We can quickly fall into the trap of leading our own lives, rejecting any notion and wisdom of God, “I know what I am doing; I don’t need a god or anyone else to tell me what is bad or good for me. I do whatever I want.” We may not say those words out loud, but with our choices and how we treat others, they may become evident. When we do this, not only do we derail our life, but we hinder other people’s fulfillment in life as well.

Whether we are in a place of deep sadness because of how we have lived or deep hurt because of what has been done to us, we may think of ourselves as unredeemable, too far gone, a mistake abandoning any hope about a good life.

Have you thought about your life along those lines? You are alive, but it feels like your life is gone already because you believe you are unredeemable, too far gone, or a mistake. I am talking about the moments when life gets so thick and unbearable that we stop functioning in healthy ways and find ourselves thinking, behaving, and making choices that are not good for the people we care about or us because we don’t care about trying anymore. You are not alone; everyone experiences that in some shape or form. The past either hunts us for what we did or enslaves us because of what was done to us.

In such times, what we need is a reset. Wouldn’t you agree? Something or someone to come along to tell us: “Let’s make things new; let’s get your life back.” This is what God wants for us, to get our lives back as he meant them to be: a good one.

Today’s message is about two ways of getting our life back the way God wants us to: by making peace with the past and having hope for the future.

So, is there anything in your life keeping you from a good life? Have you done something that you deeply regret and is eating you from within? Has someone done something to you that cuts through your heart and needs healing and peace?

Let’s study God’s Word to find the hope and healing we need. I have a couple of Scriptures today that will help us find answers. The first one is 1 Corinthians 5:17,

[I]f anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Let’s get some context first.

The Corinthians, like us, were struggling with many problems and difficulties. One of them was to live into their new identity as followers of Jesus. As new believers in Christ, they were becoming part of a new way of living that differed drastically from their old ways. The Corinthian Christians needed to be reminded of this and continuously encouraged about their faith so they wouldn’t give up and into the old ways of living before they knew Christ.

For this reason, in this text and within the context of the letters to the Corinthians, Paul talks of a “new creation” as the transformation that takes place in us that makes us be “born again,” meaning saved from the condemnation of sin and death, and the evil powers of this world, to become people of God: children of light with a restored and new life.

However, there is always conflict when you have two elements at odds, in this case: the old and the new. The moment we are embarking on our new life, the old yells back at us, reminding us who we were, “Hey, remember what you did!” or “Don’t forget what happened to you!” with the only intention of discouraging and holding us back by putting in doubt our worthiness.

This is the ultimate weapon of our enemy against us, making us doubt God’s grace in our lives by putting in question our worth. Whether it is the devil or our guilt, this voice will always bring up our past to discourage us from pursuing our future. Thoughts such as “You are nothing,” “Look what you have done or have they done to you,” “No one wants you,” and “You are a waste” are not words from someone who cares about us but from our enemy—whether is the devil or something within us that is hurting.

All these thoughts lead us to think of and feel the past as a curse. So, how do we move away from all that? How do we make peace with it? We have to change the past. I know this sounds like an insane thought; how can we change something that already happened? But think about it, why does the past matter at all? What is the past to us today? What do we get to keep from something that already happened? Why does the past have so much power over us? Because of the memories, we get to keep those –either the bliss or the trauma.

When we talk about the past, it is the memory we are talking about. The story that runs on a loop in the back of our minds of what happened to us or what we did. This is critical because those memories directly affect what happens today and will happen to us in the future because they define us. For example, when something that happened 20 years ago is still running in your mind, it continues to shape you as a person. And, the more we replay the memory, the more it takes over us, printing itself like tattoos all over our lives, defining whom we think we are. Although those events may no longer matter, they have so much power and control over our minds, personality, and, therefore, our decisions. In other words, we are the product of what we continue to allow to affect us today.

So, can we change the past? Can we remove those unhealthy marks from our lives? I think we can. Of course, we can’t change the facts of the past, but we can change how we feel about them and how we allow them to affect us today.

This is how it can happen: we can’t ignore the past, it happened, but we can reframe it into a story of redemption by looking at it, talking about it, and thinking about it through the lens of Jesus’ love and grace. When we can say, “That is what I did,” or “That happened to me, but I have let it go and given it to God,” at that moment, we no longer see ourselves as “too far gone” but as back home where we belong.

This is how we get our lives back, by embracing and moving into the new things that God has for us. When we let God work in our lives, God does not let our traumas and disappointments get in the way of our future anymore but breaks the cycle of oppression and any shackles that were passed onto us by our families or other people as we rework these experiences through our faith in Christ.

As Paul says, becoming new creatures is the ultimate reset through grace for anyone, “for everything old has passed away and everything has become new!”

So, when your past is haunting and cursing you and you are losing hope, turn to the Redeemer, to the one who gives life and love, and let him listen to him telling you: “You are forgiven, and you are loved.” This is what reframes our whole lives around a new story with the hope we get through Jesus Christ. This is the first step in getting our lives back, by finding ourselves in Jesus, the one who gives us lasting peace through forgiveness and redemption.

This leads me to the second and last Scripture that goes hand-in-hand with God’s grace in our lives and his desire to see us free and fulfilled. This is Romans 8:28,

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

God has the power and desire to change any hurting situation in our lives and turn it into a story of redemption but also a blessing. This text from Romans expresses this promise. The way I understand this text is that “All things work together for [our] good” when we welcome God’s grace but are also led by God’s love, acting accordingly.

Jesus told the disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) Why would Jesus want that for them and us? Think about it, all our hurts, disappointments, and brokenness have happened because of jealousy, greed, anger, and even hate, not because of compassion, kindness, and love which is what Jesus asks us to practice in his teachings. So, the promise of “All things work for good” is only fulfilled when we give ourselves to God and accept the invitation to live a life led by Jesus’ example. Indeed, God gives us healing, but let us not go back to what caused the wounds in the first place.

Did you think we could just show up for the blessing of redemption and have no concern about what God wants for us after? Unfortunately, thinking like that is what got us in trouble in the first place, that is why we suffer and remain broken even after experiencing God’s grace. To get our life back, we must learn from Jesus what that means so we can do as he does.

Our hope is not going to come from what we have done before, but from what Jesus has done for us and offers us to move with hope and anticipation into the future. We get our lives back the way God wants us to by pursuing our calling in this life with hope. Having this kind of hope in our lives fills us with fire and excitement to do things right and make things better. Wouldn’t that be a good life?

Friends, there is a whole lot more that God wants to bless us with, but we will not get it if we continue to allow an unredeemed past and traumas to dictate our future or if we think we can get away with breaking God’s commandments. And just like the Corinthians, we may find ourselves with a new faith, but old thinking, old behaving, and old brokenness marking us for life, with a cursing past and no hope for tomorrow.

Here is the invitation and good news: Allow God’s grace to change your past by healing it and transforming it into a beautiful story of redemption. Look straight at those fears, disappointments, and even hurts, and say, “You are forgiven, you are redeemed.” Then, just as important, don’t you let go of the love that gave you a new life, hold tight to it, be faithful to it, and grow in it, and you will taste and see how “All things work for good for those who love God.”