

## The Ruin of Hurt

### TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, this is a surprise, isn't it? As much for me as it is for you. Interestingly, five weeks ago, when I was rostering Kids Ministry, I thought I'll give myself a week off today.

But actually, what a privilege it is to bring the words that Jonathan has prepared to us this morning. So let's pray. Heavenly Father, your presence is here with us.

Lord, together we've worshipped and we've prayed and we've fellowshiped. And now we come under your word, Lord, and we ask for your help. Father, may it be real to our hearts.

May you speak to us in your gentle, still voice. We commit this time now to you, Lord. Amen.

The Burke and Wills expedition, led by Robert O'Hara Burke and John William Wills, was a significant event in Australian exploration history.

Commencing in August 1860 from Melbourne, the expedition aimed to traverse the continent from south to north, specifically targeting the Gulf of Carpentaria. After reaching the Gulf in February 1861, the group faced a dire situation on the way home.

Months into the trip, with supplies running out, Burke, Wills and another member, John King, staggered back into Cooper Creek, starving and exhausted.

Beneath a tree marked with the word dig, they found some food and a message, and they faced an important choice. They could retrace the road they knew towards Menindee, or they could head across unknown country toward a station 240 kilometres away.

Burke chose the unknown road, but its destination had an eerie name, Mount Hopeless. The expedition chose to head for Mount Hopeless. They never reached it.

Burke and Wills died, with John King the only survivor. They didn't begin their journey intending to ruin their lives. They began with ambition, confidence and urgency.

But a succession of seemingly reasonable decisions carried them further and further down a road that led to their death. Proverbs 14-12 says, There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death.

And in Matthew, we find the words in Matthew 7, 13 and 14, enter through the narrow gate. Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life. So how do intelligent, sincere and courageous people end up on the road to Mount Hopeless?

Usually not through one spectacular act of foolishness, but through a succession of smaller choices.

Impatience over wisdom, ambition over council, confidence over humility, urgency over preparation, another step and then another step down the wrong road. Nobody wakes up one morning and says, today I'm going to ruin my life.

We take the road that appears to promise something good. Over the next three weeks with different sermons, morning and evening, we'll be covering six roads to ruin. Anger, hurt, success, doubt, power and desire.

Anger promises justice. Hurt promises protection. Success promises significance.

Doubt promises freedom. Power promises control. Desire promises fulfilment.

But every road must ultimately judged, not only by the promise at its entrance, but by the destination at its end. You might have noticed that the stage looks a bit different today.

The red ball is meant to represent the apple of temptation that is in our series logo. Genesis begins with two doorways to travel through. Two choices, obedience or disobedience.

In the background is the shadow of the cross. The way back home, the narrow way that leads to life. So this morning we begin with Hurt.

Hurt brings us to a fork in the road. The one road is difficult and narrow. It involves acknowledging the wound, grieving honestly, seeking wise help, establishing healthy boundaries, forgiving without pretending, and trusting God with justice.

The other road may initially feel more protective, rehearsing the offence, building walls, refusing to trust, making the offender pay, withdrawing from community, allowing pain to become identity.

The wound may not have been your choice, but the wound will try to choose your road. Hurt. Out of all of the roads to ruin, hurt is perhaps the most universally applicable because we've all been hurt.

And hurt is sometimes hard to acknowledge because it can feel weak to say, You hurt me. One of our kids famously said to another one, Mom, he hurt my feelings. Mom, what are feelings?

But we know when we're feeling pain, don't we? We know when we're feeling frustration and even anger, but often it's hard to articulate that we can be feeling hurt. But it's important to acknowledge hurt.

And I think it needs particularly sensitive treatment because being hurt is not sinful. The danger comes when unhealed hurt becomes the lens through which we see every person, relationship and circumstance.

Here's a blueprint of this, The Road to Ruin. Pain becomes bitterness, withdrawal, suspicion or victimhood. The deception is that if I hold on to this pain, I can protect myself from being hurt again.

The destination, isolation and a life increasingly controlled by what someone else did. The narrow way though, to lament its honest community, its healing, forgiveness and allowing Christ, not the wound to define us.

Our text for Hurt this morning is Hebrews 12, 14 and 15. Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. Our second text this morning is a story.

It's found in Genesis and it's about one of the key characters we find in the Old Testament. His name is Joseph. Joseph grew up in a very dysfunctional family.

He was the 11th son of 12. He didn't choose his family, he was just born in it. For some reason, something about Joseph strikes a chord in his father's, Jacob's heart.

Joseph arrived late to Jacob's beloved wife Rachel. All this attention turns out to be a curse for Joseph rather than a blessing. The special coat that he receives puts a target of abuse on his back from his brothers.

Joseph is just 17 and he starts having dreams, dreams about the future. He didn't ask for them, they just came. And they spoke of his own greatness.

One day, his brothers turned against him, they bashed him and almost murdered him, and they left him in a pit in the ground. Then they sit around and have lunch while Joseph listens on.

A travelling group of traders come by, and the brothers sell Joseph to them as a slave. Then the brothers go and tell their dad that Joseph was killed by a wild animal. The story goes that Joseph gets bought by a wealthy man named Potiphar.

Joseph does well and grows in responsibility, but then Potiphar's wife takes a liking to young Joseph, and after he rejects her advances, she sets him up to be disgraced before her husband, as though he actually pushed himself upon her.

Joseph is promptly arrested and thrown into jail. While Joseph is in jail, he interprets the dreams for two other prisoners, and as one of them is released, Joseph says, please remember me.

The guy forgets Joseph, and for two years, and then finally comes to get him to help solve a dream that the Pharaoh had been given.

Finally, as Joseph comes out of prison, he interprets the Pharaoh's dream, and is thrust to a place of prominence in Egypt, in fact, second only to Pharaoh.

Now, when you've been through all of that, what you do now that you've got the power to get even? I reckon I might have sat down and started to make a list. Hmm, chariot driver, I've got a couple of stops to make.

Firstly, with this squadron of soldiers, I'm going back to my brothers. Then I need to go and see Mrs. Potiphar, and then that scoundrel of a prisoner, I helped.

But Joseph does none of these things. He actually forgives. And if you know the story, the 11 brothers end up coming to him during the famine, and they bow down to him.

And Joseph shows mercy, which ultimately saves the people of Israel. Joseph's refusal to live in bitterness had far-reaching ramifications beyond his own little life. God was using him to release blessing on the line of Messiah.

But he had to forgive for it to happen. So what do we do? Number one, hurt.

Hurt must be acknowledged. What happened mattered. Joseph forgave, but he never pretended that what happened was insignificant.

He was able to hold two truths together. He said, what you did to me was genuinely evil. In Genesis 50, 20, it says, you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.

Joseph didn't say, it doesn't matter or it all worked out, so forget about it. He names their intention, you meant harm. In Genesis 42, his brothers themselves remember Joseph's distress when he begged them for his life.

Joseph had suffered terribly. In verse 21, it says, they said to one another, surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen.

That's why this distress has come on us. In Genesis 42, verse 24, Joseph turns away from them and weeps. The pain for Joseph is still there, years later, and it's real.

Verse 24, he turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

Genesis 45, 1 and 2, when Joseph finally reveals himself, he weeps so loudly the Egyptians hear him. It says in 45, verse 4, he says plainly, I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt. He names what had happened.

As we said before, Genesis 50, verse 20, you intended to harm me. Healing doesn't begin with it was nothing. Healing begins with it happened, it hurt and it mattered.

And then Joseph takes the extraordinary next step, but what happened to me will not have the final word over me. Hurt must be acknowledged. Number two, offence must be recognised.

The wound is offering me a road. The road offered by hurt and offence is I will never trust again. I will make them pay.

I will tell everyone what they did. I will withdraw before anyone hurts me again. I believe, I will believe my bitterness is justified.

Believe I cannot be free until they apologise. I will believe this wound is now who I am. The enemy doesn't need to cause the original wound, but he can use the wound as an invitation into bitterness, isolation and revenge.

This is the road to ruin. Proverbs might sound a little over the top, but it's really not. Holding on to hurt can lead to death.

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death. And whether that's blood pressure and stress or the death of a relationship, hurt often leads to death. Number two, offence must be recognised.

Onto three, bitterness must be uprooted. I will not allow yesterday's pain to poison tomorrow's relationships. Hebrews says, see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Have you noticed bitterness never remains contained? We think it can just be our little painful and pain-filled secret, but it does spill out into our lives.

It enters our future relationships, marriages, parenting, leadership, friendships, church community, our understanding of God. A person wounded by one authority figure may distrust all authority.

Someone betrayed in one relationship may interrogate every future relationship through the betrayal. Unhealed pain does not remain in the past. It keeps interpreting the present.

As we might imagine, the way to dig out roots of bitterness that have come from hurts is forgiveness. Jesus taught us how to forgive. But he wasn't just a teacher, was he?

He's the saviour of the world. He's the saviour because he lived out what he taught. He forgave and he gave his life as proof of his forgiveness.

It's important to realise that Jesus is the wounded saviour. He was betrayed by Judas. He was abandoned by his friends.

He was falsely accused. He was mocked, struck, publicly humiliated. And he was crucified unjustly.

1 Peter 2, 23 says that when he suffered, he did not retaliate, but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. Jesus said, Enter through the narrow gate. Small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads to life.

On the narrow way, Jesus carries the wound without becoming ruled by it. That's top shelf truth, don't you think? They sound like John O's words, don't they?

Jesus carried the wound, carries the wound without becoming ruled by it. Jesus neither denied the evil nor became like those who inflicted it. Bitterness must be uprooted through forgiveness.

But there are blockages to forgiveness. So what stops us from forgiving? Firstly, pride.

Pride is a huge obstacle to granting forgiveness. If we do, we can feel as though we're weak. In actual fact, nothing makes us stronger than being like Christ.

Number two, desire for vengeance or justice. God says it's his prerogative to take revenge, not ours. Number three, a lack of contrition on the part of the offender.

It's hard to forgive when the offender appears to show no signs of remorse. But our freedom to forgive cannot be bound by their continuing sin. Number four, the need for pain release.

Often, we don't want to forgive because wallowing in the bitterness becomes almost an anesthetic to the pain, but it only takes us deeper. Number five, spiritual strongholds.

If you have held on to grudges for a long time, it's highly unlikely that there are not specific demons assigned to you individually.

If you have a hunch that there might be some sort of demonic stronghold of unforgiveness, bitterness, rage, jealousy, resentfulness, you should talk to someone. We can pray with you and set you free in the name and the power of Jesus.

Number six, a reluctance to ask for forgiveness ourselves. The quickest way to move into the power of forgiveness is to not only forgive others, but to search your own heart and ask for forgiveness yourself from others.

Paul said in Colossians, in Chapter 3, verse 13, bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another, forgive as the Lord forgave you. Bitterness must be uprooted. Number four, the offender must be released.

I surrender repayment and vengeance to God. In Genesis 50, verse 19, when Joseph's brothers fear that he will finally take revenge after Jacob dies, Joseph says, don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?

Genesis 50, verse 19. That is Joseph releasing his right to vengeance, isn't it? In essence, Joseph is saying, I will not make myself your judge.

I will leave the judgment with God. Joseph has decided, I surrender repayment and vengeance to God. Joseph had the power, the opportunity, and arguably the human justification to make them pay.

But he refused. He says, you owe me, but I am not going to spend my life collecting the debt. Joseph didn't deny the debt.

He surrendered the right to personally collect it. Romans 12, 19 says, do not take revenge. Leave room for God's wrath.

Remember, when we forgive, we are forgiving the guilty. If they weren't guilty, you wouldn't be forgiving them. At times, this can be a very powerful tool in helping a person come to a place of forgiveness.

Try and see the perpetrator of the offence as a human being and not something else. When people hurt us badly, we can dehumanise them over time. We make them almost monster-like.

But Jesus didn't die for monsters. He died for humans. And if a human being has hurt you, you've got to see them as fallen human beings who have been hurt themselves.

Forgiveness is a choice of the will. Simple as that. God tells us to do it.

As hard as it is to do, we're told to do it so that we would be free. In 2003 at Blue Johns Canyon, Utah, when climber Aaron Ralston had his hand trapped under a 360 kilogram boulder, there weren't many choices for him to make.

He would die from starvation or dehydration. But he could also die from poisoning. His hand was crushed and had died, and this would ultimately poison his bloodstream and kill him through toxicity.

If you remember the story, he decided to act in favour of life, and he obeyed what his brain said had to be done. He cut off his own hand. Sometimes injuries we sustain in life can be a bit like that.

We need to obey God's rules. Cut off the injury by forgiving. You will carry the scar, but you get to walk away from the disaster and live.

Who's living with a 360 kilogram boulder on their hand? Number five, identity must be reclaimed. I am not merely what happened to me.

I am who Christ says I am. Hurt can become something that happened to us, or it can become the thing that tells us who we are. Joseph had every reason to build an identity around the wound.

I am the rejected brother. I am the one they hated. I am the one who was betrayed.

I am the slave. I am the falsely accused prisoner. All of those things were true descriptions of what had happened to him.

But Joseph never allowed them to become the deepest truth about who he was. The repeated frame in his story is, the Lord was with Joseph, Genesis 39 verse 2, and then in 21 and 23.

That is his deepest identity, not the betrayed one, but the one with whom God is present. Then in Genesis 45 verse 8, Joseph can even reinterpret his story. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

He's not denying their responsibility. He's already said, you sold me, but he refuses to let their action become the controlling definition of his life. Do you see that identity must be reclaimed?

What happened to me is part of my story, but it's not my identity. And for us, in Christ, I may have been rejected, but I am not the rejected one. I may have been betrayed, but I am not the betrayed one.

I may have been abused, abandoned, overlooked or wounded, but those things do not get naming rights over my life. Christ does. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.

The old has gone. The new is here. Identity must be reclaimed.

I am not merely what happened to me. I am a new creation in Christ. Joseph gives us the Old Testament picture.

His brothers wounded him, but they did not get the final word over who he became. Paul gives us the Christian reality. In Christ, the deepest truth about me is not my wound, my failure, my rejection, or my past.

It is that I belong to Christ and I have been made new. Hurt becomes a road to ruin when pain becomes identity. Offence becomes entitlement.

Protection becomes imprisonment. And bitterness becomes our way of life. The narrow way is to bring the wound to Jesus, to release vengeance to God, to receive a new identity, and to walk toward freedom.

Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life. And we can walk this road. Amen?

This is the road that we can walk. Let's pray as the band comes up. Lord Jesus, this morning, we've touched on some potentially deep and painful consequences of past hurts.

Lord, at times they've led us along a road to ruin. But Father, in your quiet, still voice, would you give us the courage to face our hurt and reframe it with our identity in Christ? Thank you that we are made a new creation in you.

Lord Jesus, we need your help. Holy Spirit, we ask that you would do a work in our hearts. And Father, we trust in your goodness.

And we thank you for this challenge this morning. In your mighty name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.