

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome. Take a breath. You are in the right place.
- B. If you have not heard, last week, we made a big announcement. We announced that we have changed the name of our church. Neighborhood Church is now Pathway Church.
- C. No need to panic.
- D. We are not changing our mission, our teachings, our beliefs, our leadership, or our denomination. We are not changing anything that is precious about our church. We are not changing our services. We're not changing our programs.
- E. Just our name. Pathway is more in line with what we do... the Grace Pathway... so Pathway is who we are.
- F. Last weekend, I went into detail about reasons why we made this change. I really encourage you to watch that message, or read that message, or listen to that message.
- G. Also... today is a huge weekend for us. It is Baptism Weekend!
- H. If you are being baptized today, we are super happy for you. And if you are here today because somebody you know and love is being baptized, we are so happy you are here.
- I. This weekend, across all our services, we have 29 men and women who are being baptized, so that's awesome.
- J. So there's a lot going on.
- K. But no matter how much is going on, there is one thing that stays top priority. We never want anything to crowd out time in God's Word.
- L. So, if you have a Bible, you can open it to Ezra 4:6, and if you don't have a Bible, no worries, you can follow along on the screens.
- M. Please think with me today on the topic of being:
 - 1. *Derailed.*

II. On the Rails

- A. Okay... settle in for a story.
 - 1. Once upon a time, long ago, in a real place, and a real time, there was a very special land. And there was a nation in that land. The nation was free. The nation was prosperous. The nation was good.
 - 2. But the people began to take good things for granted.
 - 3. They forgot where their blessings came from.
 - 4. They forgot their blessings came from God.
 - 5. And the biggest thing they forgot is that their blessings were part of a relationship they had with God.
 - 6. When they exited the relationship, the blessings exited their lives.
 - a) Sadly, it's a very common story, not just for nations, but for marriages, and for families, and for individuals too.
- B. Six hundred years before Christ, the people of God exited their relationship with God. Because of this, they exited their blessings too. Their nation fell. Their city was destroyed. Their glorious temple that had stood for 500 years was flattened. And for seventy years, they were forced into exile, forced out of the promised land. They raised their children, and their children's children, in exile.
- C. But now, by the time of this book called Ezra, things have changed. The people have turned their hearts back to God. And God has turned the heart of the ruling empire of Persia, to allow God's people to go back home.
- D. The exile is over.
- E. This is good news. The people return to the promised land in waves. The first wave numbered 47,000 people.
- F. Home at last. Back in the place of God's blessings.
- G. All of this is great.
- H. The first order of business is clear. They are to rebuild the temple that was leveled so many years ago.
- I. So, it's time to rebuild the temple.
- J. It's a really big deal. They gather the nation. They set up the professional orchestra, and line up the professional choirs. And they lay the foundation of the Temple of God with huge fanfare and joy.
 - 1. *When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. (Ezra 3:10, 11)*
- K. This is an epic moment. It's not just they are rebuilding their temple. No. It's deeper than that.
 - 1. They are basically rebuilding their whole lives with God.

- a) Their physical exile is over, and their spiritual exile is over too.
- L. And it's awesome. Celebration. And joy. And feasting. The voice of celebration—and yes, the voice of weeping—rises up over this land that has been barren for so long.
- M. It's a great day for the people of God.
- N. And here's the principle, the first lesson for us today:
 - 1. *Lesson 1: When you restore your relationship with God, the blessings of that relationship come back to you too.*
 - a) *You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalms 16:11)*
 - b) *For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly. (Psalms 84:11)*
 - c) *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)*
 - 2. God and goodness go together. That doesn't mean you will have no suffering. It doesn't mean freedom from pain. Walking with God doesn't mean you will be healthy all the time or wealthy all the time.
 - 3. What it means is your soul will possess a health that doctors can't give you and a wealth that money can't buy.
 - 4. And that is what God's people were rebuilding.
 - 5. And that is why they sang for joy. This was an awesome day.
 - 6. And it lasted for about a minute and a half.
 - 7. Know why? The guys from the building permit office showed up.
- III. Derailed by External Forces
 - A. I am not kidding you.
 - B. The neighbors are ticked off. They don't want the Temple getting built again, and they don't want the Jews to build it. No way. Not in my neighborhood. Not in my backyard.
 - C. So these neighbors draft a complaint. They hire lawyers and draft a complaint. They send the complaint off to the head office.
 - D. And the head office replies. The king sends back a "stop work" order.
 - 1. *Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings? (Ezra 4:21, 22)*
 - E. So the guys from the permit office show up. "You don't have a permit to rebuild this temple. You have to stop or else." Petty little tyrants.
 - 1. *Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. (Ezra 4:23, 24)*
 - F. They will stop work on the temple for around two years.
 - G. It seems to be a fact of life that as soon as you try to get back on track with God, something's going to happen to derail everything.
 - 1. *Lesson 2: The world will always give you reasons to put off rebuilding your life with God.*
 - a) *"In the world you will have tribulation..." (John 16:33)*
 - 2. There's always something to derail you.
 - a) You decide, I'm going back to church, and you get sick. Or your kids get sick. Or that's the morning your dog gets sick on your very best rug.
 - b) You decide, I'm going to get up early and follow an online Bible reading plan, and PG&E turns off your power.
 - c) You determine, I'm going to Celebrate Recovery. I've got to get victory over these problems... but just when you're ready to head out, you have a flat tire, and no spare in the trunk.
 - d) You say, I'm going to get baptized. I'm going to tell the world I'm a Christian... but you're scared, or the right person can't be there, or you tell yourself you're saved without it (which is true, but that's not the point).
 - 3. There's always something.
 - H. There are two sets forces in your life that resist your life with God. One is internal, one is external.
 - I. The external forces come from the dark side. The simplest step of faith is a threat to the powers of darkness. When you resolve to turn your life around, the devil resolves to turn your life upside down.
 - J. We forget that we live in a spiritual universe. We forget that there is fierce opposition.
 - 1. C.S. Lewis said, "The enemy will not see you vanish into God's company without an effort to reclaim you."

2. Jesus told Peter, "Satan has desired to sift you like wheat."
 3. Paul told us all to put on the armor of God that you may stand against the wiles of the devil.
 4. Peter said, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."* (1 Peter 5:8)
- K. I believe that's all real.
- L. And when you move toward God, the darkness of the world pushes back.
- M. But... here's the important thing.
1. *Lesson 3: The grace of God in you is mightier than the combined evil of the cosmos.*
- N. And when you go to step into a deeper walk with your Savior and your friend, all the power of heaven comes to your aid.
- O. Just like it did for the people of God so long ago.
1. God says, *"My grace is sufficient for you..."* and there never was a day, and there never was a step you needed to take, where that wasn't true.
 2. *Lesson 4: God's grace is always more than enough.*
- P. When they were stopped from building the temple, it wasn't just the enemies of the Jews, it was the enemies of God at work.
- Q. And the funny thing is, God's people actually had a permit.
1. They actually had legal permission to build the temple... the permit came from the king himself. It was his idea!
 2. Even more, that same king commanded that the whole project be paid for by the government's purse!
- R. So why did they stop? They stopped because the forces that derail you aren't all external.
- IV. Derailed by Internal Forces
- A. *Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. (Ezra 5:1)*
- B. Why did they stop building the temple, really??
- C. Their spiritual lives were derailed because problems on the outside were bigger than their determination on the inside.
- D. Yes, they could point to their excuses... opposition, enemies, permit office, flat tires, blah, blah, blah.
- E. But the real reason they stopped building is because they simply weren't motivated enough.
- F. How do we know?
- G. Because God raised up two prophets to give his people a loving whack upside the head.
- H. And they said, "You guys, the only thing stopping you from rebuilding your life with God is you."
- I. If you open your Bible to the book of Ezra, it's like you can slip in two other books. You slip in the book of the prophet Haggai, and you can slip in the book of the prophet Zechariah. You can also slip in the notes from the permit office, and documents from the king. All of these ancient documents are preserved in this book of Ezra.
- J. So, here are all the people, gathering together, to look at the unbuilt temple. Up steps a prophet, a preacher, named Haggai. Here is his message:
1. *On August 29 of the second year of King Darius's reign, the Lord gave a message through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. "This is what the Lord Almighty says: The people are saying, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house--the Temple.'" So the Lord sent this message through the prophet Haggai: "Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? This is what the Lord Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! You have planted much but harvested little. You have food to eat, but not enough to fill you up. You have wine to drink, but not enough to satisfy your thirst. You have clothing to wear, but not enough to keep you warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes! "This is what the Lord Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord. (Haggai 1:1-8, NLT)*
- K. Translation:
1. *Lesson 5: The main thing standing between you and an energized life with God is you.*
- L. Because...
1. When God is on the sidelines, you feel like you're just spinning your wheels.
 2. When God is on the sidelines, you're working so hard, and satisfied so little.
 3. When God is on the sidelines, the riches of grace that could be yours, and actually are yours, feel a million miles away.
- M. They stopped building the temple.
- N. They clicked "pause" on their lives with God.
1. Yes, they had reasons.

2. Yes, they had opposition.
3. Yes, they had hassles and troubles and problems.
 - a) But all those problems, and troubles, and hassles, and opposition, and reasons were really just excuses.
- O. And the most beautiful thing is this: even when God's people were at their worst, God's love for them never even flickered.
- P. That's the message of the other prophet here. These verses are too beautiful for me to leave them out.
- Q. Haggai is the stick. Zechariah is the carrot. Zechariah looks at the unbuilt temple from heaven's point of view. What does God say about this? What do the angels say about this?
 1. *And the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. Then the angel said to me, "Shout this message for all to hear: 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: My love for Jerusalem and Mount Zion is passionate and strong. But I am very angry with the other nations that enjoy peace and security. I was only a little angry with my people, but the nations punished them far beyond my intentions. "Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I have returned to show mercy to Jerusalem. My Temple will be rebuilt, says the Lord Almighty, and plans will be made for the reconstruction of Jerusalem.' Say this also: 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: The towns of Israel will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem as his own.'" (Zechariah 1:13-17, NLT)*
- R. Even when you freeze your life with God, and it's your own dumb fault.
 1. God doesn't withdraw his protection.
 2. He doesn't break his promises.
 3. He doesn't take away his grace.
 4. He doesn't erase your destiny.
 5. He doesn't alter your identity.
 6. He doesn't revoke your salvation.
 - a) Because...
 - (1) *Lesson 6: There will never be a failure, sin, situation, or circumstance but that God is eager to resume a walk of fellowship and friendship with you.*
- S. He'll pick up right where you left off.
- T. And he'll even clean up the mess you've made.
- U. He's not the one who has pressed the pause button.
- V. So what happened?
 - A. *So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. (Ezra 5:2)*
 - B. The message of the prophets worked. God's people got back to work. Before they had permission. Before the opposition went away. Before the stop work order was run through a shredder.
 - C. They rose up and began to build the house of God.
 - D. They were derailed for a very long time. But now their lives are back on track.
 - E. They pressed play, and got their lives back together, walking with God once again.
 1. *Lesson 7: If you find yourself living far from God, today would be the perfect day to bring your heart back home to him.*
- VI. Conclusion
 - A. Today, we have baptisms. Baptism is a sign of salvation. It does not save. It does not wash away your sins.
 - B. Jesus saves. Jesus, crucified and risen again, washes away your sins. And simply believing in him to do that is all God calls you to do.
 - C. What baptism does is to declare to the world, in a very specific way, that a person is saved. That you do belong to God, and he belongs to you forever.
 - D. I would simply finish today by saying, life with God is a journey.
 - E. If you have never begun that journey, you can. You can be saved today. You can tell God, in the privacy of your own heart, that you are believing in Jesus as your Savior today.
 - F. But maybe you've already done that. Maybe that happened a long, long time ago. And the trail of your life has been anything but close to the heart of God.
 - G. Won't you come back to God today?
 - H. Won't you come back to the one whose love has never wavered?
 - I. Won't you bring or restore your friendship with the best friend and only Savior you ever had?
 - J. I hope and pray as you watch these baptisms today, that you will see men and women of all ages who are excited about an everyday life with God — the only life that satisfies your soul.