

**Let the Redeemed of the Lord Tell Their Story**  
**Scott Campbell**  
**September 4, 2022**

This Sunday's texts:

Psalm 107:1-2

Ezekiel 36:25-26

John 10:7-10

The holy gospel according to John, the tenth chapter:

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Good morning, Church. For those of you I haven't met, my name is Scott Campbell. I've been attending St Timothy's since 2018, been a member since 2019, and I've had the pleasure of serving as Youth Leader and Young Adults Coordinator since the beginning of this year. For those of you who are visiting, I am not a pastor or a preacher, so if you don't like my message or its delivery, I beg you, please come back next week when someone far more qualified than I will be standing up here. I'm simply following the suggestion of the psalmist in Psalm 107. "Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story."<sup>1</sup> So here it goes.

I was adopted into a pretty average middle-class family at birth. My parents are both from Montana and so my brother and I were the first in our family to be born here in California (not something to brag about when visiting Montana, by the way ... it will not impress them at all).

We were raised going to church and, although not extremely active, we were usually in attendance on Sundays and at mid-week youth groups. I knew all the books of the Bible and could recite quite a few verses from memory. At the age of eight, I distinctly remember asking Jesus into my heart. I was at AWANA and I repeated a prayer that our leader recited. At the time, my only knowledge of Jesus was that he had died on a cross for my sins and that, if I asked Him to live in my heart, He would forgive me for all the bad things I did and when I died, I would go to heaven. It sounded like a pretty sweet deal to me. But the truth is that nothing tangible changed that day. I didn't feel or act differently at all.

Back then I wasn't what you would call a problem child. In fact, my mother frequently received compliments about how well-behaved and polite I was. But at the age of eight, I had another experience that I remember vividly. I took my first

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 107:2

drink of alcohol. I was sick on a school day, and since both of my parents worked, I was home alone. I'm still not sure what drew me to my dad's very limited liquor cabinet, but I took down a bottle and a glass and I had a couple of shots.

I remember the feeling it gave me and I remember thinking that this was going to be a part of my life going forward. I was going to do this as often as I possibly could. In retrospect, that should have been my decision concerning prayer and my relationship with God. But this was not the first lie that I had fallen for and, unfortunately, it would not be the last.

At first, the opportunities to drink were few and far in between, but as I got older, they became more and more frequent. By my teenage years, drinking and even drug use had become a pretty common occurrence. I naturally gravitated toward the wrong crowd and I soon had a group of friends who were only encouraging in the worst of ways. I was getting in all kinds of trouble, but in the back of my mind, I always counted on Jesus' payment and God's forgiveness of my sins. After all, I had said that prayer! Forget all the calls to repentance and obedience, I was leaning heavily on forgiveness and turning a deaf ear to the rest.

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death." I believed in God. I believed that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. But my attitude was like that of the Romans, to go on sinning so that grace may abound. I had been deceived by an enemy that I was too naïve to understand and I was convinced that there was nothing wrong with the life I was leading.

For those of you who have struggled, or know someone who has struggled with addiction, there is a pretty common pattern. First, it seems like a lot of fun. Then it is fun, but with problems. And, finally, in the end, it is just problems. Well, it was different for me. By my late 30s, everybody who truly loved me was concerned for my health and well-being. I was participating in life as little as possible and was hardly the man that my wife and three children deserved. Shortly after my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, things came to a head and I lost everything. My wife, kids, home, job, car ... everything. And that is how I ended up in San Jose.

Some of you might know about City Team from the work that St Timothy's does with their men's and women's recovery ministries. Well, I am one of the men that you helped. I walked into their building on April 13, 2018, beaten down and broken. But little did I know that I was exactly where, and in exactly what condition God wanted me. This is not my first time at City Team. In 2016, I entered the year-long recovery program and left a short three months later. I thought that I had beaten the system because my wife had allowed me to return

home early. And I honestly believed that I was probably a lot smarter than the rest of those guys anyway, and, of course, what would take them a whole year to do would only take me a quarter of the time.

More lies.

Less than two years later, I was back and I was miserable. I blamed everybody else for the situation I was in and was frantically searching for a way out. But there would be no easy way out, and over time that would become more and more obvious.

One evening, a few months in, I was reading a book by a man who claimed he had spent 90 minutes in heaven following a horrific car accident. I don't want to debate whether or not this is theologically possible, but I mention it because this man was in a lot of pain and, looking ahead to a long and excruciating recovery process, was feeling quite hopeless. I identified with that and kept reading with an eye toward what his solution might be. He wrote about listening to a gospel song.

That suggested we be grateful in all circumstances and so he said a prayer. He thanked God for what he still had: his family, friends, and the chance to do more work for the kingdom here on earth. I began to experience a change in mindset. I went out into the dark and empty courtyard and began to say, out loud, my own prayer of gratitude. I thanked God for the fact that I was still in good health and had a roof over my head. That I knew where my next meal was coming from, and that my mom was still in my corner, rooting for me. I was frankly quite shocked by how many things I still had to be grateful for.

I poured my heart out, and then something amazing happened. I felt the presence of God and had the feeling of a great weight being lifted off my shoulders. Cliché? Yes, but it is truly the only way I know how to describe it. I count that moment as a turning point. Both in my recovery and in my relationship with God.

Over the next several months I had many more experiences that I will never forget. A worship band came to play and I literally surrendered my life and my will to God while they performed the song "I surrender" by Hillsong. I read scripture that explained exactly what was happening in my life and began to realize that the Holy Spirit was actually living inside of me. And God started placing men in my life to teach me how to live a life worthy of the calling that I had received. One of those men was my spiritual mentor, Brian Hall. During one of our first meetings, he asked me what I was looking to get out of our relationship. I wasn't sure how

to answer and I asked him for some time to think about it, but no sooner had he left than I had an answer.

I wanted to know what being a follower of Jesus Christ looked like. I knew what being a believer looked like; I had always been a believer. But I was ready to be a follower, and the only thing I knew about being a follower was how to pretend to be one in these pews on Sunday. That conversation started an amazing journey. One that is nowhere near over by the way. We still meet weekly in our Grow group and he is still a constant source of wisdom and support. In fact, my first circle of friends here at St. Timothy's was all CityTeam spiritual mentors, and they are still who I turn to for advice and encouragement. If any of you are looking for a worthwhile chance to speak into the lives of some really great men and women, I wholeheartedly recommend the CityTeam spiritual mentor program and would be more than happy to tell you how to get involved.

So now I'm around 8 months sober. From the outside looking in, maybe nothing has changed. I still have little in the way of material possessions and I haven't talked to my wife and kids in months. But on the inside, the difference is night and day. I no longer have to force gratitude, service, and brotherly love. I feel the tug of the Holy Spirit and am excited to respond. The staff is treating me differently and when I inquire why, they tell me that they have noticed a change too. God had truly given me a new heart and put a new spirit in me. He had removed my heart of stone and given me a heart of flesh. I was still far from perfect, but when I acted outside of God's will I now felt conviction and the need to make amends. For the first time since early childhood, the majority of my life was being lived in joyful anticipation. God was obviously and extremely active in my life and the proof was in the fruit that it was bearing. Love, joy, and peace became my baseline and they were rarely affected long by my circumstances. I became willing to let things happen in God's time instead of forcing them to conform to my agenda and awesome things started happening.

I got a job that fit my skill set perfectly, and it was a job that I would not have looked for for myself. I was blessed with the opportunity to buy a vehicle and began attending more church and recovery activities. My relationship with my mom was getting stronger and I began to regain her trust. After a rough start, the same thing started to happen in my relationship with my brother and then his family. I was seeing my oldest daughter regularly and was eventually reunited with my granddaughter. After a few years, my son reached out to me as well. We started getting together monthly for lunch and kept in touch via text. And when I was about 2 ½ years sober, my youngest daughter reached out to say Happy

Thanksgiving. I was now back on good terms with my parents, my brother and his family, my three children, and my granddaughter. It was what I had spent all those years praying for and so much more than I ever expected. The Bible says that God will restore the years the locusts have eaten, and I was experiencing it first-hand.

Then, in April of last year, my wife, Michelle, invited me to a family event. For years I had prayed for a reconciliation of that relationship too, but when it didn't happen after three years, I assumed that meant it wasn't part of God's plan for me. I had reluctantly accepted that possibility and determined that, at the very least, I would help when I could and be a source of peace instead of a source of stress. When she offered friendship and a chance to be present with my family at birthday parties and other family functions, I jumped at it. I told her that I would clear my schedule for each and every event to which I was invited.

Over the next six months, I was blessed with many opportunities to hang out with and enjoy my family. Birthdays, little league games, and even a three-week period in between my roommates selling their old home and taking possession of their new home, where Michelle graciously offered to let me crash on her couch. All of this gave me a chance to show them that this transformation was real and that it would last because it was a work of God.

I believe God's word when it says that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion because it is happening to me daily. And I like to think that, over time, they began to see it too. I took advantage of every opportunity to show Michelle that I still loved her and wanted to spend as much time with her as possible, but I was still willing to work within God's will and timeline, no matter what that meant for our relationship.

I'm not sure when or exactly how it happened, but our friendship began to grow into something more and at some point, I realized I was getting my wife back. We were going on dates and having conversations that reminded me of our teenage years together, before addiction turned me into a monster. When my roommates, a young married couple, decided to start a family, they politely let me know that they pictured doing it without a roommate, and so I had a conversation with Michelle. I would still be working in San Jose, but I was spending more and more time in San Leandro. Should I stay in San Jose? Move to San Leandro? Somewhere in between?

Let me tell you church that I was floored when she offered me the option of moving back home with her and our kids. I wanted to say yes immediately, but we opted to prayerfully consider it for a month before making a final decision. The

month went well and we both felt we had God's blessing to complete the reconciliation. My prayers had been answered! Not exactly how my limited vision asked for them to be answered and certainly not as quickly as I would have liked, but perfectly, and with perfect timing. As always and as promised, He had done immeasurably more than I had asked or imagined. To Him be the glory!

I am sharing my story with the hope that at least one person listening can benefit from it. We all deal with unhealthy addictions, attachments, or behaviors, but in Christ, there is a freedom beyond words and peace that transcends all understanding. When I was young and my addiction was in its infancy, I was NOT going to talk about it with anybody in my church. I looked at them as perfect people who had it all figured out. I thought they would judge me, shun me, and make fun of me behind my back. But the Bible tells us to confess our sins to one another and pray for each other so that we may be healed. By not talking about these things to my church family, I had fallen victim to the lies of the enemy once again, and cut myself from the greatest source of healing available. I'm still not perfect (shocking, right?), but that's the beauty of it. If I was perfect, I wouldn't need a savior, and maybe I never seek out the most meaningful relationship of all, my relationship with God.

I feel not only compelled, but obligated to share with you these struggles because I want you to know that this is a safe place to confess, repent, and be gently restored. My hope is that anyone struggling with these or similar issues would feel comfortable enough to talk to me or another trusted member of this body. I would be honored to listen and offer suggestions. It would be my pleasure to tell you how Jesus left the 99 and came looking for me because, the truth is, if you are lost, He is desperately looking for you too. Unfortunately, on this journey of life, we will encounter our fair share of naysayers and those who try to lead us astray. Those people are thieves and robbers. Jesus warns us not to listen to them because they want nothing for us but death and destruction. But Jesus... Jesus wants us to have life, and have it to the full.