

SESSION 9: REACHING RESTORATION

What would restoration look and feel like? How can we get back to our core best selves?



SHARE A PRAYER

Open the session with prayer requests and a prayer.

INTRODUCTIONS

Last week's homework was to imagine yourself sitting across the table from someone you need to forgive or be forgiven by.

- Does anyone want to share what they learned from that experience?

These sessions have been a journey—through fond memories and loss of loved ones—and all the different emotions that come with both. For this session, we focus on restoration. If you think about restoring old furniture or an old house, the process is similar. Needless to say, with time and experiences, an old house is never going to be brand new—but it can be restored. We can wash away some of the layers of dust and gunk, then get down to the goodness that lies beneath.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Earlier in the movie, we see Brooks behind prison bars. Though he is on the side of freedom, he is still imprisoned by his anger, regret, and grief. Now he is walking out of the prison. After his meeting with Glen Ake, he feels – for the first time in 15 years – free.



This scene is about the restoration of Brooks' core self—after removing the layers of anger and gunk he harbored for Glen Ake—but it's also about his restored relationship with Leslie. In the movie, Brooks and Leslie struggle to communicate and connect. Their love runs deep, but their conversations remain on the surface. They avoid eye contact, are quick to anger, and are too busy for compassion. As Leslie says later, "*Brooks just kind of ran away,*" leaving much of their relationship behind—broken and untended. It is not until this last scene of the movie that they are able to make eye contact again and to open their hearts to a renewed relationship.

MOVIE CLIP – Play Session 9: Reaching Restoration

THINK-PAIR-SHARE QUESTIONS

Before discussing these questions as a group, take a minute to write your own responses (think), discuss them with a partner (pair) then join together for a group discussion (share).

- 1) What do you observe about Brooks' body language, facial expressions, and mannerisms when he walks out of the prison and is talking to Nicole? How is he different from previous scenes?

- 2) What do you notice about how Brooks and Leslie interact in this last scene? (*Look for eye contact, body language, and proximity.*) How is it different from other scenes with them?

- 3) In a Dateline NBC interview, Brooks reflected on past relationships before his confrontation with Glen Ake and said: *"I look back, and I was just building this coat of armor... that was killing me and killing my marriage, my friendships, everything. At the end of the day, it was protecting me, but also keeping me away from the people that I love."* In the movie, how did Brooks' "coat of armor" protect him? How did it hurt him?

- 4) Can you relate to a "coat of armor"? If so, how has it affected your relationship with others and with God?

- 5) What would a "restored" you look and feel like? (Think body language, facial expressions, and emotional well-being)

FAITH WALK

Throughout the Bible we see men and women who lost it all—Adam & Eve, Joseph, Job, Daniel, David, the disciples. Yet, they were strengthened and redeemed through their relationship with God. In his suffering, David wrote to God, “*You have given me hope... comfort in my suffering... your promise preserves my life*” (Psalm 119: 49-50). When Job lost his family and all his possessions, he cries to God, “*I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted*” (Job 42:2). Apostle Paul wrote among hardship, “*For Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses.... for when I am weak, then I am strong.*” (2 Corinthians 12: 9-10).

The night of the crime, Brooks almost died. His right lung collapsed, the bullet nicked his heart, and he was losing blood and blacking out. Just then, Leslie ran in the room with a knife and cut him loose. Doctors were amazed that he and Leslie survived. It wasn’t until Brooks went back to the house and saw the trail of blood from the house to the car that he realized how God’s hand was on them that night. Though God allowed his parents to die, He intervened to get Brooks and Leslie to safety. Since that night, God has intervened time and time again to guide and strengthen Brooks and Leslie through trials and loneliness.

Through all of his challenges the one thing Brooks always knew *was God was with him*. His greatest ally in his journey toward peace and purpose was his relationship with God. He says for years after his parents’ death it wasn’t uncommon that he’d be out somewhere and a nearby light would flicker, go out, then come back on. As if to tell him, *you are not alone*.

People often ask, “*Weren’t you mad at God?*” or “*How can you trust a God that would let this happen to you and your family?*” Though Brooks’ life was rocked, his faith had to stay strong, or he would have had nothing left.

As Jesus traveled with his disciples through hardships, he was a constant source of reassurance and wisdom.

Read Matthew 11:28-30.

A yoke is a device used to harness two animals (usually oxen) while they are carrying a heavy load. Two animals yoked together can usually carry at least three times the load of one alone.

- **What does Jesus mean when he said, “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me*”? What can we learn from Jesus while also taking his yoke?**
- **Do you feel as if you carry your burdens on your own or in partnership with God and Jesus?**

Many of Jesus’ miracles were about restoration. He restored sight (Mark 8:25), he restored two demon-possessed men (Matthew 8:28), and restored a man’s shriveled hand (Mark 3:5). His life on earth is full of examples of restoration as people found their better selves in their connection with Christ and His kingdom. As he said to the man with the shriveled hand, “*stretch out your hand*” and when he did, he was completely restored.

Read what Peter said about Jesus’ ability to restore in 1 Peter 5:10.

- **What can you do to lighten your load and feel restored?**

HOMWORK

Read Galatians 5:1. In this verse, the implication is that instead of being yoked with Christ, many are yoked in slavery with past burdens and sins.

What burdens are you carrying? Imagine that you are an ox carrying a heavy cart. In the cart are the burdens of your life. Write a list of the burdens you carry. Maybe they are financial stresses, broken relationships, regrets, or weaknesses.

Now imagine Jesus walking beside you sharing the yoke while you carry your heavy load. *What would you say to him? What would he say to you?*

What would your life feel like walking beside Jesus and without carrying those heavy burdens?

(Write your thoughts below or on a separate piece of paper.)

FROM BROOKS

Do you think people can be fully restored after great loss or tragedy? If so, how?

The short answer to this question is yes, but part of it is what do we mean when we say “restored”? You can’t escape the fact that when you live through something truly tragic, you are changed forever. In some ways you become a different person. What our eyes see, they can never un-see.

The question is, *how will you be different? Will it be for the better or for worse? Will you become, or at least remain, bitter and angry?* Certainly part of working through the process is experiencing anger, or even hatred. But if you get stuck there you will almost certainly destroy yourself.

I think that first, we have to want to be restored. Even if we don’t feel ready for yet, we can tell God that we are willing to be made willing to do the things we have to do to be restored. I believe God honors that and takes us on the journey to restoration. Rarely will that be what we expect it to be. It may take a very long time before we arrive and not even see it coming when it does.

But most importantly, we have to trust God and honor His Word and then follow. God tells us that we are to “Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:28) and “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44).

If we trust Him and follow what we believe He wants us to do, we will most certainly not only be restored but be stronger and better than we ever thought possible.

FROM RICHARD – GOD’S DEALING WITH PEOPLE

By Richard B. Douglass, November 7, 1974



Some of life’s best lessons are learned during times of tragedy. An overworked contractor learned that recently. He had rushed madly for months trying to meet deadlines and make a fortune while “everything was breaking his way.” Then he woke up one morning and found he had been in the hospital for ten days with a serious heart attack. “I came out of there a better man. For the first time in years, I asked myself what really counted in my life. My family, friends, and my faith were the things I came up with. From now on I’ll have a whole new list of priorities,” he concluded.

For years the people of Judah put God on the outside edge of their lives. God allowed them to become the captives of an enemy country. The leaders of their nation became exiles, living in the land of their captors. God was not being vengeful. The discipline was not intended to destroy them. Instead God meant to shake them until they re-evaluated their priorities and turned to him in faith.

Ezekiel served as a priest in Jerusalem. The Babylonians took him to their land so the people of Jerusalem would not find adequate leadership to start a rebellion. The colorful man became one of God’s leading spokesmen to the captive people. He encouraged the people to return to God. When they did, God would restore them to their land. The prophet warned that God would not do this merely so they could brag of their special relationship to God. God would do it “for His holy name’s sake.” That simply means that God intended to honor Himself in the process.

Many of the captives had pictured God as a local deity who dwelt in the temple in Jerusalem. God wanted them to understand that He cannot be limited to a location. He touches every part of the world with his presence. God’s interest extends to people everywhere. Even his special interest in the Jews was so they would become missionaries to declare God’s love and power to all people. God used the period of captivity to teach people what He is really like.

Through Ezekiel, God revealed what the people needed to do to be ready for restoration to their own land. They needed spiritual cleansing and “a new heart.” The idea of the new heart stands out in both the Old and New Testaments. It refers to a complete change in nature brought about when God changes us from the inside out. The scripture writers talk about a new birth and “becoming new creations.” When we yield complete control of our lives to God, he takes charge of our lives and makes us so radically different that it is like having “a new heart.”

Often God needs to bring people to the point where they realize their own weakness and failure before we are willing to accept God as He is and allow Him to transform our lives. The process sometimes seems painful. God does not intend to destroy us. His objective in our lives is to help us see the need for a change of life and then allow God to work that change in us.