

“Restorative Community” Mark 8 Shane Hatfield 8/15/21

We’re going to read and study Mark 8, so if you have a Bible, open up to Mark 8. If you’re a visitor, my name is Shane Hatfield. I’m the pastor at Ethos, and I’m so glad that you’re here. I would love to meet you afterward. There’s a coffee bar back in the back so come up there afterwards and meet me. I’d love to get to know you, to shake your hand, to thank you, and we have a gift for you, a thank-you gift for coming to worship with us that we can give you. I can answer any questions that you want, we can talk about life, love, religion, and conference realignment in college football. Whatever you want. So just come back there and we can talk.

We’re going to continue our study tonight of ‘The Ethos Way.’ We’re answering questions that we feel like we need to answer to become a healthy body. The first week we talked about why we exist, and we said that we exist because of God’s transforming grace, and we exist to spread His transforming grace to all of creation. Then we started answering the question of how do we behave? Our behavior is embodied in our core values and we have three core values, the first being gospel centrality. We focus on the gospel. The second one is impassioned worship. We talked about how the gospel empowers us to worship God with our head and with our heart and with our hands. This week we’re going to look at our last core value and that is restorative community. What we believe is that we bring people to Jesus for restoration. We come to Jesus together, and Jesus restores us. There are a lot of different places in the Bible where we can see this principle work, but I think Mark 8:22-26 is a good example so we’re going to read and meditate on that tonight.

Hear the word of the Lord:

“<sup>22</sup> And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. <sup>23</sup> And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” <sup>24</sup> And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” <sup>25</sup> Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. <sup>26</sup> And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.””

All men are like grass, and their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but not the word of the Lord. It stands forever. Let’s listen to it.

On Memorial Day weekend, my family and I were headed to a softball tournament that morning. We woke up and Shari’s stomach didn’t feel well. She said, ‘Hey, I’m not feeling well. I’m not sure that a full day at the ballpark is going to be good for my stomach. I think I’ll just stay home. I’ve got some studying I need to do anyway.’ I said, ‘That’s great. You just stay home. Study, get better, we’ll keep in touch and maybe you can come to the softball field later.’ So, we went to the softball field and as the day kind of progressed she sent me text messages just keeping me updated and eventually, about lunch time, she said, ‘I’m feeling really bad. I’m vomiting. I don’t think I can come.’ And I said, ‘That’s too bad. Tough it out. Get up here.’ Just joking. I actually said, ‘It’s cool. I’ve got this. You just stay home and get better.’ So, we go through the softball tournament. We get home. She feels a little better but not great, she’s kind of going back and forth between having this stomach pain and then feeling good, and then having the stomach pain, and then feeling good. I said, ‘Don’t worry about it. I’ll take care of everything. You just rest.’

So, we get to bedtime and I go in at bedtime and she’s still lying in bed and she said, ‘I think I’ve got a problem. The pain has moved from the middle of my stomach to the side.’ We both knew what that was, at least we thought we did. We thought she probably had appendicitis

and we should probably go to the hospital. So, we called Shari's dad and said, 'Can you come over and watch the kids? We need to take her to the hospital.' So, I drove her to the hospital. We got to the emergency room, and we sat in the emergency room for what, eight hours or something like that? Shari sat the full eight hours. I took a few breaks, like naps, in the car because it was getting late. Eventually, she got in to see a nurse, they put her on fluids, she got in to see the doctor, she took a CT scan, and they confirmed that she had appendicitis. So, she had to get her appendix removed. She had to go to the pre-surgery and meet with a nurse, and then she had to go back and have her appendix taken out and then come post-op with a nurse. When she was finally ready, I got her and took her home. Eventually, she was restored. She recovered and got better. Here she is today.

Why do I tell you that story? I tell you that because it took an entire community of people to bring Shari restoration in that situation, right? She had to have me to drive her to the hospital and drive her home. I pretty much did nothing the rest of the time. But I drove the car. She had to have her dad watch our kids. She had to have the nurse as a receptionist to check her in. She had to have the triage nurses take care of her, the pre-op nurse, the post-op nurse. All these people had to come together to help her see the surgeon so that the surgeon could remove the appendix and restore her to health. It took a community of people to bring restoration.

I think that's what we see in our Scripture tonight. We see it takes a community of people to bring this blind man to Jesus so that Jesus could restore his sight. He couldn't have done it alone. He had to have a community around him. That's what we see at Ethos. That's what we see in the church and that's what we want. We want to be a community that brings people to Jesus for restoration. Jesus is the great physician who can heal our souls of every sickness, every disease, every ailment, everything. Every sin that weighs us down, Jesus can heal us. As a community, we bring each other to Jesus so He can bring restoration in our lives.

That's what we're going to look at tonight. We're going to look at the power of a restorative community, the barriers to restorative community, and the process of having a restorative community. The power, the barriers, and the process. Kids, if you're here, in the passage it talks about this guy who says he sees people walking around looking like trees. I'm going to give you permission to draw a picture during my sermon. I would love for you guys to draw a picture of people that look like trees, okay? I want to hang it up in my office this week and see, this is what it looks like.

So, first off, let's see the power of a restorative community. You see it there in verse 22. It says, "<sup>22</sup> And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him." So, a whole group of people brought this blind man in. He couldn't have found Jesus by himself because he was blind. He couldn't come alone. He had to have a community to guide him to someone who could restore his sight. And not only did this community bring him to Jesus, they begged Jesus to heal him. In other words, they prayed for him. They knew him well enough that they knew his needs. They loved him well enough that they cared for him to bring him to Jesus, and they prayed earnestly for him on his behalf. Restorative community has this power. It has this power to bring people to Jesus so He can heal them, and this isn't the only place that we see this in the gospel of Mark.

In Mark 2, there's a story about a paralyzed man, and this paralyzed man wants to get to Jesus so that he can be healed, but he can't go by himself because he's paralyzed! So, the story tells us that a whole group of people brought in a paralyzed man on a mat and the room was so full that they couldn't come in through the door, they had to dig the grass or whatever it was on the roof and they lowered this paralyzed man down through the roof so that he could get to Jesus.

The passage says that when Jesus saw “their” faith. Their. Plural. It wasn’t just the man on the mat, it was all of his friends around him. When He saw their faith, He said, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ And then later He healed the paralyzed man to show that He had the power to forgive sins.

In Mark 7, Jesus heals a deaf man, and the passage says, “They brought Him a deaf man.” An entire community of people surrounded this deaf man and brought him to Jesus so that Jesus could heal him. All through these stories you see people who are sick and suffering, and they don’t come to Jesus alone. They come in community! A group of people brings them to Jesus, so Jesus can restore them.

Over the last eight months, I have heard similar story after similar story about our church as I’ve talked to people and I’ve gotten to know the Ethos story. I’ve heard stories of people who were unchurched, that had never heard the gospel, had never gone through the doors of the church, and yet, they met someone from Ethos, and they were invited into that community and they came, and they heard the gospel and they believed, and they were saved. They were restored through our church. I’ve heard stories of people who were de-churched. Who had left the faith, had left the church, had rebelled against it, and because of the love and grace of people at Ethos, they came back and they are restored to Jesus and the church. I’ve heard stories about weary, burnt out Christian servants who came and heard the good news of the gospel and were able to rest and experienced refreshing and renewal. I’ve heard stories of people who were enslaved and addicted, but they came to members of Ethos and they joined recovery groups, or Bible studies, and they were able to be freed. Their lives were changed. They were restored.

I’ve heard stories about people who were suffering and through the community, through the people, they were able to find hope and healing and restoration. I was talking with somebody and they said they were suffering with infertility and they were suffering alone and finally, they had just had enough of being alone and so they went to Bible study and that night they shared their suffering, the way they were struggling, with their Bible study and afterward, another person in the Bible study came up to them and said, ‘We’ve been struggling with the same thing. Let’s talk about it.’ And so, they got together, and they shared their suffering together and that birthed a lifelong friendship, and that birthed a joyful adoption. Jesus used that community to bring restoration in their lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God has used our church to restore sinners and sufferers through the gospel. There’s power in the church. There’s power in the gospel. There’s power in our community. As we look forward, as we move toward the future, we want to continue to be a group of people that brings people to Jesus for restoration. That’s the kind of community we want to be.

But there are barriers to that community. That’s the second thing we’re going to look at: the barriers. The first barrier is isolation. As a society, because of the pandemic, we’ve experienced probably more isolation, maybe than we ever have. We’ve been forced to be alone, to be separate from each other. We’ve kind of been heading down that direction anyways because of technology. Technology has this sort of isolating effect on everybody, when we can interact with people through technology the way we used to have to go out in the community and interact with people. It’s been exacerbated because of the pandemic, because everybody has been forced into isolation. We know that isolation, whether you’re a child, an infant, or an adult, isolation will destroy you. I think I shared this a few weeks ago but researchers have done research that showed that one of the most damaging things to an infant is just to leave them alone, to not touch them. Prisons have long known that the best way to punish someone in prison is to put them in isolation.

If we are isolated, if we're alone, it does damage to our minds, our bodies, and our souls. Isolation is a barrier to experiencing the restoration of Jesus. What we're hoping is that as we come out of the pandemic, as we're able to meet together in community safely and appropriately, that God would use our community to restore us, to restore our souls. So, I ask you, how have you been isolated by technology or the pandemic or something else? How can you return? What does it look like for you to return into community? What does it look like to move toward a body of people who know you and love you and want to bring you to Jesus?

The first barrier is isolation. The second barrier is just denial. It's to deny that you have a problem or to deny the severity of the problem. Think back to this passage. Jesus takes the man out of the crowd and He begins to heal him. Jesus says, 'Now what do you see?' Now, if you're like me and you're a people pleaser, I'd probably be like, 'Everything is great, Jesus! I see it all!' Like, you don't want to tell the guy that He didn't heal you! Right? But what did he say? Jesus says, 'What do you see?' And he says, 'I see men that look like trees,' which brings a funny question. If he can't see, how does he know that they're men and not just trees, but that's a sidenote. The man admits that he can't see clearly. He doesn't deny it. He's honest. The first step to being a part of a restorative community is being open and honest and not denying your sins or your struggles.

Addiction recovery programs like Alcoholics Anonymous and Celebrate Recovery, they know this. They know that the only way for people to find recovery is to make an open, honest, full confession of their sins, not trying to minimize it or mitigate it, but to be open and honest about it. The surest way that you know that somebody is not ready for recovery is they want to deny that they have a problem, or they want to minimize the problem. If you ask someone who's an alcoholic, if you look at their life and it's like, their life is totally unmanageable, but you ask them like, 'Do you have an alcohol problem?' And they say, 'No! I'm okay. I'm fine. It's just a couple drinks. I can handle it. It's not that big of a deal.' That's a sure sign that they have a problem and that they can't see clearly.

What area of your life are you in denial? Where can you not see clearly? Here's how you need community! You need community to show you what you don't see! What's the problem with a blind spot? You can't see it. The things that we're most enslaved to, we can't see and so we need somebody from outside of us to speak into us and say, 'You're enslaved to this. Your life has become unmanageable. You need help.' We can't live in denial.

So, the first barrier was isolation, the second, denial, and the third barrier is unresolved conflict. It's not explicit in the text, but it's implicit. These people are working to care for this man! If we have unresolved conflict in our body, we will not work together for restoration. We can't be a community of restoration unless we're also a community of reconciliation. I have seen churches and ministries just destroyed by unresolved conflict. Now, conflict is going to happen, because we're all sinners, and so, at some point I'm going to sin against you and you're going to sin against me, and we're going to have a conflict. The conflict is going to happen and it's kind of like cancer. The sooner you treat it and the more invasively you treat it, the better your chance for survival. If that conflict metastasizes like cancer and it gets into your bloodstream and it spreads to the rest of the body, then it's going to kill. It's hard to get rid of. So, where we have conflict in our body, we have to pursue forgiveness and reconciliation, so that we can be a body that loves people well enough to see restoration happen.

These barriers are isolation, denial, and unresolved conflict. What we have to do is we have to go through this process to become a restorative community that Jesus, that we kind of see here in this passage. So, what does it look like to become a restorative community? I will say, 1A

and 1B. 1A is intentionality and 1B is prayer. You've got to have those two things together. I'm not going to separate it into one or two. Intentionality and prayer. We've got to be intentional. Everything in the world and the flesh and the devil all pulls us toward isolation. It all pulls us toward self-centeredness and selfishness and isolation. The only way we're going to build community is we're going to have to push back on that. We're going to have to push back on it. It's going to look different for everyone based on your life stage and your personality and your life situation and what you've been through and your preferences, so, it's all going to look a little different, but the basic formula is the same. Time plus communication equals friendship. If you want to build good community, you're going to have to spend time with people and communicate with them, and as you spend time with people and communicate with them, then you begin to build intimacy and you begin to become the kind of community where change and transformation can take place.

Now, if you've been around Ethos for a while, and a lot of you have, I just want to name something that if it hasn't happened to you yet, it's going to happen to you. Everything has changed in the world and everything has changed in Ethos over the last eight years. We all just need to kind of grieve that a little bit. It's okay if you've been around for a while, to look out and go, 'Yeah, things have changed.' To look back at the past with honor and say, 'Man, there were some amazing things that happened here over the last eight years.' And with honesty and go, 'But things have changed.' In that process of grieving and thinking about the past with honor and honesty, then I think that brings us to a place where we can begin to enjoy what's happening now, where you can see the good and where you can begin to build community with people that are here, that are with you, and that love you and care for you.

If you're new to Ethos, and a lot of you are, it's probably like 50% of the room has been here six years or less, and then 50% of the room has probably been here six months or less. If you're new to Ethos, we want you to get involved in our community. There are so many different avenues where you can get involved. There are so many different ways that you can serve. Really, if you do anything to be a part of our community and to build community, that's going to help. When I first came on staff at RiverOaks, this church, many moons ago back in 2010, I showed up at the office for my first week and I went to Ricky who was my boss, he's the pastor here, and I said, 'Ricky, what do you want me to do?' And he said, 'Shane, there are so many things that are not getting done, if you do anything, it will help.'

In some ways, because of the pandemic, and because we're just in transition, anything you can do to help build community is going to help. Whether it's inviting somebody over for a meal, or inviting someone for coffee, or just praying for somebody, or just sending them a text message, or throwing a shower, or having a party or volunteering in the nursery. Whatever you can do to help build friendship and community is going to help. If you need ideas, it would be nice if the elders knew, if you have ideas come to the staff and come to the elders and share, and say, 'I'd like to do this, can I do it?' We had somebody this week that said, 'Hey, I'd love to help out with showers and meal trains, can I do that?' And we were like, 'Yes, thank you. That would be amazing.' So, it's going to take intentionality.

But it's also going to take prayer. I'm a doer by nature, so I think about, just like, do stuff. But it's also going to take prayer. It's going to take the work of praying for each other. Like I said earlier, they prayed for this person. They didn't just bring him to Jesus. They brought him to Jesus, and they prayed for him. John Calvin says that prayer is the chief act of faith. The main way that we enact our faith is by praying. So, I would ask you, Ethos, who are you begging Jesus for? For whom are you... I don't know how to say this properly. I'll just say it in Okie.

Who are you begging Jesus for? Who are you begging Jesus to heal? Who are you begging Jesus to restore? Who are you begging Jesus to save? Who are you begging Jesus to transform? Your friends? Your family? Your neighbors? Your coworkers? Each other? Let's know each other well enough, let's be involved in each other's lives enough that we know exactly how to beg Jesus for each and every person in this room.

We have an Ethos group that meets before the church, shameless plug, Ethos Group 3 'o clock here. And we were trying to decide what we were going to do a few weeks ago, and of course I was like, 'Well, we could study this, this and this,' and somebody in our group said, 'Or we could pray?' I was like, 'Oh, that's a good idea. We should pray.' I was a little ashamed because I don't think in decades of ministry... I guess I've been in ministry a decade now. I don't think I've ever been a part of a group that just prayed. So now, we meet, and we pray. Prayer is a way that we bring people to Jesus and God answers our prayers and He shapes our hearts around those prayers. Prayer doesn't change God. Prayer changes us and it shapes our hearts around people who need restoration.

So, we've got to be intentional, we've got to pray, and then we've got to be honest. We've got to be honest. Like I said earlier, we can't be in denial. We've got to be honest about who we are and what we're struggling with. I was talking to one of our members and I was asking them about what they enjoyed about our church and what they appreciated about it, and they said, 'I love the Ethos groups.' And I said, 'Why do you love the Ethos Groups?' And he said, 'Because the first time I came to an Ethos Group there was just this sense of honesty and authenticity and I felt like it was a place where it was okay to not be okay, and I hadn't been in a place like that for a long time.' We want Ethos to be a place where it's okay to not be okay. It's okay to walk in and talk about your sins and your suffering. We don't want to just leave people there, because Jesus doesn't leave us there. Jesus meets us where we are, but He doesn't just leave us where we are. We want to help people move toward Jesus, together. We want to carry each other toward Jesus in sanctification. Sometimes, that looks like getting together and being honest and dragging each other to Jesus, and sometimes that looks like walking to Jesus together, and sometimes that looks like sprinting to Jesus. Whatever it is, wherever you are, we just want to be open and honest about where we're at, so that we can move toward Jesus together. When we are honest about where we're at, and we're humble about it, God's power can work through us. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Paul says that God's power is made perfect in weakness.

This reminds me of two of my students in RUF who became best friends, and this is how they became best friends. One of them showed up to RUF and was all alone and so she went to the bathroom and started crying. The other one showed up to RUF and she was all alone and went to the bathroom and started crying and they found each other in the bathroom crying because they were alone and they looked at each other and said, 'Huh. You too?' And they became best friends from that moment. A great friendship was born, and it has brought fruit for the gospel and has transformed their lives. But we've got to be open and honest for that to take place. So, we need prayer, and we need intentionality, we need honesty, and lastly, we need persistence.

Restorative community takes persistence. Virtually all commentators, conservative or liberal, when they look at this passage, one of the things they agree on is that it takes more than one touch from Jesus for restoration. It takes more than one touch from Jesus to bring restoration. It's a two-stage healing. There are no other healings in the gospel where there's a two-stage healing, but here there is. It's because this healing is really a parable. It's a parable of our

spiritual growth. It takes place in stages. Where it fits here in the narrative actually shows the spiritual progression of the disciples.

In chapter 7, the disciples do not get who Jesus is at all or what He is doing. They don't get it. They don't understand Him. Then, in chapter 8 you see this healing and then also, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ. So, it's like, 'Yay! Peter got it! Finally!' And then right after that Jesus says, 'Oh and by the way, I'm going to go to the cross and I'm going to die.' And Peter says, 'No, you're not!' And Jesus says, 'Yes, I am. Get behind me, Satan.' And you're like, 'No! Peter doesn't get it again!' It's not until chapter 15 when Jesus dies on the cross and later on in the gospel when we see that the disciples finally get it. They didn't understand. They kind of understood. And then they understood.

That's kind of like our spiritual life, isn't it? We go through these peaks and valleys and we go through times when we don't understand God at all, and we go through times where we see a little more clearly, but it looks like men walking as trees, and then we go through times where we see the gospel and Jesus clearly. Our spiritual growth is a progression of gradually seeing Jesus more and more clearly in our lives. See, we tend to, in the church, kind of glorify a Pauline model of conversion. Paul, the apostle, doesn't believe in Jesus and then gets body slammed on the road to Damascus and then becomes an apostle and believes in Jesus. Those types of conversions happen, but a lot more of us have conversions like Peter where it's a slow subtle progress and a lot of people will grow up in the church and wonder, 'Did I believe when I was four? Did I believe when I was eight? Did I believe when I was twelve? Or did I believe when I was twenty, or when I was forty, or when I was sixty?' And the answer is 'Yes.' There was a spiritual progression taking place in your sanctification. You were more and more seeing your sin and more and more seeing the goodness of the gospel. That's spiritual growth. That's transformation.

But you've got to keep coming. You can't give up. Keep coming. Keep getting those touches of Jesus. Keep coming week after week after week. At AA and CR they have a saying. They say, 'Don't quit until the miracle happens.' In other words, keep coming back. That's how worshipping in community works. Don't quit until the miracle happens. Keep coming back. Keep coming back and looking for Jesus. Keep coming back and hearing the gospel. As we come day after day, week after week, year after year, and we bring people to Jesus, and we bring ourselves to Jesus, we bring each other to Jesus, Jesus will restore us. The place where we see that most clearly is on the cross. The restoration that we want, that we need, that we have to have, happens on the cross. That's why we come back every week and we look on the cross, because there we see the King, the great King, the mighty King, the King on the cross that died for our sins to restore our relationship with God, to restore our relationship with each other, to restore creation, and that King's hands are healing hands.

In the Old Testament, the laying on of hands was done to anoint priests, to bless people, to put sacrifices on animals, but it wasn't done for healings. Then in the New Testament we see as Jesus lays His hands on people, He heals them. That's because He's the true King, and as Tolkien says at the end of the Lord of the Rings, "The hands of the king are healing hands, and by his hands he will be rightly known." As we come in here each week, we experience the healing hands of the King, and as we're healed, we get to go out and be the hands and feet of Jesus to bring healing to others. We say, 'Come. Come and see. Come with me to this man who can heal you, who can restore you.' We want to be that kind of community because we have that kind of God, a God with healing hands that has healed us and restored us. As we do every week

when we come to the end of the sermon, what do we do? We pray because we can't do it on our own. We need the great surgeon, Jesus, to do it. So, let's go and ask Him to do it.