

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

God Makes All Things New

Ashley Stevens

Hi. I'm Ashley Stevens from Mountains Unmoved, and I look forward to talking to you today about how God can use the hardest parts and the darkest parts of our story for good. About how He truly does make all things new. But before I begin, let's open in prayer.

In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. God, I lift up anyone walking through a hard season, I lift up anyone that has wounds that they're still waiting to be healed, and I lift up anyone that's still just yearning to find some small ounce of good in a hard chapter that they've walked through. And I just pray that my words today, that my story would give them hope that You truly do make all things new in Your timing. It's in Your name I pray. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the hardest days of my life was the day we had scheduled to get married. And I know that's a dark way to start off my talk today, but I also know that we've all walked through dark days. We all have days that we wish had never happened, or wish it happened differently. I don't think you'd be listening to this talk and this retreat if that weren't the case. But, for me, that day was May 16th, 2009, and on that day we had booked the church, we had booked the reception hall, we had asked the bridal party, and put together an invitation list. We had even ordered our save the date cards for May 16th. But instead on that day, I lived across the country from my fiancé. Instead on that day, I was in my fifth month of therapy. I had gotten into a very serious accident just three weeks after we got engaged, and I was in month five of battling, battling to get back to the girl that could return to work, could return to drive, and could return to get married. That day was hard.

That night, we went to my hometown church, and we went to the Adoration Chapel. And as we were kneeling in prayer that night, I sobbed. I am not a crier. There are very few times in my life that I have sobbed. But that night I was so overcome with grief, I was angry, angry that I wasn't walking down the aisle, angry that we still had yet to reschedule our wedding day. And that night, I began to question my worth. I looked different - after the accident my face was partially paralyzed. I heard different - this ear went deaf soon after the accident. My handwriting was different - a stroke impaired the use of my dominant hand. And I didn't feel like the same girl that I was six months before, when he had got down on one knee. And I didn't feel like I was the woman that he loved when he had asked me to marry him.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

And after I ran out of the chapel that night, my fiancé caught up with me. And once I got composure, he grabbed my hand, and that night he said “Ashley, I love you more today than I did the day I proposed. I want to marry you more today than when I asked you to marry me. And that’s because I’ve seen you fight to recover, I’ve seen you have hope in the future, I’ve seen you trust God with this and, sometimes begrudgingly, still know that eventually He will use it for good. And that’s the woman that I asked to marry me. That’s the woman, with a steadfast faith, that I want to mother our future children. And today is not the day that we’re getting married, but as soon as it makes sense, as soon as you return back to work, and as soon as you start driving again, as soon as you return to life as we knew it, then we’ll get married.” And while those words didn’t make that night easy, they gave me hope. They gave me hope that someday, not that day, but someday this beautiful wedding we had planned, and ordered flowers for, and booked a DJ for, someday that beautiful wedding would come to be.

I learned recently about the life of an oyster. It relates, I promise. But I learned that the life of an oyster involves a lot of pain. Sand and sediment and debris slip under its shell, and it causes pain to the oyster’s system, it agitates the oyster. But there are chemicals that God placed inside the oyster that coats the trash, coats the debris, and turns it into something beautiful. God takes the pain of the oyster and turns it into a pearl. He turns it into something beautiful. And in the same way, He takes our pain, He takes our hard days, like that May 16th, and He turns it into something beautiful. There are plenty of stories about that in the scripture, of God redeeming suffering, of God fighting for His people, of God making what seems hopeless into something good.

The story that comes to mind today is the story of Joseph in Genesis. And in Genesis 50, he’s reunited with his brothers. And he looks at his brothers, the same brothers that had sold him into slavery out of jealousy, and he looks at his brothers and he says “You meant evil for me, but God meant it for good.” And in that verse, the word “meant” is Hebrew for the word “wove.” And that day, he was looking at his brothers that had basically thrown him under the bus and he said “You tried to weave evil into my story, but I gave those tattered threads, those broken, ripped threads of hate, and deceit, and abandonment, and jealousy, and anger, I gave them all to God, my Father. And God rewove those tattered threads into something beautiful.” When he said that to his brothers that day, it was after 22 years, 22 years from seeing his brothers last.

And that speaks to me, because sometimes healing comes in layers. Sometimes it doesn’t happen overnight, and it didn’t for Joseph. In those 22 years, he was in prison, held captive in Egypt. And that was a big chunk of his life, that was a big era, 22 years of his story. But during those years he began to interpret fellow

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

prisoners' dreams, and he interpreted them accurately. And after doing that for several prisoners, the Pharaoh, the leader of Egypt, got word.

And after one night when the Pharaoh had a dream he didn't really understand and couldn't interpret, he summoned Joseph out of prison. And Joseph, after speaking to the Pharaoh, interpreted and explained what his dream meant accurately. And the Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph that day that he named him, he appointed him the second in command over all of Egypt. So on that day when he saw his brothers, when he reunited with him that 22 years before had sold him into slavery, he was able to see how God had reworked his story into good.

Brad and I, my fiancé at the time, for us it took a year. It took an entire year after the accident to reweave our story into good. We decided to get married on the one year anniversary of the accident for that purpose. We wanted to redeem the day, we wanted to, every December 12th, to look back and remember the most joyful day of our life, the most beautiful day of our life, rather than the hardest. And on that day, as I walked down the aisle arm-in-arm with my dad, as I walked through the countless people that had prayed for us and visited us, that had called us, brought us meals, offered homes when people came to visit. As I walked through the people that had helped us reweave our story, reweave my recovery into something good, it was beautiful. And it was a beautiful reminder that God can make the hardest parts and the darkest days and parts of our story into something good.

I don't know where you're at today in your story. I don't know if you're walking through the hard, or if you're 22 years away from the hard, or one year, as in my case. But wherever you're at, I want to encourage you that God is not finished with you yet. That no matter how tattered your threads are that you're handing Him, hand it to Him anyways. No matter if your threads are of loss, or of betrayal, or of deception, like Joseph, of the unknown; whatever your threads are, hand it to our good God, our loving God, that wills your good, that wills your happiness, and wills your peace, and wills those things that you had dreamed of before the hard chapter.

We've been blessed with three girls. We've been blessed with the family that we pictured and envisioned on that night we got engaged. And there were many points in my recovery that we didn't even know if that would be feasible, but God reworked our story into good, and He will rework your story, your hard days, your tattered threads into something beautiful. Into a pearl. There is no part of your story that He cannot redefine. There is nothing, absolutely nothing too broken for God to redeem and to reweave into something beautiful.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Let's close in prayer. *In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. God, I thank You for Your redemption, and I thank You for Your will for good, and I thank You for how You long to bring us into fullness with You, You long to bring us into joy. And I just pray for greater patience, for greater trust in Your plan, in Your story, in Your redemption for any one of us walking through our hard season. I ask this in Your name. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*