

## NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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The Gift of Brokenness

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Well, welcome to each of our seven campuses. This weekend we continue our series on our mission as a church. You can turn to Isaiah chapter 58. I want to pick up where Pastor Dave left off two weeks ago. He said that the heart of God is always oriented toward things that are lost, and that's true. Jesus told stories about the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son, and then he even said, I came to seek and to save the lost. We exist as a church to help people find their way back to God. Let me add one little more, one more piece to that puzzle, the heart of God is always oriented towards those things that are lost, and I would add this, the heart of God is always oriented towards things that are broken. And I think that's good news for some of us this weekend.

Isaiah Chapter 58, verse 11

<sup>12</sup> *"Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."*

Twenty years ago I was walking by a crack house on Capitol Hill and a God idea fired across my synopsis. This crack house would make a great coffee house. You have heard that story a time or two. But let me tell you the rest of the story. After we rebuilt those ancient ruins, if you will and opened up the doors to Ebenezers Coffeehouse, the committee of 100 on the federal city, the architectural nonprofit group that advocates for adherence to La Infanta original vision for the city. They gave us one of their annual vision awards. Now, this isn't a church where we like, are all about plaques hanging on the wall. In fact, I think that vision award is buried in a bin somewhere. But I love what it said because I think it captures what we want to be about as a church. I'm even going to put it on the screen so that you can see it. The vision award said...

"For its demonstration of the potential for imagination and creative energy to give new life and purpose to a forlorn building by envisioning a community benefit where others saw a blight. The revitalization of 201 F Street, NE, the long neglected, vacant building into the heart of a new vibrant coffeehouse and community center for National Community Church stands as a symbol of the value of adaptive reuse."  
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City

How great is that? I think that's pretty awesome. What I love about it is this, we did who we are, I think somewhere in the process of pursuing that vision to turn that crack house into a coffee house we recognize that rebuilding broken walls is part of our identity, it's part of our calling as a church. See, we take Isaiah 58 personally, we take Isaiah 58 seriously. I believe that God has called us to be repairers of the breach, repairers of the broken walls, and that calling goes way beyond buildings. But those buildings in many ways symbolize what we're about as a church. Now a picture is worth a thousand words, so I'll show you a few. In 2006 we turned that crack house into Ebenezers Coffeehouse; I think we have some before and after. And then in 2017 we turned an abandoned apartment building into the DC dream center where we are mentoring and discipling hundreds of kids. And right now we are in the process of turning a 127 year old car barn into a prototype campus. Well, what are we doing? I think

we're doing Isaiah 58. It's going to take some time, it's gonna take some money to rebuild those ancient ruins. But when we're done well, we'll have an event venue where we'll worship, we'll gather for leadership summits; we'll do all church events. And phase two will have a kid's ministry that will double as a child development center. In phase three we'll have a co-working space and a mixed use marketplace where church and community can cross paths. We'll have a prototype for future NCC campuses. I think for other urban churches, we will conscientiously create jobs, we will incubate entrepreneurs and it will be a place that I believe thousands of lives will be changed by the grace of God. Now, I cast that vision couple of months ago, but I thought you might like to see some of the progress. Now listen, we still need to get that building permit. Okay. We're getting closer. We need two more signatures. But the demolition is almost done and so how about just a little time lapse in a few pictures of the progress that we've made. Watch this...

{Video}

In August of 1996 National Community Church just getting off the ground and it was a tough month. And I'll tell you why because our students were on summer break and then are hill staffers August recess, and the DC public square where we met did not have air conditioning. And I used to wear a suit if you can believe that, it was hot. And I remember one service in particular; I think we had like 13 people. And that's kinda when you second guessed the vision that God has given you. What I'm saying is in August of '96, we were in survival mode and sometimes those are the moments when God speaks to us, right? And I felt this impression from the Lord that he wanted us to start giving to missions. Now on one level, it didn't make a whole lot of sense. We would not be a self supporting church until year three. And how can you give what you do not have? But those are also the moments when you learn to stand on the promises of God. And that's what we did.

*Luke 6:38 "Give and it will be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be poured into your lap for, with the measure you use, it will be measured unto you."*

And so we made that first investment in missions. It was not much, it was a \$50 check, but it was a defining moment for this church and we never looked back. I think it was the genesis of our core conviction that God will bless us in proportion to how we give to missions and care for the poor in our city. Listen, as long as we are prioritizing things that are near and dear to the heart of God, not worried about our finances and not worried about our future.

Let me do a little time lapse since 2001 at NCC has given \$19,390,647.00. That might be a spot to just praise God. Right? Unbelievable! I want to say thank you for your faithfulness in giving. And I want to say this; we want to grow more so that we can give more. Now, listen, one reason why we're building this prototype campus is because it gives us the ability to help more people find their way back to God, right? But it's not just about seating capacity, then it's about sending capacity. Listen, we want all of our seven campuses to be an even bigger blessing to the communities that he has placed us in.

One more little time lapse, since 2001, we have taken 202 mission trips as a church. Thousands of you have taken your vacation time and gone on a mission trip on your own dime. We'll take another 26 trips this coming year and you will find those trips highlighted in your next booklet. I might encourage you to pray through those trips and just see if there isn't one of those trips that God wants you to go on. If you've never been on a mission trip, it will change your life. Now listen, you don't have to go halfway around the world to be on mission. All you have to do is walk out your front door, right? But at the same time, I want to say this; I believe that one mission trip is worth more than 52 sermons, that there's

something about getting out of our comfort zone, getting out of our routine. And here's the thing we go to serve. We go with good news, right? We, we don't go with a Messiah complex. And what we found is that usually when we go, the primary beneficiary is us because God then opens our eyes and opens our hearts and his kingdom advances in some unique ways. What I want to do this weekend share two stories and then we'll zoom back in on Isaiah 58 and we'll make it personal.

In 2010, Amy Wall went on her first mission trip to Uganda. That mission team built a classroom in Gulu, but every day on the way to the work site, they would walk by in IDP camp. And one day Amy, notice two little girls drawing water from a mud hole. In Amy's own words, she said everyday my heart broke a little more for the water crisis and I knew I had to do something about it.

Well, in 2015, our Uganda team partnered with a Christian nonprofit mission for water. And we dug two wells in Lira. Since 2015 we have dug seven wells and we have fund raised for eight more. Those wells provide clean water to approximately 5,250 Ugandans. Listen, it seems to me like that's Matthew 25, *"I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you showed me hospitality."*

Well, this past year Amy Wall and Krista Back were praying about this year's trip and they felt like God was calling them to maybe do something a little different. They asked our missionary partners what the greatest need was and they told us that the greatest need was a maternity ward for south Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda; women in those camps having babies in tents on mud floors. And so, there was a minor issue that they told us it would take about a year to get land rights to build this maternity ward and they said that it would probably take some bribes. Well, believe it or not, we have a policy here at National Community Church that we do not engage in bribery on our mission trips, you know, shocking. Right? But you know what? God has a way of honoring integrity and generosity and we got land rights in a month. Our team went, I think we have a few pictures, maybe a before and after of that maternity ward, a picture of our team. And then this is pretty incredible 528 people gave donations totaling \$100,000 dollars. A little plaque, just a honoring them and, I just, I think that's awesome, right? Can we praise God for that?

Now, I want to say this, please hear me, the heroes of this story are the doctors and the nurses and the missionaries who are on the ground, right? But I also want to honor Amy and Krista and the team that went because, see something amazing happens when we step out in these ways. These 26 trips are 26 miracles waiting to happen and God advances his kingdom in such a unique way. But, how does it start? I think it starts with walking by an IDP camp and noticing out of the corner of your eye two girls drawing water from a mud hole. We ask this question a lot around here. Does your heartbreak for the things that break the heart of God? That's where mission starts. It starts when our hearts break for the things that break the heart of God, and again, you don't have to go all the way around the world, lots of broken people in our backyard. And you know what that means? That means we need to be on mission every day in every way.

Now, let me share one more story. In 2017, a team of NCC'ers led by Emily Hendrickson and Ashley Anderson went to work with our missionaries, Tony and Jamie Sebastian. They helped open the iheart cafe in Cyprus. Now they also spent some time in the refugee camps in Greece, Dave Tress was a part of that team; Dave is also a part of our staff. Many of the videos, the trailers, short films that you watch were created by Dave Tress. Now, while they were in the refugee camp Dave got this idea that he would let some of the refugee kids take pictures with his camera. And what he discovered is it was a unique way to see through their eyes and one of those children, I think we have a picture of this; one of those

children took a picture of a of a refugee, Udi Miri. Now, when our team got back to the cafe in Cyprus, Tony knew that Dave had some artistic giftings, and so he commissioned Dave Tress to create a piece of art. And Dave got an idea; what if he chiseled that picture of Udi into the cement wall? Now, the amazing thing is that Dave had never done anything like this before, but, I want you to check out this time lapse because it's pretty cool.

{Video}

That piece of art, which will be online, has become this incredible conversation piece. Everybody that walks into the iheart cafe in Cyprus asks about this cement mural, if you will, and here's what's so cool, it gives them an opportunity to talk about coffee with a cause and business as mission.

Here's what I'm getting at; you don't have to turn into somebody else to be on mission. Okay? All Dave Tress needs to do is be Dave Tress and find a way to use his gifts to then make a difference. I think it's about God leveraging the gifts and passions that he's given us and we usually have to go out of our way and it's usually inconvenient, but when we do that, then God's kingdom advances in some often strange and mysterious ways.

Now, let me go back to Isaiah 58 and want to make this personal. Let me say again, the heart of God is always oriented towards things that are broken. It says, "*Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins*". This is not just about rebuilding broken walls; this is about rebuilding broken lives. The word rebuild in Isaiah 58 is the same Hebrew word that's used in Genesis two when it says that God fashioned Eve out of Adam's rib, so there is this reshaping or re-purposing, and the word ancient doesn't just mean old. This is fascinating, it means concealed. I think those ancient ruins are often the broken places in our hearts, in our minds, where we have experienced grief or guilt or doubt or disappointment or fear. Just about every news cycle there is a story about sexual harassment or sexual abuse. If you've been the victim, that kind of abuse, it triggers memories that then trigger emotions.

Lora and I, over the years have walked with a lot of family and friends who have walked through the pain of miscarriage, and I think what makes it so difficult is that it's often so personal and so private. And what we've discovered is sometimes it's just seeing a baby that can trigger memories that trigger emotions. I think what I'm getting at is that those are the places where we need an extra measure of God's grace and I think that's where the Holy Spirit does his best work in our hearts.

Before we could rebuild that crack house, turn it into a coffee house, before we could turn that abandoned apartment building into the Dream Center or even the car barn into our prototype campus. Guess what? We had to do some demolition, they were total gut jobs. We had to get those buildings back to their original bones, then and only then could we raise up those age old foundations. I think if you walk through a divorce, you have been through a demolition. Listen, those are often gut jobs and the testimony of so many NCC'ers in the situations that I'm describing is that that's when and where and how they walked into this thing called National Community Church. And guess what? That is where they experienced the grace of God. I've heard so many stories about people often sitting in that last row, sometimes for months or years crying through worship, crying through the message, but just holding out hope that God was going to give them a second chance at life or a second chance at love. And God has done that over and over again. I want to speak hope into your life, into your situation this weekend. I want you to know that everyone is fighting a battle that we know nothing about. The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said that if we could read the secret history of our enemies, we would find in each man's life, sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility. I think there are ancient ruins in our

lives, but here's the thing, that isn't just the place where God gives beauty for ashes. He does that. It's not just the place where it gives the oil of joy for mourning, not, not just the place where he gives the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. What we need to understand is that that is also the place where mission begins.

Where have you been broken? Can I tell you this weekend that that's where God wants to help you, help others heal? Where do you feel weak? Yes, God uses us at our pointed giftedness, he gave us those gifts. But, come on, God also uses us at our point of weakness. It says in I Corinthians 1 that God uses the foolish things to shame the wise and he uses the weak things to shame the strong and he uses the things that are not the lowly things that... See God likes using people like me and like you, and what we need to do is inventory those broken places, experience the grace of God, the healing of God, and then recognize that now we're on mission because now we're in a place to help others through the same situation that we've been through.

You know, CS Lewis said, 'when I invited Jesus into my life, I thought he was going to put up some wallpaper and hang a few pictures, but he started knocking out walls and adding on rooms and I said I was expecting a nice cottage, but he said, I'm making a palace in which to live.' I've walked through seasons of demolition, they are difficult. God's had to do a gut job on my pride more than once, but it during those seasons that I've seen God prepare me for something better, something different and I want you to know that he's doing that in your life.

Around the turn of the 20th century, I'll close with this; Alfred Adler proposed the counterintuitive theory of compensation. Adler believed that what we think of as disadvantages often proved to be advantages because they force us to cultivate compensatory attitudes and abilities that otherwise would have lain dormant or gone undiscovered. It's as we compensate for those weaknesses for those broken places that we often discover our gift to the world. Seventy percent of the art students that Adler studied had optical anomalies that didn't make sense to him and in many of the composers that he studied, Mozart, Beethoven among them, had these degenerative conditions in their ears. A more recent study of small business owners found that 35 percent of them were self identified dyslexic, and what this study found is that it forced these entrepreneurs to cultivate a different set of skills to compensate for some of the challenges that they had in reading and it was in cultivating those compensatory abilities, that it really actually laid the foundation for their career as an entrepreneur. Long story short, perceived disadvantages, things like birth defects even, environmental challenges like poverty, listen, those can actually be springboards. Success is not achieved in spite of those perceived disadvantages, often it is achieved because of them, that is the theory of compensation. In a nutshell, what I'm getting at is this, we better be very careful to inventory the broken places and the weak places because that, my friends, is our ministry, that is our mission, that is the place that God will use us.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for each person at each of our campuses. Lord, those who may be a bit a part of this church for a long time and others that wandered in or just at the invite of a friend are here for the first time, but God, I don't believe anybody walks in by accident that there's some divine appointments this weekend that this is a message that we needed to hear. God, we need your healing. We need you to rebuild those ancient ruins in our hearts, God, to bring your healing, to bring hope, Lord, to renew, to do what you did in David's life, to create a clean heart, to renew a right spirit, to restore the joy of our salvation. But Lord, thank you that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and it's in those broken places that sometimes it allows the love of God and the grace of God to maybe seep into a deeper place. God, I pray this weekend that you would help each of us to experience new dimensions of your grace, new dimensions of your healing. And God I pray that you would connect the

dots for us, that we would recognize that yes, we've got to go through a season of healing, of rebuilding, but God, I also believe that you are laying the foundation for the very ministry and mission that you have called each one of us too. And so to that end, we pray that your kingdom would come, that your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.