

I. Independence Day

- A. Before we get into the message, I want to remember this weekend as the birthday of our nation. Happy Independence Day.
- B. A healthy body needs a strong heart. And the cause of liberty in the world needs a strong United States of America.
 - 1. There is no other nation that has stood against tyranny like the United States of America.
 - 2. There is no other nation that recognizes the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
 - 3. There is no other nation, that in its founding, recognizes those rights as coming from God himself.
- C. The government does not make you free; God does. And so the United States Government cannot, should not, and must not take away your freedoms.
- D. My word to every person in the government — no matter what station, what office, or at what level — you must be committed to protecting the rights and freedoms of every citizen of the United States. If you work for any government office with any power over any people, lean into liberty. Lean into a yes for the people that you serve. And then serve them well.
- E. In our nation, as it was founded, liberty is the highest value. Not security. Liberty. Not wealth. Liberty. The first job of every person in government is not to guard our safety, but to protect our liberty. That is the best way for us to be free to do good in the world.
- F. The alternative to liberty is chains and slavery. Obedience to masters. Tyranny. And the death of hope.
- G. Because of liberty, the good news of Jesus Christ has flowed freely in and from this land. When tyranny comes, the gospel will go underground. Nothing can stop its power, but the gospel flows best in a land that is free.
- H. A healthy body needs a strong heart. And the cause of liberty in the world needs a strong United States of America.
- I. May God bless, save, and heal our land. And may God make us that shining city on a hill — the land of the free and the home of the brave.
- J. Amen.

II. Message

A. Creation

- 1. Scientists can only estimate how many stars there are in the universe. They can't be certain. The reason they can't be certain of the number is because they can't be certain of the size.
- 2. The observable universe stretches about 13.7 billion light years across. That means that the light reaching us today from those stars began traveling an apparent 13.7 billion years ago.
- 3. Using some math, they come up with a size of perhaps 48 billion light years in radius.
- 4. Some astronomers estimate that our galaxy, the Milky Way, has up to 100 billion stars. Others double that number, but it really doesn't matter because they lost me at a billion.
- 5. In 1995, experts pointed a telescope at Ursa Major, looking at a small spot. In that small spot, they found not just isolated stars, but galaxies. Three thousand faint galaxies.
- 6. Then, a few years later, they looked at those 3,000 galaxies using upgraded equipment. Not 3,000 galaxies, but 10,000 galaxies, each with hundreds of billions of stars. One expert has said there are over 10 trillion galaxies in the universe. And if you multiply that by 100 billion stars per galaxy, you get 1 with 24 zeroes after it, and that is considered a gross underestimation, because every time the equipment gets sharper, what we used to think were stars we discover actually are galaxies.
- 7. All I can say is this: My Dad made all that.
- 8. And the cool thing is he made it in a day.
- 9. And the ultra cool thing is that he made it for me, so that I wouldn't get bored in eternity. It is my playground as one of God's kids. I can't wait.
 - a) If God can fling stars and galaxies across the cosmos, like flinging out a handful of sand...
 - b) And if God can create the beauties of a flower...
 - c) The intricacies of a human eyeball...
 - d) The mechanics of a hummingbird wing...
 - e) And enough nerve connections in one human brain to outnumber the stars in the heavens...
- (1) If God can do all that, can't he handle what concerns you today?
- 10. So to get into our paragraph of the Bible today, I'd like you to write down this sentence:
 - a) *Miracles are easy for God.*

III. G.R.I.T.

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood, and to our summer series. Our Series is called:
 - 1. G.R.I.T. Grace Revealed In Trials
- B. We are talking about mental and spiritual and emotional toughness. We are talking about the kind of faith that takes a hit, gets knocked down, tends its wounds, but always gets back up again.

- C. Grit.
- D. Our definition is this:
 - 1. *G.R.I.T. is the spiritual toughness to face the tyrants that would steal your dominion and the faith to crush them with supernatural weapons of grace.*
- E. Because we believe God created us to have this big, free, expansive, life without boundaries... and all these trials come in to shrink you.
- F. Our Mentor here in the School of Grit is a character in the Bible called Elijah. Today, he faces the mother of all trials.
- G. Let's read:
 - 1. *Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. (1 Kings 17:17)*
- H. Nothing worse than this. Nothing more painful. Nothing more heartbreaking. This woman was a widow. She was from a culture that worshipped idols. Elijah the prophet was in hiding. Evil King Ahab painted a target on his back. This widow woman took him in.
- I. And now, after she has housed Elijah for a while, after she has begun to crack open her heart to this new God, this invisible God of Elijah... now, her son dies.
- J. How unspeakably sad!
- K. This is the set up for our verse for today, and it is the set up for the teaching from our verse too.
- L. What is this world? Help me out here... This fallen world is a morally broken what... Pain Machine
 - 1. This fallen world is a morally broken ____.
 - 2. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine.
- M. And we're all stuck in it.
- N. That's why we need Grit, and that's why Elijah is such a great mentor for us. He goes on from grit to grit, from trial to trial, and he does it as a real human. Not a superhero. But a guy who felt everything deep in his gut.
- O. GRIT is the only way to handle life in the pain machine.
- P. Here's the focus for today.
 - 1. The main topic is Grit.
 - 2. The sub-topic is hope.
 - a) And the sub-sub topic is something I introduced last time. Faith-filled self-talk.
 - b) Faith-filled Self-talk. I want to break down our passage of Scripture into five short scripts. Mottoes. Five mottoes that you can use to begin a habit of faith-filled self-talk and fan the flames of hope.

IV. Mottoes to Fan the Flames of Hope

- A. Let's listen to God through the Bible.
- B. *Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?" (1 Kings 17:17, 18)*
 - 1. I understand this response. I am sure I've done this response about a million times. She suffers the ultimate suffering, and she lashes out. She lashes out at Elijah. She lashes out at God.
 - 2. Motto number one:
 - a) *1. God is for me, not against me.*
 - 3. That's your faith-filled self talk. Practice saying that.
 - 4. She connects some dots between her sons' death and her own sin. See that? "You're just here to remind me of my sin, right?"
 - 5. If you are a child of God, then your sins are gone once for all. God will never bring them up against you. He will not punish you for them. He will not punish your children for them. Yes, there might be consequences that you set in motion by your sin. But that's just the natural order of the world playing out.
 - 6. God has said,
 - a) *He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:10-12, NKJV).*
 - 7. You have a once for all forgiveness from God. And the bad stuff in your life is not God punishing you for your sins.
 - a) *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1, NKJV).*
 - b) *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31, NKJV).*
 - 8. Your self-talk will either enlarge your life, or shrink your life. You need to rein it in. Get it under control. Practice the art of faith-filled self-talk.

9. Why did the woman's son die? Not because she did anything wrong. Not because Elijah was out to get her. And most certainly NOT because God was out to get her.
 10. She scapegoated them.
 11. Why did he die? Because this fallen world is a morally broken pain machine and we're stuck in it. That's why.
 12. Please quit blaming God.
- C. *And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. Then he cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?" (1 Kings 17:19, 20)*
1. Elijah has lived with this family for a while. He's grown close to them. He's grown close to this boy. Now, she lashes out at him.
 2. And look at what he does. He doesn't get defensive. He doesn't argue theology. He doesn't do any of that. He is wise enough to know that there's a time to speak, and a time to keep silent.
 3. Instead of talking to her, Elijah talks to God.
 4. And look at what he says. I'm going to read it twice. I'm going to change the word "also" to "indeed" because that's what the Hebrew allows for that word, and it makes more sense.
 - a) O LORD my God, have You indeed brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?
 5. Now, I'm going to read it again, and emphasize a certain word:
 - a) O LORD my God, have YOU indeed brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?
 6. When I teach biblical interpretation at the seminary, I say that your first job is to observe the obvious.
 - a) It's a question.
 - b) It's Elijah's question.
 - c) He's alone with God and with this boy who passed away.
 7. I love this because it is so human. Even though he knows better, he goes upstairs with this little boy's body. He gently lays the boy on his bed. He looks to heaven, and he says, "Was this really you, God?"
 8. It's something I think we all ask, every time trouble comes. Did you cause this, God? Did you permit this, God? Did you allow this, God? Why me, God?
 - a) Here's motto number two:
 - b) *2. The good stuff comes from God; the bad stuff from the devil.*
 9. You know how you get a commercial jingle stuck in your head? You get a mind-lock on it?
 10. That's what we need with this motto. The good stuff comes from God; the bad stuff comes from the devil.
 - a) *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)*
 11. God is not a thief. The devil is. God does not come in to steal, kill, and destroy. The devil does. God comes in — through Jesus and his grace — to give a life that is abundant, and overflowing like the waves of the sea.
 12. God can use evil. God can bring good outcomes out of people's bad actions. God has that power. Only God has that power.
 13. But the devil wants to drive any wedge he can between you and God. He wants you to blame God for troubles in your life. Blame God for bad stuff. That's his constant whisper.
 - a) How could a loving God do this to you? See? God doesn't love you. God can't forgive you. You've gone too far. You've crossed the point of no return. There's no going back. No grace. No forgiveness. And no love. God is less than you think he is. And he's certainly less than he says he is.
 14. It's the devil's favorite lie.
 15. The truth is simple. Whatever insecurities tear at your soul, they do not and cannot come from God.
 16. Here we have this mighty prophet of God. Even he wonders whose fault this is. "God was this you." He's grieving. He's heartbroken. He loved this kid, and cared about his mom.
 17. He wasn't a super man. About 900 years after he lived, the New Testament would say that Elijah was a man "as human as we are" (James 5:17).
 18. "God, did you really do this?"
 19. But he already knew the answer. The good stuff comes from God; the bad stuff from the devil. That's the heart of Grit.
- D. *And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him." (1 Kings 17:21)*
1. Never let your questions erase your hope.
 2. As far as we have in Scripture, no one has ever been raised from the dead before this paragraph in the Bible.
 3. So there's no precedent for this. There's not even a promise for this. Just a man who's willing to ask, and to ask big.
 4. What's the motto?

- a) 3. *With God, there's always hope.*
5. Don't give up. Don't quit. If the devil shuts a door, God opens a window.
 6. This doesn't mean we should pray to raise the dead. Listen, if God calls me home, don't go trying to drag me back down here. I'm happy up there. Don't you go dragging me back here with your prayers.
 7. Let me go, because if I'm in heaven, believe me, I've let you go. I'm gonna fly across the milky way galaxy.
 8. There is no such thing as a hopeless situation with God. No such thing as a hopeless Christian.
 9. Elijah models this. He lays down on the child three times.
 10. Why?
 11. Nobody knows for sure. But there is a principle here that's illustrated really well. It's the principle of IDENTIFICATION.
 12. The living one became one with the dying one that the dying one might live again. See any parallels?
 13. Christ identified with you — he became one with you — so that you might become one with him...
 14. And the fact that you're one with him, means that there's always hope for you.
 - a) No matter how dark the night. With God, there's always hope.
 - b) No matter how big the giant. With God, there's always hope.
 - c) No matter how deep the sadness. With God, there's always hope.
 - d) No matter how many waves keep knocking you off your feet. With God, there's always hope.
 15. The person of Grit believes in a brighter tomorrow, so if you get knocked down seven times, you get back up eight.
 16. Jesus said, in this world you will have troubles, but don't give up. Because Jesus Christ has overcome the world. The grace machine is bigger than the pain machine, and will one day spit it out.
 17. We have two more mottoes to talk about, and we'll be done.
- E. *Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. (1 Kings 17:22)*
1. Who knows the secret life of a prayer?
 2. Who knows how it travels, and how it is heard? Who knows how the Holy Spirit prays along side you, and within you, and polishes up your prayers as they speed to the throne of grace?
 3. Who knows what makes some prayers get answered, and some prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling.
 4. Hockey legend Wayne Gretzky said, "You miss one hundred percent of the shots you never take."
 5. And I think Jesus would say, "You miss one hundred percent of the prayers you never pray."
 6. God is able to answer any prayer, any time, so here's motto number 4 to feed your hope:
 - a) 4. *I'll pray great prayers to a great God.*
 7. There's an old poem:
 - a) Thou art going to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring.
 8. Remember: miracles are easy for God.
 9. But you, having the courage of your convictions — that's the hard part. Faith is a mighty struggle, and Faith-filled self-talk says I'll pray great prayers to God and leave the outcomes to him.
 10. Question: CAN God raise the dead?
 11. Answer: Of course he can. He created the universe and everything in it. He fashioned each star, and calls them all by name. The power of life is always in his hand.
 12. Yes, God CAN do anything, including raise the dead.
 13. But will he? You never know. Most of the time, it looks like God plays hide and seek. Most of the time, it looks like prayers go unanswered. I have a Wednesday Night Prayer meeting on Facebook, and for a couple years, I have seen so many of the same prayer requests. It makes me wonder sometimes.
 14. But there are enough answers to prayer, that I just have to keep praying. In fact, just a few hours ago, somebody posted on last Wednesday's Prayer Meeting... "Answered prayer: my 19 year old son accepted Jesus last Friday! Thank you Jesus! Such a blessing!"
 15. We have prayed for that son for a very long time.
 16. And here is Elijah. He has no promise to rely on, except the goodness of his God. So he prays. And the soul returns, and the child comes back to life. Had he not prayed, there would have been no miracle.
 17. I don't believe in commanding miracles from God. I don't believe in announcing them before they happens as if your faith can twist God's arm.
 18. I believe we live in a pain machine, by humankind's own choosing. And God lets that play out, most of the time.
 19. To me, the bigger miracles is not that God raised the dead. That's hardly a flex of his bicep. The greater miracle is that, against all odds, Elijah prayed.

- a) Phillips Brooks (an old time Puritan) said, "O, do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle."

20. Grit has hope, and hope prayers great prayers to a great God.

21. One more motto:

F. *And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!" Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth." (1 Kings 17:23, 24)*

- 1. So, when this boy came back to life, the Bible says his soul came back to him, and he revived.
- 2. I can't even imagine that moment when the boy comes running downstairs and into his grieving mother's arms.
- 3. I can't imagine it.
- 4. And it never would have happened if Elijah hadn't been there in that time and place. Which is our fifth motto.
 - a) *5. God sent me here for such a time as this.*
- 5. That line, for such a time as this, comes from the book of Esther. A madman named Haman hatched a plot to exterminate the Jews. And there was Esther, in a place she didn't want to be and didn't understand. Until this happened, and her uncle told her that God had her right where she was, "for such a time as this."
- 6. Have you ever thought that the reason you're around when the bad stuff goes down is because somebody needed you there?
 - a) Somebody needed to see love, so God has you there.
 - b) Somebody needed to see courage, so God has you there.
 - c) Somebody needed to see grace under fire, so God has you there.
- 7. G.R.I.T. Grace Revealed in Trials.
- 8. When trouble comes, and you put grace on display, you change the world. You do good in the world. The one kind that matters.
- 9. You may be the first missionary your part of the world ever sees.
- 10. For one shining moment, your grit peels back the curtain that separates this visible world from the invisible, transcendent world of the heavenlies. And people see grace in action. They see God reaching down into this pain machine, with his hand of comfort, and his gentle whisper that some day, everything will be okay.
- 11. When trials swirl around you, take a deep breath, and don't despair. Don't lose hope.
- 12. God has you where he has you for such a time as this. Tell yourself. And find hope.

V. G.R.I.T. Basic Training

A. Write it down. When trouble comes, read it. Then panic.

- 1. *This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" (Lamentations 3:21-24)*