe expectations on how to behave or how to look, or expectations on what you're supposed to do with the family business. This was Francis' life. And as you get into the story, you really see there's a deep father wound. His father was strong, abrasive, successful with business, but unrelenting on Francis.

Francis grows up with money. So in his teenage years, he's got lots of money. He spends it. He's got a posse. They party. They kind of hang out all

night. He does that thing. But that buzz only lasts so long. And he just has this sense of like, sense of destiny. He wants to achieve glory. He wants people to know his name.

So in those days, one of the ways you could do that was to be a knight. The only problem was that Francis was not born into nobility. But he had money. So he found somebody, he hired them to train him. Of course, he got all the stuff. And went to the guys in town, and he had a sweet suit made, his suit of armor. And of course his dad is a merchant, so he's got colors, plumes, banners, the whole thing. He's like medieval GQ. He's looking smooth. He's pretty excited he's going to be a knight.

And in those days like, city-states would fight each other. You know, I don't know exactly how it works. Ok, it's time to kill the neighbors. So they come on out. And like, Kenmore and Cheektowaga, like hey. Like I mean, that's kind of how it was. It was time to fight. So the morning would come. It's time to do battle. And Francis is trained, he's got his new suit on. You look good. And you know, a crisp Italian morning, gets on his steed. And you know the mothers are out there wiping their eyes, father's were banging their chests. Our boys, go, you know, kill the neighbors. And off they go.

It doesn't go well for the people of Assisi. They lose the battle. And Francis is knocked from his horse, wounded in battle. A number of the other guys are. In those days, the way you finished off the battle was you just walked around and if people were still moving, you stuck the spear or the sword in them. But, there was like a rule. If you're walking around and you're finishing off people and you're killing them, but you see somebody that

looks like they got some cash, don't kill him. So of course they get to Frances. They're like, whoa, nice suit. So they save him and a couple of the other knights. And they throw him in the dungeon and they put him up for ransom.

Well, he's in the dungeon for about a year. Most historians say he actually got really sick, and probably got malaria there, that he never really recovers from. He really struggles with the sickness for the rest of his life. Assisi, you know, the people, his dad, they pay the ransom. Out comes Francis. He comes back home. And he's changed, of course. Well, living in a dungeon for a year will affect you.

But he still has a little of the quest for glory. So he's got one more shot. The Crusades are coming through town. I don't know if you heard of the Crusades. You didn't kill your neighbor, you just kill people that didn't follow Jesus. So they came through town. And they're like, you got any men that can join the Crusades? There weren't a lot left. A handful left, six, eight men. Here we go. Francis says yeah. And off they go.

They're on the road to join the Crusades. And Francis has really his first significant interaction with God. He hears a voice, and a lot of detail here, but the long story short is he senses God speaking to him and telling him not to go. He turns his horse around, goes back to town. A little embarrassing. News gets back six months later... news doesn't travel fast in those days.. that all those men who went out to join the Crusades were ambushed along the way. All of them killed. So for some reason God is connected with Francis and spared his life.

And Francis starts to struggle with this, he starts to really ask the deeper questions about life. And he starts to see things he didn't see before. He recognizes the needs of the poor, and he starts to give some of his money away. He starts to serve people.

One day, he goes out into the woods, and he finds this old dilapidated church. And the church has a crucifix hanging from the ceiling. He's just laying there looking at it, and the mouth of the crucifix moves, and says, "Francis, repair my church". I don't know if you've ever had a moment where the mouth of a crucifix moved, but it was bit disconcerting for Francis. He ran off, he found a priest. He said, I had a vision, or a thing, and the mouth moved, I'm supposed to repair the church.

Now by the way, in Francis story, there's tons of allegory, tons of metaphor. And this is one of them. We don't have time for his full story, but God uses Francis to repair his church. And when we're talking to repair the church, we're talking about I mean the worldwide Church. I mean, there's some really interesting interactions that happen later in his life.

In this case, he goes to the priest, and says, what should I do? He goes, here's all the rest of my money. The priest says, you know what? Let's set that aside for a minute. Here's a hammer and some nails. Just go repair the little church. Ok. So he goes out.

Meanwhile, word is out, his father has heard that Francis is not only not fulfilling his responsibility to continue on with the family business, but he's giving everything away, whatever he'd been given. And his father's not happy. So his father comes after him. And Francis in his fear, paralyzed by

fear from the intense expectations for this person in his life, he goes into hiding. He goes into the church, he finds the cellar. Below the cellar, there's a dark hole in the ground. And climbs into the hole, and he stays there for 30 days and he won't come out. Somebody sneaks some food and water in to him, but he refuses to leave. And he stays in that dark place.

And it's as if in this moment, all the compression of life is coming down on him. His failed expectations of what he thought he might be. The pressure of his father, and who his father wanted him to be. Questions about faith and spirituality and God. And all of it at one time compressing on his soul. And it kind of harkens back to several places in Scripture, when you think of Jonah in the belly of the fish. Or you think of Saul when he was blinded before he became Paul. Even Jesus in the grave. It seems that there are these moments spiritually where we go into this dark place and there is a wrestle and almost a torment while God strips away the ego and reveals something about Himself.

I don't know if you've had this kind of experience. I have. Recently. It began for me in January, and really lasted for close to eight months. I'm just barely on the other side. In January, our church went through a major transition. We've been in one space, an old factory that we loved for about 10 years. A businessman bought the property and wasn't interested in having a church there. And we of course had several things set up, but they all fell apart. And we found ourselves homeless as a church. And our church is kind of a medium-sized church, and so it's really difficult to find enough parking and children space and all this stuff, to move the church

that size. And eventually we had someone in town said, hey you can use our space on a Sunday night, which is very kind and gracious.

But it was hard. Hard on our church, and we have families with young children, folks in typical, they're just kind of used to that routine. Long story short, in about three months we lost about half the congregation. At the same time, we lost our almost our entire staff. We had two guys that were already set up to go plant a church from our staff. We had two people, one married to a spouse, moved out of town, another gentleman moved out of town. David and Leslie were on staff, they came off because they were traveling with All Sons & Daughters. Our executive pastor had an emotional breakdown through the weight of this whole transition; retired, moved out of town.

I found myself begging God to release me. And He wouldn't. And so, all I did was amp it up. I thought I'll just work harder. I'm like, I was born in Buffalo, I know how to do this. I pull myself up by my bootstraps. Give me a little duct tape. I can slap it on anything. Rub a little dirt on it. Here we go. I know how to work hard. And I just went for it, harder and harder, and faster and faster, and tried to fill in all the gaps and solve all the problems, and essentially be the rescuer. And I broke. Something in my spirit ruptured.

I've always been kind of a faith and adventure guy. I was like big faith. God, he's amazing. I love adventure. I was never fear and anxiety. The last eight months - fear and anxiety. I had friends that had panic attacks and tell me about it. I never quite got it. I've had panic attacks. And those of you

who've been through it, your brain starts to cramp, everything starts to go dark, you feel like you're going to die.

And look like, all the phrases of like, "trust God, know God, He's bigger than this." You know, all the things I've taught. It didn't matter. Spiritual truths that are deep and meaningful. What happened? I'm a pastor, right? And here I am locked up in fear and anxiety.

God used this whole experience in a number of different ways for our church. But I'll tell you what he did to me. He exposed something in me. He exposed an expectation that really wasn't from anybody. It was a voice that I'd made up that was in my head, that I was meant to perform, I was meant to rescue, I was meant to save. You know what I've learned about God? God is the God of salvation. Saving is His honor.

I don't know if you're wired like me, like being a martyr, like, I can suck it up. I'll do it, take one for the team. If you're wired like that, and there's any of this energy in you. Like, I'm there. I have no boundaries. I'll rescue. I'll do what I got to do. I'll tell you, can only carry that so far. And God began to carve out my self-sufficiency. For those of you in recovery, the first step is I am powerless to change my circumstances. More than any time in my life, God put me flat. There are times I wished I would die, I wasn't sure if I was going to. There were times where I felt hopeless.

I wound up going to a counseling thing, and I met this young man from New York City. He's a basketball player. Let's just say he's early on in his faith journey. And he uses very colorful language. He's very creative with his adjectives. And so, we did this counseling, and we'd have a break. We'd

go out and shoot basketballs. So we kind of connected. And toward the end of the week, you know, he'd make comments and stuff. But toward the end of the week, we did this thing where we just encourage one another. And kind of sat in a circle and you to just a kind word or affirmation. And he came up behind me. I could tell it was him, primarily by his opening statement, which I'll edit. "Hey Jamie, I could still kick your butt at basketball anytime. But I want you to know something. I've watched you. You're kind with people. When will you start being kind to yourself?"

I don't know if you're like me. I was pretty good at giving compassion to other people, but not real good at letting myself be loved. And if you were to ask me, Jamie what's your other big takeaway from these poets and saints? It's that not only with a broken people, but each one of these people they learned how to let themselves be loved. You might go, well everybody wants to be loved. But it's another thing entirely to let yourself be loved. It's really vulnerable to say I'm not going to make it God, unless you're real and unless you're there.

And so, the first takeaway for me was to know that I am adored. And I want to speak a truth out to you today. And you may or may not be able to absorb this based on where you are in your journey, but I just want to tell you something. I want you to hear it from a fellow brother in the faith. You are loved. You are adored. There's no one else like you, you're an endangered species. God created you as one of a kind.

And the very thing you might be running from, the shame, the struggle. Maybe it's something, it could be years ago. I was bringing up shame from

like years ago. There's regrets that lock you up. It could be from two days ago, could be from months ago, whatever the thing is. But can I just tell you this. It doesn't matter. On your best day, you're not good enough for God, and on your worst day, you're not farther than His reach. If you will just let yourself be loved where you are, there is a healing ointment that will pour over your soul.

I want to read a verse to you from Zephaniah chapter 3:17. And here are the three lines about God. He will rejoice over you with gladness. The God of the universe rejoicing over you. He will quiet you by his love. When I was all amped up in my anxiety, sometimes that was about it. The only thing that could get me quiet and still was His love.

And let me tell you what happens if you sit in His love. If you do this long enough, it may take you weeks, may take you months, may take you years. But I promise this is true. It's a scriptural truth. And I was the subjective truth. Like, I can tell you, I experienced this. If you sit quieted by his love, he will exalt over you with loud singing. The God of the universe singing out over you. For those of you that are C.S. Lewis fans, go read *The Magician's Nephew*, and listen to the creation narrative in *The Magician's Nephew*. It's just beautifully written. And it's this picture of the God of the universe singing out over his creation. Why is he singing out over his creation? Because you are worth it. Because you are beautiful.

And know this: God does not delete our stories; he redeems them.

Whatever the thing is in your story that you wish was gone, you wish it wasn't there, and it keeps creeping up. And you go, oh God, take this away,

or I wish it never happened. Whatever was done to you or whatever you did that get you locked up, can I tell you this? God says it's actually there for a reason, and I create beauty from ashes. And I will take that thing that was awful. Yes, it was awful. Yes, you are victimized. Or yes, you were the perpetrator. But I'm gonna take it and make it good, because that's what I do. I've been doing it for all creation. He's the restorer of all things.

Francis seem to worked something out in that darkness, because he emerges from that hole a different person. He comes out of the womb of the earth and has a new birth of sorts. There's something about him, he's changed. While he's been in the hole, his father has set up a trial for him. He's called the church together, he wants a trial. He wants to shame his son publicly and get everything that his son has. Whatever money, whatever he's taken. And so he calls this trial. Francis comes out of the hole. There's a bishop and a priest waiting for him. They march him into the trial.

Before the trial even begins, Francis sees his father. Francis has the money bag from the church that he had originally given that they had not used, so he kept it. He sees his father. He walks directly to his father. Before the trial even begins. He walks up to him and said, here this is what you want. It's yours. He takes off his tunic - which was all he was wearing, by the way - and he takes that off and puts it in his hands, too. He said, there. Everything you've ever given me, it is back to you. You no longer own me, and I no longer will respond to your expectations. I have given my life over to another Father. And he has saved me and rescued me.

By the way, the priest quickly takes his mantle off and wraps it around Francis. And there's a lot of metaphor in all this. There's a mantle being placed from another man. In his truly exposed before his father, he actually finds new life. And in that moment, his biographer tells us, he runs out of the church. It's winter. It's 20 degrees, there's two feet of snow on the ground. He just takes off, and he goes singing, dancing, talking to animals for about 20 miles, running through the snow in a cape!

I got to tell you something. When you let go of that thing that's holding you back, you stop striving to try and fix it on your own, you stop trying to crush it, suppress it, make it go away. But you go, God, I'm just loved, irrelevant to my brokenness. I'm loved. Your grace is sufficient. And I can be quieted by Your love, and listen to You sing over me. Because my story every day is being redeemed.

Romans 8:28. Do you know this verse? And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose. God's not finished with you. He's not finished with me. I'm recovering, I'm repairing, and finding my way. I'm trusting my Father like never before. And I encourage you, if you've never laid it down and given it all to him, would you today? Would you pray with me?

Father, for some people that word is warm. There's a kindness wrapped around it. For some people though, it's a hard word. Thank you that you redeem words. Would you remind someone here today that what they thought a father was was a misperception of truth. The human being that was their parent didn't understand what it meant to really be a loving

father. For that one person who this word is tough, would you redeem the word for them today? And would you show, like you did for Francis, would you show them that You are this eternal, loving, creative God? And you haven't stopped being creative. You keep taking our lives and refashioning them.

And for that person here today who just needs hope. When life feels bleak, and they haven't achieved their dreams, or their goals, or the stuff, or the thing, and they look in the mirror, and they're endlessly frustrated or sad or angry or broken, would you just remind them, Father, today who they are in this moment is enough to be loved by You. That's what it means for a loving father to love a child. We're not meant to perform; we're meant to be present.

So Father, show us how to access Your love, and just let your Spirit sing over us and empower us. God, that as we walk, we would walk as the saints that we are, your children. And know that we're just conduits of love. Just conduits. Love and grace. Every good and perfect thing is from above. It comes from You. Take the pressure off for us to perform and allow us to just be. Thank you for the great example of your Son. Thank you for loving us first. Show us how to love You in return. In Jesus' name, amen.