

All right. Everybody, welcome to Valley Creek on this back-to-school weekend. We are so glad that you're here with us today. Whatever campus you're at, whether you're in Denton, Flower Mound, Gainesville, Lewisville or online, we are so glad you are here with us today. And whether this is your first time here or maybe you haven't been in a while, maybe you've left and just recently come back, or maybe this is your spiritual family and you're here all the time, it really doesn't matter. We are so glad that you are here with us and we are so excited about what God is going to do in this upcoming semester. It was great to pray for our students, our parents, especially our parents, our teachers, especially our teachers, administrators, and coaches, and just believing that God is moving in Gen Hope, capturing their heart, doing a great work. And in just a few short weeks, all of us are going to be in a whole new rhythm and routine. That's what back-to-school means. A lot of us have been waiting for summer to be over to get that routine, to get that rhythm back in our life. In just a few short weeks, you're going to have a different rhythm, a different routine, a set of habits, of daily practices. Your whole life is going to be structured differently. The only question is, are you going to choose your routine? Or are you going to let your routine choose you? Are you going to choose the upcoming rhythm for the semester? Or are you going to let that rhythm choose you? See, what a lot of us will do over the next few weeks is we will just stand there and we will take every calendar that's given to us by every activity and every event and every organization and everything that we're a part of. And we will just take it all. And we will allow that to become how we live our life over the course of the coming semester. And then, in about one month's time, we're all going to be complaining about how busy and overwhelmed and stressed out we are and we can't wait for Christmas break. So, maybe there's a different way to do it. Maybe there's a time and a place to rearrange your life differently. Because if you don't pick your calendar, your calendar will pick you. And you are not a victim to your calendar, you are a product of it. No one else gets to determine how you spend your time, but it's one of the greatest gifts that God has given you. So, the question is, is what are you going to arrange and rearrange your life around this fall?

It's what we've been kind of talking about most of this year. In fact, I love when Jesus says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all of these things will be given to you as well." Our problem is we arrange our lives around all these things and hope to find Jesus in the process. As opposed to arranging our life around Jesus and letting Him give us all these things. The ones that we actually need. And so, as you get started in the fall, my encouragement for you is just actually think about how you're going to arrange and rearrange your life and you have more freedom to choose things than you think you do. Some of you just, that's it. Check out for the rest of today. It's the only thing you need to hear. And we will talk more about this in the days to come. Next week, we're going to start our series A Different Way, the series we've been in all year. We're going to jump back into that. But what I want to do today so that we can have a really healthy re-entry into it as I want to prepare your heart. I just want to try to prepare your heart so you can live a different way this fall semester. You see Hebrews 12 says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance

the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." Do you realize there is a race that's marked out just for you? Not a race, but the race that God has created and marked out just for you with boundaries, and borderlines, and guardrails, and parameters, and checkpoints, and rest stops, and overlooks. A journey that has ups and downs and zigs and zags and lefts and rights and valleys and mountaintops. And it is an incredible journey with an unimaginable destination. There's a race that has been marked out just for you and God has graced you for that race. He's given you everything you need for life and godliness. He has supernaturally empowered you to run your race. In fact, the word grace doesn't just mean forgiveness of sins; it's supernatural empowerment. It's God working in my life to do that which I couldn't do on my own. And He's given me the grace for my race. He's not giving me the grace for anybody else's race.

And the problem is sometimes when we're running our race, we get so busy looking at other people's race and we criticize their race. We complain about their race, we condemn their race or we covet their race. But we haven't been given the grace for their race. We've been given the grace for our race. Which means God hasn't graced you to be married to their spouse; He's graced you to be married to your spouse. God hasn't given you the grace for someone else's kids; He's given you the grace to raise your kids. God hasn't given you the grace for someone else's parents; He's given you the grace to have your parents. He's given you the grace for your gifts, and your talents, and your passions, and your circumstances, and your situations. He's given you everything you need to run your race. But sometimes when we're running our race, there are things that hinder and things that entangle us along the way. Things that trip and bind and cause us to stumble and get caught up and fall down. And there's luggage we pick up and backpacks and suitcases that we're trying to carry on our race. And we sometimes have to wake up to this fact that we've got to let those things go so we can actually run the race that God has graced us for. And we don't get rid of the things that have entangled us by looking at the things that have entangled us. We get rid of the things that have entangled us by looking at Jesus. Because when you're running and you look down, you look up. We got to look up at Jesus and we'd be amazed at how we start becoming unencumbered to run the race that He has marked out for us. And there is a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. A whole lot of people that have run their race. Well, this is basically everybody in the Bible. You can see them who have gone before you. There are a great cloud of witnesses in this church who are running their race well to inspire and encourage you to run your race. And so, before we go flying off into the fall in a thousand different directions, there are three things that I just feel like are from the Lord for our church that are hindering people from running their race. Three words. Forgiveness, grief, and obedience. Who do you need to forgive? What do you need to grieve? And where do you need to obey? So you can run your race because it is a great race in Jesus' name.

And if that analogy doesn't work for you, let me give you this one. "Above all else, guard your heart for it as the wellspring of life." The condition of your heart will determine the quality of your life. Whatever's going on in here will determine what happens out here. And your heart

almost has a giant filter over it. Think of your air conditioner or your engine filter, and it sucks in all this junk and it's meant to catch it. But if you don't clean it out every once in a while, that thing gets so clogged up and what happens? It starts to scream because the pressure is getting so large. It's sucking so much, but it can't get in. Some of us are living with this massive pressure in our life that we're about to explode. And so, we got to take the filter out and clean off the unforgiveness and the grief and the disobedience so we can run our race in Jesus' name with fresh air. You with me on this? And what I want to do is just look at the life of Joseph. Joseph was an Old Testament figure. He's part of the great cloud of witnesses. He ran his race so well. And he inspires me to run my race. And I hope he will inspire you to run your race. And if you remember Joseph, Joseph was the favored son of his father. His father had given him a coat of many colors. Joseph had dreams and visions and revelation and a great destiny from God. And what I love about Joseph is he is an Old Testament prophetic picture of Jesus. Jesus is the Father's favorite son. Jesus wears the robe of righteousness. Jesus had dreams and visions and revelations and an amazing destiny from the Father. And do you realize that if you're included in Christ, then everything that's true about Jesus is true about you. Which means you are the Father's favorite son or daughter. It means you're His beloved son or daughter in whom He is well pleased. That He rejoices over you with singing. That He loves you with an everlasting love; that you didn't choose Him, but He chose you because He wanted you. When was the last time you reminded yourself that I'm God's favorite? I'm God's favorite and nothing I do can change that because I've been included in Christ and Christ is His favorite. So, now I become his favorite in Jesus' name.

So, Joseph was his father's favorite son, but his brothers hated him. And so, they took Joseph one day. They threw him in a pit. They sold him to slave traders, told his father he was dead. Joseph was taken down to Egypt, sold to a slave master named Potiphar. And for a couple of years, he served in Potiphar's house until one day, Potiphar's wife made up a story about Joseph, completely slandered, gossiped, and told this whole narrative that wasn't true about Joseph. So, Joseph gets thrown in prison. Not just any prison, but a slave prison. And while in prison, he's serving people, doing his best. He helps these two guys get out of prison. He says, "Hey, when you get out, can you remember me? Because I would like to get out too." They forget about him. He's there another couple years. And after a while, Joseph is brought before Pharaoh, interprets Pharaoh's dream. Pharaoh is so inspired by it that he makes Joseph the number two in all of Egypt. Joseph saves the world from a global famine, rescues his family, brings them to Egypt, reconciles with his brothers, loves his father. I mean, it's this incredible story. This incredible race. And later in his life, when Joseph's father dies, this is what happens. This is a lot. Just let me read this to you. I'm really sorry. That's the best we can do on this thing. I know. Just if your eyes hurt, close them. I'll just read it to you like storytime. Joseph's father dies. The brothers are afraid. "So, they sent word to Joseph saying, 'Your father left these instructions before he died: "This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers.'" He forgave. "'The sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now, please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your fathers.'" When their message came to him, Joseph wept." He grieved. "His brothers then came and threw

themselves down before him. 'We are your slaves,' they said. But Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.'" He obeyed God's heart. "And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them." Joseph was able to throw off the unforgiveness, the grief and the disobedience to run his race and finish it well.

So, the first question for you is just this. Who do you need to forgive? I mean, can you even imagine, Joseph? You're sold by your own family into slavery. The people you're supposed to trust. The people you're supposed to rely upon. The people that are supposed to have your back, where you can be yourself with no masks or pretenses and he's sold by his own family. And then, this random woman makes up a story that completely shifts the reality of his life that's not true in any way. And then, he's forgotten and left all alone, rejected in prison. Can you even imagine? And the answer is for just about everyone in this room, yes, we can imagine. Because we don't have Joseph's story, but we have our own version of that story. You have your own version of deep wounds and pains from the sin of the people around you. I mean, this is why Jesus says, "It is impossible that no offenses should come." He says, "Hey, you live in a sinful world. It's impossible to go through this world and never be hurt or impacted by the sin of others." Sin steals, kills, and destroys. It corrupts, it dents, it stains. It tears, it breaks apart. And none of us are immune to it. We will be impacted by the sin of others. And the word offense is a really interesting word because it actually means stumbling block. It's something that trips you up. It's something that traps you. So, offenses will trip you up, entangle you, trap you on your race so you can't get where God is trying to take you. And if we don't deal with the unforgiveness, the offenses in our hearts, offenses will eventually turn into bitterness. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. If you allow unforgiveness and offense to stay in your heart, eventually that offense turns into bitterness and bitterness is a gateway sin. Bitterness, the real problem with it is what it becomes. It springs forth and defiles many. Bitterness will lead you to be a person of gossip and slander and anger and vitriol and judgment and condemnation and malice and hatred and cursing. It is a gateway sin that we need to deal with by allowing the grace of God to flow through us into the world around us. Which is why we are told to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. You will always forgive other people to the level you believe God has forgiven you. This is a principle of the kingdom. You will forgive other people in the way and manner that you believe that God has forgiven you. Like if you believe God is stingy with His forgiveness, you're stingy with your forgiveness. If you believe God makes you plead for forgiveness, you will make other people plead for forgiveness. If you believe that God doesn't really want to forgive you, then you will never really want to forgive others. Like however you believe God has forgiven you is how you forgive other people. So, if you want to know what you believe about how God has forgiven you, look at your ability to forgive others. And so, the question is, then how has God forgiven you? Completely, fully, and abundantly. "So far as the east is from the west, so far as He removed our transgressions from us." "I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more."

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He not only canceled your debt, He credited your account, and there is no more debt to pay. You owe Jesus nothing. Nothing. So we can't spend our lives telling other people that they owe us everything.

This is why Jesus in the Lord's prayer says, "Forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors." "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." This verse trips a lot of people up. And they think, "So, that means if I don't forgive someone else, God is not going to forgive me?" Now what Jesus is saying is, He's saying until you believe that God has fully forgiven you, you will never be able to fully forgive other people. He's saying, until you allow Him to cancel your debts, you will always try to collect on everyone else's debts. Once you realize that you owe Jesus nothing because of what He has done, I no longer will try to collect from other people because they owe Jesus nothing because He has paid for their debt as well. The bill has been paid not just for you, but for everyone. You see, we're called by Jesus to be people of love. And love is simply goodwill. It's charity. It means my will for you is good. My desire, my choice, my heart for you is for your good. And love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. And love keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus keeps no record of your wrongs. Why? Because His will for you is good. And so, evil is having a bad will. It's my desire. My choices. My heart is for your bad. And if love doesn't keep a record of wrongs, and I'm keeping a record of wrongs, then my will for that person is for their bad. If Jesus keeps no record of wrongs, can I ask you, are you keeping a record of wrongs? For your brothers who threw you in a pit and that woman who made up a story about you and those friends who forgot about you in prison? See, it's impossible to walk in the spirit of grace while holding on to the spirit of offense. It's really hard to live in God's kingdom with unforgiveness in your heart. And it is almost impossible to run into the future while holding on to the past. But you have to forgive.

And I can say this to you because this summer, as I was reflecting and contemplating and spending time with the Lord, I realized there was some unforgiveness that had developed in my heart over this past season. And it kind of caught me off guard. I didn't really notice it until I did. Until the Holy Spirit showed me and it was an unforgiveness that was holding me back on my journey. And I realized that I had some unforgiveness in my heart towards people who have left our church poorly in the past few years. I realized there was some unforgiveness in my heart to people who have left our church by violating our values and not caring about how it was going to impact other people. And not just doing the basic things that Jesus teaches us about being people of love. It's not that they left. It's how they left and it hurt me. And I watched as it hurt a lot of other people. See, at the end of the day, I'm the one that sits there and watches the hurts on our staff and our leaders as people do different things. And while that might not make a lot of sense to you in your life, maybe I could give you an example. Like say you are my realtor. And for a year, you're helping me stage my house and get contractors to fix the stuff in my house. You've showed me 50 different houses. And then, one day, you go on realtor.com

and you see my house has been listed. It's sold, and I've already bought a different house completely without you. And I've ghosted you and never told you anything. And you try to call me to figure out what's up and I won't answer your call. That would probably be hurtful. Or let's say you're my coach. And you spent three years coaching me, training me, helping me go through practices, get my skills. You like took me from here to here. And then, it's a game day and I just don't show up at the game. And you're looking around, you're wondering where I am. I've never called you. You try to call me, I ghost you. And I've just decided I don't want to play that sport anymore and never shared that with you. That would probably be hurtful. Or let's say that you're my manager and for five years, I worked in your space. And you train me and develop me and taught me the skills that I didn't have. And then, one day, I just didn't show up to work, and you can't figure out where I am until you ask the co-workers. And they say, "Oh, yeah, John moved to Alaska." And John just moved without ever communicating or sharing anything with you. That would probably be hurtful, right? You see, it's not that they have moved on. It's how they moved on, because this to me is sacred and holy. And it matters. And while that might not mean a lot to you, I bet there's something just like it in your life, where you've been hurt by other people. And I realized this was hindering me on my race and so, I had to start working it out with the Lord. And the way I work out forgiveness in my heart, that's why I'm telling you the story, is I figure out anybody that when I hear their name, it creates an emotional reaction within me, I just start practice blessing them. Just bless them. Just speak well of them. Just pray for them. Just love on them. God, I release grace into their life. And on those days when I have no grace to release into their life, God, I need to receive some of Your grace so I actually have something to release in this space. And I will keep praying for them, praying over them until I have cultivated God's heart for them. And once I can see them the way God sees them, I can release and be free to move on. So, who do you need to forgive? A boss, a friend, a spouse, a parent, a child, yourself? Because you can't run your race if you're trying to collect a debt from the past. And if we're included in Christ and Jesus hung on the cross saying, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do," then I have no right to hold on to an offense anymore. Because it's no longer I who live, it's Christ who lives within me. So, I'm actually not enabled to hold on to an offense because the echo of creation, the echo of heaven is forgiveness. Therefore, it must be the declaration of my life. Who do you need to forgive?

Second question is, is where do you need to grieve? You want to talk about grief? We think of Joseph's life. Think of all he lost. He had to grieve his father and his family. He had to grieve his plans, and his dreams, and his vision. He had to grieve his homeland and all the expectations of what he thought his life was going to be like because he's in a foreign country, doing things he never wanted to do in a place that he never wanted to be. He had to grieve. And what I love is that when his father passes away, and he says, "As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil, and you see it." He grieved it. He surrendered his pain to the goodness of God so he could keep running his race. Years later, he wasn't holding on to the past trying to still understand it or ask why or make up for it or get everybody to do something for, no. As far as I'm concerned, I've grieved that. And I've let it go and I'm running

my race. You see, I love what Psalms says, that it says, "The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." It's almost like God is never closer to us than when we're broken. And the reason a lot of us never feel close to God when we're grieving is because we don't grieve with God. We grieve without God so we don't feel Him close. It says all throughout the story, Joseph wept, and the Lord was with him. It's like he brought his grieving, he brought his pain to the Lord. And because he brought it to the Lord, the Lord was with him, and was doing the healing work in his life. In fact, I love this Psalm that says, "Trust in Him at all times. Oh, people, pour out your hearts to Him for God is our refuge. Selah." Pour out your hearts to Him. God is not afraid of your brokenness, your pain, your questions, your wounds, your hurts, your lack of understanding. He's not afraid of it. He's waiting for you to bring it to Him. You will find all throughout Scripture that the people of God grieve. They lament. They cry out to God. They have this deep pain, and they put it on the pages and they let it fly. And they're like, "Oh, God, where are you? I don't understand. I'm hurting." But they're coming to God. And in coming to God, they're starting to grieve effectively. And that's why most of the time at the end of the Psalms, when they pour out their heart to God, it ends with this one line that's like, "And yet I will still trust you." "And yet I will still rest upon your loving faithfulness." "And yet, even though, you are still good. Selah." Rest, pause, breath. It's like grief is pouring out your heart to God. And then, Selah. Pause, breath, rest. Interlude from the pain, because He's good. See, here's what I think grief is. Grief is surrendering your pain to the goodness of God. Grief is taking your brokenness, and it's surrendering it to the goodness of God. Grief is literally bringing my pain and putting it under God's goodness and allowing God's goodness to overshadow it. Grief is the process of wrestling through my own beliefs that God is good. God is good to me. And God works all things together for good for those who love Him. Grief is choosing to look at my pain through the goodness of God instead of looking at the goodness of God through my pain.

In a sense, grief is like making a declaration to the spiritual realm saying, "In this world, I will have trouble, but I take heart for He has overcome this world." In a sense, grief is not denying reality. It's just saying God's goodness is greater than this reality. And grief is embracing mystery. It's embracing this mystery that I don't understand it. I don't get it. I don't like it. I can't control it. It feels illogical to me. I can't get the questions of why and how this happened, answered in any way. And so, I have to figure out how to let go of all my questions, of all my control, of all my need to understand by embracing the mystery that this can take place and God can still be good to me at the same time. The mystery is the secret things belong to the Lord, but the things revealed belong to us. In other words, I may never know why, because that's a secret of the Lord. But what He has revealed is that He is good. And so, I can hold on to that. And that's very different than worldly grieving because worldly grieving is anger, denial, bargaining, all those things. It's this complaining. It's the need to ask questions. The why, the how, the understanding. It's numbing. It's coping. It's medication. And there's a time and a place for some of that. But kingdom grieving is surrendering our pain to the goodness of God. And if you don't grieve, one of two things will happen. One is you will stop running your race. It's almost like a checkpoint that you can't go through until you actually have surrendered that

pain to the goodness of God. So, you get stuck on your race and you can't move forward. Or if you don't grieve, you bury that pain inside of you, jump over the checkpoint and run on. And the problem is you carry false beliefs into the next leg of your race. If I don't grieve by taking my pain to the goodness of God, I run into the next leg of my race believing a bunch of lies about God and life and myself. Like God doesn't, God can't, God won't, God isn't. I'm not. I can't. I won't. Life isn't. Life can't. Life won't. And I take this pain from the past and I run, jump over the checkpoint and run into my future. But I can't actually run that race anymore because I now have false narratives and false beliefs about what this race is, what my life is all about, and who God even is. So grieving is actually the process of God not only healing your heart, but Him renewing your mind. Yes, He heals the wounds in your soul, but He washes your mind so you think things that are good and true and right.

And you'll find this all over the Bible. I mean, Habakkuk, the Israelites, you have not experienced tragedy like they were going through in this season. Nor have I. I mean, this is like next level. And he says, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God, my Savior." Life is full of though... though... though. Though my marriage, though my body, though my children, though my circumstances, though my situations that are so very real. Yet I will choose to submit and surrender those things to the goodness of God. Or how about Joel when God Himself says, "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten." Do you know God promises to give you back everything you've lost? Yes, Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy. But Jesus has come that you might have [life], and to the [full]. So, no matter what Satan wants to steal, kill or destroy from my life, Jesus promises to give me back more. Whether it be a little thing like time. Or a big thing like a new heaven and a new earth. He says, "I will repay you 100 times as much for everything you had to give up, for everything you lost in this life." Listen to me. Grieving without God is simply suffering without hope. Grieving without God is suffering without hope. If I grieve without Him, I'm suffering and there's no hope. There's no hope of a future. There's no hope of a race to run. There's no hope of goodness. There's no hope of restoration. But when I grieve with God, it's suffering with hope. It doesn't alleviate the suffering. There still is pain and brokenness from Satan stealing, killing and destroying. But I now have hope of restoration and reconciliation and everything I've lost; I believe He's going to give me back. Maybe not the way I want it and when I want it, but He promises to restore what darkness has taken in Jesus' name if I'll just keep running my race. Do you remember the story of David and Bathsheba? David and Bathsheba have a son. The son lives for seven days. And during the seven days, the son was sick and David wept. He fasted. He prayed. He sought God for an intervention, for God to move. Now, let me just read this to you. The child dies and David's servants are super confused. "Then, David got up from the ground after he'd heard his son had died. After he had washed, he put on lotions and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then, he went to his own house and at his request, they served him food and he ate. His servants asked him, 'Why are you acting this way?'" They're so confused. "'While the child was alive, you fasted and wept. But



now that the child is dead, you get up and eat?' He answered, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live. But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.' Then, David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him." What David shows us is that there is a big difference between a season of intercession and a season of grieving. While the son was alive and sick, he interceded. He pleaded, he contended, he fasted, he fought for something that mattered to him believing that God was going to intervene. But once the child passed away, David then moved into a season of grieving. He's no longer interceding, contending, pleading, asking why, asking how. No, he surrendered his pain to the goodness of God saying. "The child won't come to me, but I will go to him because I know the Lord restores that which Satan has taken. And so, I'm going to get up and I'm going to keep running my race." Then David, and he kept running his race and he ended up living his life and going back to his wife and they had Solomon. Do you know who Solomon is? Solomon is part of the lineage of Jesus. Solomon expands the Kingdom of Israel. Solomon, builds the temple of the Lord. What if David would have stayed in intercession instead of moving through healthy grieving and never reengaged his life? What if he would have withdrew and sat down in his pain and his brokenness and his loss? Think of what that would have cost him. Think of what it would have cost everyone in his life if he just didn't run his race. Because his race impacted their race, which actually impacts your race. Because Jesus came through Solomon. And Solomon's name actually means "loved by the Lord." So, because David worked through his grief and got up and kept running his race, a wake of love of God was released into the world. "Then David..." "Then David..." You have to figure out with the Lord. Is it a season of interceding and pleading and contending? Or is it a season of grieving, which is surrendering pain to the goodness of God and moving forward?

And I can share all that with you again because it was about three years ago that my wife's father died of a heart attack in the middle of the night. Colleen's dad was 65. He was super healthy. There were no signs of anything. And at like midnight, we get the call that he had a heart attack and he died. I mean, you want to talk about disorientation and brokenness and pain, the call, those calls that you never think will come. And then, one comes and there was immediate grief and brokenness and pain and loss. It's hard for anybody, but it's really hard for Colleen because her dad was like her best friend. They talked every day. They were super close. And I remember sitting there over the course of those first couple of days thinking, "I don't know how she's going to do it." Her dad was like, in the center of her entire life. Like, how is she going to do it? And over the course of the season to come, she wouldn't use these words, but I watched her day after day just surrender her pain to the goodness of God. She didn't deny reality. And there was those moments when his name was said or a song was played or this thing where she thought she dreamed about him being a part of or being at and it brings a flood of emotions. But instead of withdrawing and sitting down and getting hindered in her race, she took her pain and she somehow managed to just surrender it to the Lord. And you say like, how do you -- I don't know. You just got to give it to God and let His

goodness overshadow it. And she kept running her race. And because she kept running her race, even though there was a grief to work through, she was able to stay engaged as a mother and as a wife and as a friend and as a leader and her running her race. Then, Colleen got up and kept running her race, surrendering her pain to the Lord and a wake of love was released out of her life. And Colleen's race impacts my race and my race impacts your race and your race impacts the people you love's race. And the people you love's race impacts your race. Your race impacts my race. My race impacts Colleen's race. Are you catching it? What does it cost us when we don't run our race and we refuse to grieve according to Scripture not according to the ways of the world? Surrendering our pain to the goodness of God, which is so real. So, can I ask you, what do you need to grieve? What have you lost? A spouse, a friend, a parent, a child? A job, finances, a season, a dream? How about just life isn't what you thought it would be? That's grieving. That's surrendering that pain to the goodness of God. It's not shoving it. It's not sitting down and it's not trying to just jump over the checkpoint. It's taking it and it's bringing it to the Lord. And here's how you know you have grieving work to do. If you spend more time thinking about what you've lost than what you've been given, you have grieving work to do. If you spend more time thinking or talking about what happened than what God is doing, you have grieving work to do. If you spend more time complaining about the past than dreaming about the future, you have grieving work to do. You have to bring your pain to the Lord because some of us get so lost in the past that not only can we not create the future we can't even live in the present. And that impacts the race of everyone around us. So, whatever loss, whatever pain, whatever brokenness you may have experienced in this season or in your life, the Lord is close to the brokenhearted. He's inviting you to just surrender your pain to His goodness. Where you need to grieve?

And then, the last thing is just simply this. What do you need to obey? What's amazing about the life of Joseph is all throughout the story, he never chooses to live according to the world. He does the heart of God. He lives with character and integrity and does things with all his heart. Even in a season that many of us would justify him totally cashing out. No, he obeyed God. Here's the interesting thing about obedience is I think most of us know exactly what it is that God's asking us to do, we just don't want to do it. I think 9 out of 10 of us in this room, if I sat down with you and had a cup of coffee and just asked you, "What was the last thing God asked you to do and did you do it?" You would know what it is. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is the Guide, the Counselor, the Great Convictor. He's moving, He's showing. And what happens is we sit in a room like this and we hear from God. We know something we're supposed to do, but we quickly want to silence that voice and run out and go to lunch and move on with our life. And we can just get back to busyness and forget it. And we forget that God leads us in small steps, which means I don't get to skip any. There's no like detour on your race. There's no leg of the race you get to skip. This is not like Chutes and Ladders where you get a ladder and you just say, "I don't really want to do that." That's not how it works. The rich young ruler came to Jesus, wanted eternal life. Jesus told him very clearly, "The one thing you need to do is sell what you got and give it away." "I don't want to do that." Jesus says, "I got nothing else to say to you then." Now, we would say, "Oh, that's so harsh." And in church, we would be like, "No,

we need to give him an easier step." No, that was the step on his race. He just didn't want to take it. And this is where we get lost. I mean, this is why Proverbs says, "In his heart, a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his step." Listen, God has a course, so He gets to determine the steps. The problem is, is I plan my own course and therefore, I take my own steps. The problem is, this is the road of destruction. This is the road of life. If He plans the course, He gets to determine the steps, and I don't get to map out my own life. And if God is love, then everything He asks me to do is loving. So, any place I refuse to obey God is because I question His love in that space. Disobedience is a lack of trust. It's really all it is. If I disobey God and I don't take the little step He's asked me, it's because I just don't trust that that's the best step, so I'm going to take this one because I actually think I like it better. So, the question is, is where do you need to obey?

I mean, just a few months ago, my son came home from his High School Circle and he said, "Dad, guess what?" "What?" He said, "My leader felt like he heard from God to sell his sports car and he's going to sell it." I was like, "That's really cool." He goes, "No, no. You don't get this, Dad." He goes, "This is one of those cars that men spend their entire life trying to get. And God asked him to sell it and he shared it with us that he's going to do it." And I watched as it really impacted my son because he saw someone else running their race well. And it's not that there's anything wrong with having a car and God may give this man a car back, another car in the future. But in this leg of his race, that was something God wanted to do. Maybe for no other reason than that story got told so you would hear it. That's the mystery of God. That's the, stop trying to ask and understand every reason why God asks you to step there. How about just, He's loving, and where He's leading me is good. I don't know. And it may have nothing to do with me. God might be like, "I need you to move the car down the line because there'll be someone in church where the story gets told in three months and that's going to actually save their life." Oh, but I didn't get all the narrative. If you tell me that I do. Sell the car. What's your "sell the car"? Where do you need to obey? What do you need to give, or get rid of, or pick up, a relationship to end, or a person to apologize for, or something to reconcile? I think you already know it in your heart. Do you realize that if every person in this church took one next step today, we would literally send shockwaves through the heavenly realm and it would literally knock down the gates of hell. Just one. I'm not saying you got up and sprinted. I'm saying you took one. Just the thousands of us. We all took one step of faith. We would be a completely different church by lunch. You would come back next Sunday and you wouldn't even recognize us because there would be so much life of heaven released into the atmosphere by thousands of people taking that one step that they know God asked them to take. Not five. Not the impossible. Not the jumping over. No, just that one thing. We would be a completely different church by lunch. Why? Because not only would you be running your race, but as this Body of Christ, we would have just taken a step on our race as a body saying, "Nothing's going to hinder us. Nothing's going to hold us back in Jesus' name." Come on,

Joseph ran his race. He kept the faith. He finished the faith, and so did Jesus, and so can you. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off

everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us," because it's a great race in Jesus' name and, "Let us fix our eyes on Him, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the race," the cross, His race, "scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Do you realize Jesus ran His race? And He refused to be hindered by unforgiveness, by grief or by disobedience. He ran His race by forgiving. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He ran His race by grieving. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And to Your hands, I commit My spirit." That's grief of the highest level. And then, by obeying. "My God, if there'd be any other way, take this cup from Me, but not My will, but Yours be done." So, He kept the faith. He fought the fight and he finished the race. And there is a crown of righteousness in store for Him and for you. And if you feel like, "I can't get untangled from this stuff, I don't know how to do it. I'm struggling." Then, don't look down at how you forgive that person or how you grieve or how you obey. No, look at Jesus, because looking at His forgiveness for you will fill your heart with forgiveness for others. Looking at His goodness over your life will heal the grief in your heart, and looking at His love for you will give you the faith to obey. The author and perfecter of our faith. We look to Him and His forgiveness and His goodness and His love. Let us run in Jesus' name. So, come on.

Who do you need to forgive? What do you need to grieve? And where do you need to obey? I would encourage you to just write these down in your journal and process it with the Holy Spirit this week and notice it's the word "working on." You don't just walk out of here and say, "I've forgiven everybody." I won't believe you if you say that. It's not how it works. You have to cultivate God's heart for that person. By focusing on God's heart first for you. You have to work on it. It might take you the whole semester. It might take you a year. It might take you the next 10 years. It's still worth getting unencumbered from. I'm working on grieving. What are you working on grieving? Never take the cheap answer of like, "God is good. It's fine. Move on." No, it's real pain. And God wants you to pour out your heart to Him. He wants you to surrender it to His goodness so you got to work on it. Are you working on grieving? But obedience, it's a choice. These ones we work on deeply with the Lord, this one we do today. This one, if we don't choose to do it today, we choose not to do it. I'm choosing to obey, so I will. This isn't like, I'm going to get around to it. This isn't like, I'm working on it all semester. Whatever your thing is, I couldn't think of anything there. So, that's from the Lord to not give you an example. Come on. We got a great race as a body and you got a great race as a person. What do you need to grieve? Who do you need to forgive? Where do you need to obey in Jesus' name?

So, Jesus, I just believe that in some way, today is some hard work for the journey ahead for us. I just believe even as we've been talking, even as we've been worshipping with You in the room, You're cleaning out the air filter of our hearts. You're starting the process of removing the debris that has caused so much pressure inside of us so fresh air can flow. I believe right now You've been unshackling people that have been bound up in their race. You've been setting them free from traps. You've been opening up toll gates that have kept them back. You've been tying their shoes for them. Because there's a great race to run. So, Holy Spirit, these are

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big and deep and sensitive areas of our heart, like who we've been hurt by. What we're broken from. And where we're afraid to trust You. So, I just release the spirit of compassion and kindness into this room, that You would be close. That You would heal. That You would whisper, and encourage, and pick up, and help us move forward. Because this is a great journey. And you're taking us to an unimaginable destination. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.