

Good morning. Somebody in this service commented a few weeks ago that when they see me come up these steps, they're a little scared for me. I have two artificial knees and two artificial hips. Some of you will understand when you get to me, my age. So I'm 63.

All of you are older than me. I know that. So anyway, But I'm glad to be here. Merry Christmas. And here's where we're going to start.

Everybody has a story here. And I know I met some of you. I know a little bit of some of your stories. I met Steve and his wife and Jan. You all have stories.

Every one of your stories has a few things in common. All right, here's the first thing. You were all created to be faithful and fearless. Every single one of you were created in the image of God to be faithful and fearless. Second thing I know is true about your story is it's shattered.

You have shattered dreams, shattered relationships. Faithful and fearless has become faithless and fearful. There's a shatteredness to your story. Heavy. There's good things in life, but there's things in life that didn't go the way you thought it would be.

Your character, all kinds of issues. So the third thing is true about your story. To make matters worse, you have an enemy. You're made faithful and fearless. It's broken and shattered.

Your story is. And to make matters worse, you have an enemy who hates you. He is absolutely committed to your individual destruction. He wants nothing more than for you to give up on life and give up on God.

Oh, and by the way, Merry Christmas. Right? But the fourth part of your story, every one of your story, which is the Merry Christmas story, is Jesus came to rescue you.

He came to rescue you from these damaging parts of your story. So today we're starting a series. You saw the video. The series is faithful and fearless. And it's looking at the lives of the women in the Christmas story.

It's kind of. They all weave through. It's Eve. We're looking at Eve today. Then Bathsheba in the Old Testament.

And then Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Mary, the mother of Jesus. Anna, the prophet who prophesied over baby Jesus. Every one of them has a story that's faithful and fearless, like all of ours were made to be. And that story is about trust.

It's about hope. It's about strength. So the Christmas story has its own broken parts to it. But again, the Christmas story is about a

rescuer. We have.

His name is Jesus. So we're going to start off by reading Genesis 3. And I'm gonna introduce Genesis 3 by introducing to you what I call the weird meter. I think we have a slide for that. Here's the weird meter.

All right. The weird meter is when you read things in the Bible that are on the supernatural side. And it can feel weird. All right? One of the things I like to say to people, which I believe is true, is the invisible world is just as real as the visible world.

The invisible world is just as real as the visible world. So this particular passage in Genesis 3, the weird meter goes a little higher. Cause we're talking about a talking snake and we're talking about Satan. It's like, what? That's weird.

Let's just be honest. It's weird. It's weird in a way that we know is true. But as we look at this passage in Genesis 3, a story we believe happened historical, there talks about descendants and things like this. So we know there's historicity to this story, but it still feels weird.

All right, so here's Genesis 3, so you might know. Beginning of the story. Adam and Eve were created. God claimed it was all good. He called it all good.

Adam and Eve were in the garden. Everything was good. Food was good, life was good. And then God. But God told Adam, everything you can have, except don't eat from the tree in the middle of the garden.

It's the only thing. Here's where we go. Genesis chapter three. So the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day, he asked the woman, did God really say you must not eat the fruit of any of the trees in the garden?

Of course it may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden. The woman replied, it's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we're not allowed to eat. God said, you must not eat it or even touch it. If you do, you will die. Okay, I'm popping here.

Sorry.

You won't die. The servant replied to the woman, God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you'll be like God, knowing both good and evil. The woman was convinced. Hold on. I'm going to stop for a second.

I think I'm popping too much. Right. Say yes. Thank you. Thank you.

I don't know. Is there a. Is there a handheld mic? Sorry. It's Sean's fault.

It is. Am I popping now? All right, thanks, Sean. Now it's not Sean's fault. Sean's the rescuer.

Thank you. Sean. All right. So, serpent's talking to Eve. You won't die.

The serpent replied to the woman, God knows that your eyes will be open as soon as you eat it, and you'll be like God, knowing both good and evil. Here's where the whole story goes wrong. For you and me and for Eve. The woman was convinced. She saw the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her.

So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it too. At that moment, their eyes were opened and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden.

So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. Then the Lord called to the man, where are you? He replied, I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked. Who told you that you were naked?

The Lord God asked, have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat? Of course, God knew. He was wanting Adam to answer. The man replied, it was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it. The blame game started way back then.

The Lord God asked the woman, what have you done? The serpent deceived me, she replied, that's why I ate it. Then the Lord God said to the serpent, oh, here's the weird meaning. God's talking to the serpent. He's talking to the evil one.

He's talking to the adversary of our souls. Because you have done this, you are cursed. More than all the animals, domestic and wild, you will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live. And here's our verse for the day, verse 15. And I will cause hostility.

This is God talking to the evil one, right? I will cause hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. I want you to repeat with me, repeat the word hostility. Hostility.

Think the NIV that you have says enmity. I was afraid I wouldn't be

able to pronounce it right, so I put it in hostility. All right, now read the last part, starting with he will. All right. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

He, Jesus. His heel. Jesus. First time Christmas shows up in the Bible. He, the offspring of the woman, he will crush your head.

But you, Satan, you will strike his heel. It's the gospel. The first time, most commentators say the first time the gospel shows up in the Bible is in this really dark, broken story. So let's look at some of the characters in this story. Now we're gonna do Eve.

Eve is the primary character of the day. Eve is told, she's told in the Bible. She is the mother of all living people, which is us. So Eve is our mother. She was a faithful.

She was created this way. She was faithful and fearless. Bible calls her a helper. The better word for helper might be a lifesaver. She was a faithful and a fearless lifesaver for Adam.

She was fantastic, flourishing and fruitful. She was faultless, flawless and free spirited. She was fun loving and full hearted. No fear, no shame, no regret. All was joyful, beautiful and magnificent.

So if Eve's the mother of all living beings, then this is true of us, right? You were made faithful and fearless. You, in the image of God were made to be fantastic, flourishing and fruitful, faultless, flawless and free spirited, fun loving, full hearted, no fear, no shame, no regret. Joyful, beautiful and magnificent. You see, because Eve's story is our story.

Made in the image of God to be fearless and faithful. Then it all went wrong. Serpent tells Eve that's not what God really meant. And see, the core of the lie, they're the core of the lie the serpent gave to Eve, which is the core of the lie. He lies to us.

God's holding out on you. God's withholding from you, you see, Cause he's withholding all this wisdom and knowledge and life and he's holding out on you. He's lying about that. Every lie that Satan utters to you or to me has that as its theme verse. God is withholding from you.

He's not really good. He's holding back. Eve was convinced, the Bible tells us she ate the apple or whatever the fruit was. Adam ate. And then God issues the curse.

Painful childbirth, pain for toil for Adam, thorns, thistles, and I would add lima beans. Came at that time by the sweat of your brow, dust to dust. Death happens. One son kills the other son and it's broken, shattered. It's not the life we always wanted.

So when I talk. There was a famous scientist in the 1600s in France named Blaise Pascal. He was famous for. He invented the first mechanical calculator. He also, if some of you may be familiar with Pascal's Triangle, that may cause some anxiety for those of you who don't like mathematics.

But it had to do with binomial. Expressions, coefficients, words like that, that will all cause you to go into some kind of anxiety. But let me put this up on the screen here. He described the gospel story in a real simple way. He wrote a book.

I actually didn't write a book, but he died before the book was written. But people put together, it was his own defense of the Christian worldview. And he said, here's the gospel. We were created in dignity, fearless, flawless, faithful, image of God. We're broken and we fall into misery.

Self centered, self absorbed. But then through the work of Jesus on his cross and the resurrected Jesus, we're brought back to dignity. Part of the reason I put this up is because sometimes we think we have this faulty notion that our story starts in misery. Oh, your heart is really wicked. It's evil.

Scripture does say that. But scripture also tells us we're all made in the image of God. So every one of you, your story began with fearless, faithful, flawless. That's your story. That's who God made you to be.

But because of choices, because of sin, because of all kinds of brokenness in the world, we fall into misery. But the Christmas story is the way back up to dignity. So easy enough, let's just pull up our bootstraps and go up, back to, let's go, let's fix it. Let's fix this thing. Problem.

There's another character in the story. He's evil. The Bible tells us God said there's hostility between Satan and us. Hostility, enmity, deep hatred. The Bible calls him an ancient serpent.

And he's not just some garden snake, right? A handful of years ago, I went out in the garage and I was pulling up some old rags from the garage floor, and lo, behold, under one of the rags was a coiled up snake. I like to say it was an anaconda, a huge snake. But it was a small black garden snake. But I went berserk killing it.

I got my shovel out, I was like, I was yelling, I was screaming, I chopped its head off. And I come in, I was screaming like a little kid. All right? I come in the house and I told my wife, wow. I said, did you hear that?

She goes, hear what? I said? You didn't hear me? I was killing this

thing. And you know, but it was a garden snake.

I mean, maybe it was that long. But I won, right? All right, I hate snakes. Those of you who like snakes, I don't understand you, all right? I don't.

I really don't. But the snake we're talking about in the Genesis 3, there's no small garden snake. He's the serpent that hates you. Jesus spoke of Satan is real. So if you're questioning that, Jesus called him the enemy, the murderer, the liar.

He steals, kills, destroys, and he's the prince of this world according to Jesus. Peter and Paul and James all spoke about Satan in the New Testament as if he was a real being and his primary target was you and me. He's the adversary of our souls. It's not just some made up idea to kind of fix it all.

His lie to you and to me as we try to reach back up to dignity, to reach back up to become the people who are fearless and flawless. His lie is God is not good. He's withholding on you. He's not good. He's keeping something back from you.

Maybe that life sometimes takes the form of, oh, I don't have enough money, I don't have the relationship I want. I'm not married, my spouse is. I don't like my spouse or my spouse has passed away or whatever it is. The lie that Satan shouts in our heads with the loudest whisper you could ever hear is God's not really good. He's holding out on you, so make it happen yourself.

He wants to destroy you. Scripture says in this passage he strikes at us. That word often is translated bruises or crush, but he strikes at us. I've never been bitten by a snake. I never want to be.

But Satan strikes at me and you all the time. So now here's the problem. So as we try to go back, here's the problem, here's the challenge as we try to get back up to this dignified image of God, fearless and faithful, is that any movement you make toward freedom in life will always be opposed. Any movement toward freedom in life will always be opposed. Read that with me.

Any movement toward freedom in life will always be opposed. I promise you. I promise you. You decide you're gonna tithe and start giving a tenth of your income to the church and other ministries. I promise you, the next day your water heater might break.

I'm not saying Satan was in it, but Satan will always oppose anytime you move toward God. I promise you, the moment you decide I'm gonna stop some of these habits that I know aren't pleasing to God. I promise you, the next day something's gonna happen. You're gonna go back to your old addictions. The moment you decide you're gonna

confess sin to somebody and you gotta figure out how God can heal you.

I promise you that's not gonna happen something. Satan will oppose it. Look at the Bible stories. Nehemiah started building the wall, he gets opposition. Jesus is born.

Herod shows up, opposition. The church starts in Pentecost. What happens? Persecution, opposition. Satan will always strike at the beginning of things.

And anytime you decide you're gonna grow spiritually, you will be opposed.

Unless you think it's like, this is too heavy. You know it's reality. You have an enemy. You have an enemy.

But like I said, the last part of when I was talking about everybody's story, Jesus came to rescue us. We often call Jesus our savior, our Lord. But Savior, really? Maybe a better way to say it, he's my rescuer. It is like D day.

They come in and they're gonna rescue those held under oppression. Jesus is the rescue of our souls. He doesn't just give us a stamp, ticket to heaven. He rescues our souls so we can be back in the dignity of the image of God. Fully alive, fully free, fearless, faithful.

That's what Jesus wants for you and me.

Scripture says that Jesus will crush the serpent's head. Crushed them first. John, we're told that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. The reason he came, John said, is to destroy the works of the devil in your life and my life. Jesus disarmed his spiritual powers.

Paul says in Colossians, he shamed them publicly. So again, weird meteor stuff, but what's going on? Jesus on the cross did something to expose the forces of evil in our lives. Romans 16. Paul even says, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

A clear illusion. Back to Romans 3, 16, Hebrews 2. We're told that Jesus breaks the power of the devil. Now you might say, okay, so what do I do with that? What does that look like?

How do I. I'm baptized. Does that mean Satan's blocked in my life? No, you're baptized. What?

It means now you have the power of the Holy Spirit in you to wrestle against the evil one. Even when Jesus was tempted, he spoke back to Satan. It's written. He told scripture back to Satan. Scripture tells us we don't wrestle with flesh and blood.

There's all these terms that sound like we have to. Part of our effort is part of it. Not effort to be saved, but our effort in defeating the evil one. Because of the spirit of Jesus in us, we wrestle not. Peter tells us, watch out.

And you? Me, I might think, oh, I don't know. I don't know if Satan is really that active in my life, maybe in really dark ways, maybe he's active in, you know, Hamas and maybe he's active in the Republican Party, the Democratic Party. Oops. All right, maybe he's active there, but he's not really active in my personal life.

And we are deceived if we think that. Because if Jesus said the thief came to steal, kill and destroy, don't you think the thief may be trying to steal, kill and destroy in your life? Of course he does. Of course he does. So let's talk about how he strikes what it looks like.

All right, just some examples. So there's a man named J. Oswald Sanders. He was a missionary in Japan. Oversee also a bunch of missionaries, missionary compound.

He showed up in a missions compound one time in the 1950s, and he was their special service speaker for all these missionaries. You know, people had given their lives up to serve. Here's what, here was his topic for the day. What I would do if I were Satan in this missions compound. So I'll retitile that.

What I would do if I were Satan in my marriage. What would I do if I were Satan in my family? What would I do if I were Satan in my checkbook? What would I do if I were Satan in this church? Sometimes it's good to think about what the strategy of the evil one might be against you.

If you've read CS Lewis Screwtape's letters, you know what I'm talking about. But that's just the sense of how do we know there's strategy in our life? Because if Jesus, we're told that Jesus is going to crush his head, but there seems to be, we are part of what he does because his spirit's in us. A couple more examples. I know a pastor friend of mine in Columbus, his name is Adam.

They were supposed to raise \$2 million for some big building push. They raised 1.4. He told me recently he went and sat on a park bench and he, the thought, the voice in his head said, you are a failure. You're a failure. And then he said he clearly heard now the voice of Jesus saying, who gets to tell you you're a failure?

Cause see, that first voice, and as much as we don't always understand, it was not his voice. And it wasn't the voice of Jesus, it was the voice of the evil. So maybe your challenge, maybe the voice in you, maybe Satan tries to tell you're a failure, you're an idiot,

you're stupid.

Who gets to tell you that Jesus will never say that to you. So maybe that's the challenge for you. Maybe that's the way Satan is striking at you. Here's another one. When I walk across campus, especially in the warm weather months, it's not too difficult quickly to come across a woman who has more skin showing than she has clothes on, right?

And there's a time, and I still do it. If I see somebody coming that I can tell from a distance is a beautiful woman, I actually will say out loud. Because what comes to my head is, if you were a real man, that's the kind of woman you could have. And then I say out loud. I don't say it out loud, loudly, but loud.

Do I hear it? I said, that's a lie. That's a lie. Because Scripture tells me I can rejoice in the wife of my youth. That's a lie.

Sometimes I say it out loud. It's a lie.

So there's another thing, another. And these are examples, maybe what it looks like. I have this annoying habit. My wife tells me, and I think it's true. I don't hum.

I breathe out a tune like drives her crazy. So. And maybe if you ever hear me doing that, please stop me and say, please stop that. But she said, hummer. But I do.

And so recently she said, that's really annoying. And I got defensive and I jumped right to the lie of, she thinks I'm an annoying person. She doesn't love me. She's not for me. Well, who's telling me that?

It's not God. And I know my wife loves me and she's for me, and what she's saying is true, but I believe this lie of cause Satan loves to divide. He lies, he accuses, you're a failure. He divides.

And then, last one, I'll talk about the ways that Satan hypes up our anxiety. I think anxiety, it's absolutely a real issue for a lot of people, myself included. Jesus says, don't let your hearts be troubled. So he knows that's a reality of life. And I know there's mental health reasons for anxiety, but I also know the spiritual life always intersects the psychological life.

So there's times where I lay awake at night and I get anxious. I get anxious about money, I get anxious about the future, I get anxious about my kids, and for some reason at night. And I. There's probably a psychological explanation for it, but I also know there's a spiritual reality to it. Satan is really good at exaggerating and amping up our anxieties.

So what do you do? How do you participate with Jesus in crushing the

Serpent's head. I quote scripture out loud to myself. Jesus did that, said Satan. It's written.

So when I'm anxious about money, if you were in my bedroom and I was, and you could hear me mumbling, the Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need. The Lord is my shepherd. I have all that I need. The Lord is my shepherd. It's not like a mantra.

I'm saying it to Satan. The Lord is my shepherd. I have all that I need. The Lord is my shepherd. I have all that I need.

There's times where I get anxious about the future and I feel these accusations, almost a darkness over me. And again, weird meter. But you've all felt that. I know you have, in this sense of kind of almost feeling depressed. Even though there's no reason for my life to be depressed.

And what do I do? Well, There's Psalm, chapter 8. Scripture talks about God. You have ordained praise to the lips of infants and children to silence the foe of the silence. The voice of the enemy.

Worship shuts down the voice of Satan. So there's times when I have those struggles with anxiety or whatever. I'll start singing, O the blood of Jesus oh, the blood of Jesus oh, the blood of Jesus Wash as white as snow. That's my song for now that I've been using the last month. And I'm not singing it.

I'm worshiping God. But I also want to make sure that the invisible world knows, the dark world knows that I believe I'm covered by the blood of Jesus and so are you. So I don't know what the strategy is that Satan has in your life. I don't know. But I can guess because I know what his strategies are in my life.

He lies, he accuses, he discourages, he divides.

And it's real. I mean, my mom's 89, and I've talked to my mom about this. The lie she believes is my life is meaningless right now. Why am I still here? That's the lie that she's hearing from Satan.

One of my brothers told her, mom, you have to take that up with Jesus because he wants you here for a reason. It's not. You're not. Your life isn't worthless or meaningless. I don't know what your lie is.

I don't know how Satan accused you. I don't know what you label yourself. I don't know how Satan is trying to divide your marriage or your friendships or your family. I don't know how he's doing that. But we can wrestle with spiritual beings.

And we can wrestle with the help of Jesus. Jesus is not equal to Satan. They're not equals. Satan is equal maybe to Gabriel or Michael

the Archangel, but Jesus has destroyed the works of the devil. And you can be.

We can be. I can be faithful and fearless again. That's the whole journey through. Back up the dignity of the image of God with Jesus. That's what we can be.

One of the prayers of Jesus that I actually pray over, my kids, my kids are all in their 20s. One of them is 30. But I pray for my kids every Tuesday. That's just a pattern I have from John, chapter 17, verse 15. When Jesus prays for his disciples and I pray for my kids this way.

I'm gonna encourage you to pray this way. And we're gonna pray for you this way. This morning, Jesus. This is the night he was betrayed. And so he was intensely praying.

He prayed for four primary things in John 17. But one of them was, father, protect them from the evil one. Protect them from the evil one. It's like the Lord's Prayer, forgive us. Don't lead us not in temptation, but deliver us from evil.

So Jesus is praying, protect them from the evil one. He knew that would be a challenge for us. But he also knew there could be power and victory and we could be fearless and flawless and faithful and all, all those things again.

But he prayed for that stuff that way. And I'm going to encourage you to pray for yourself that way, pray for your kids that way. Protect us from the evil one. We still have to wrestle and fight and speak scripture back to the evil one. But we can be fearless and faithful again.

But Jesus prays for us because he knows it's a spiritual struggle.

Say that out loud with me. Protect them from the evil one. Jesus is praying that for you right now. All right, I'm gonna ask you to close your eyes for a second, and I'm gonna ask.

I'm guessing there's some here that may say I'm feeling a real battlefront experience right now. I'm either experiencing anxiety or chaos or depression. And again, mental health aside, that's reality. But we also know the spiritual is reality in all of this. Maybe there's relationships, there's addictions, but there's.

You feel under a heavy burden right now. We want to pray for you. So I'm going to ask you if that's you. I want you to stand. Everybody's eyes have their eyes closed, but I want you to.

And you're standing not before me. You're standing Before God, and

you're acknowledging that you need that. So if that's you, where'd you stand? There's nothing to be embarrassed about. I'm standing with you.

I need that prayer.

Whether it's chaos or anxiety or fear and it's overwhelming, you feel like I can't win this battle. So I've asked then Shawn to come up, and Sean's gonna pray over you, over that prayer, Protect him from the evil one. So stay standing. Actually, everybody stand with them. But we, those who stand, you know who you are.

Everybody stand with them. And Shawn's going to pray over the whole congregation.

Father, thank you. That from the very beginning, you had a plan to rescue us. You had a plan to protect us.

And, Lord, as we stand this morning, we stand in the power of Christ in us that goes before us, that surrounds us. As we walk into a battle that feels like it can be every day, it can be every moment. Lord, I thank you that we do not go into that by ourselves. But you go ahead of us. You stand with us.

Father, for the person today who is standing, because they have a very specific thing that they feel their enemy, Satan, is coming after and attacking them, maybe someone that they love. Lord, would you step in and provide your protection? Would you fight for them? Lord, I pray, God, that they will turn to your word for power, for comfort. Lord, I pray that you will surround them with your church, with your body, to help them through whatever it is that they're going through, that they will allow people into those spaces.

Lord, I pray that we will not sit on the sidelines out of fear of not wanting to. To engage in the battle, but that we will go into it. Knowing that you go with us, Lord, that we can play offense for your kingdom, knowing that all of the opposition that's going to come against us when we do that, Lord, you will go before us and fight those battles. And so, Father, I just pray for your protection over us in us. Pray for your word to permeate our hearts, our lips.

Pray, Lord, that we will put on the full armor of God each day as we walk with you, as we help others see that just as you came to rescue us, you came to rescue them as well. And so, Lord, thank you for your plan. Thank you for Jesus, who ultimately crushes the head of our enemy until. While we wait for that fulfillment and that day to come, Lord, may we enter into the battle knowing that we are already victorious, that there is nothing that can separate us from you. I pray this in Jesus name, Amen.