

[Kickball Diamond?] There's a phrase every kid learned growing up. I can't remember when I first learned it, but I'm sure it was playing kickball. You're up to kick, the ball comes in at a perfect bounce, so you run up, your leg swings mightily through the air... and grazes the ball, sending it carooming off to the side. You know as soon as you connect it's not going anywhere good, so before anyone can react, you cry with all your might, "DO OVER!"

And if you're lucky, if the other kids are feeling particularly charitable (or if you're the alpha male on the diamond), you get to kick again.

[Mario Kick-Ball] Do-overs are amazing. Video games have this naturally built in - if you die, you respawn. In the older games, this was agonizing (where are my Mario fans?). If you die, you have to start the level all over, and if you run out of lives (or if your mom shuts off the Nintendo), you have to start the whole game over.

Do over.

Which is nice, because you can play as many times as you want, until you perfect the things you did poorly. You play again and again until you get it right.

As we grow older, we have fewer and fewer opportunities for do-overs. And that's too bad, because a lot of us would *love* to be able to call DO OVER.

A marriage that started in passion and hope is now bitter and cold.

A child you had such dreams for is lost and aimless and you can't get through.

A job that was just supposed to be for now has become for life and you don't have any other options.

A relationship is so toxic you can't breath and it didn't start this way but now you're drowning in poison.

[How do we illustrate 'do over'?] And you wish you could stop and call DO OVER.

You wish you could go back and figure out where it got so off course, where it went so wrong. You wish you could rewind the clock, go back and fix it.

But you can't. You're stuck where you are. We can't go backwards. We can only go forward. So you have a choice to make: Should I stay, or should I go?

[Stay vs Go] Many of us choose to stay, to settle for what we have. A bitter marriage, a toxic relationship, a dead-end job, endless fights. We know it's never going to get better but we don't have any other options so we just keep doing the same thing over and over.

Some few of us choose to go. We leave. We quit the marriage or the relationship or the job. Leaving feels good at first, because it changes our circumstances. But sooner or later (usually sooner), we end up in another toxic relationship. Another dissatisfying job. A new fight that feels as awful as the old ones used to. So you quit that one too, and the next one, and the next, and pretty soon you're a serial quitter.

Should I stay and be miserable? Or should I go and be miserable?

Should I stay or should I go?

Are those really the only two options?

[Stay vs. Go vs. Changed] Fortunately for us, (and all apologies to the Clash), the answer is no. There's a better way than stay or go. And that is for us to be changed.

Because that's the root problem: whether we stay or go, we are still broken. Every relationship takes 2, and that means we play a part in every conflict, every fight, every cold war. The reason nothing ever changes whether we choose to stay or go is because we remain unchanged.

Which means the solution is to change. Or rather, to be changed. That's the good news: if we want to find true wholeness, true healing, we must be transformed. In fact, if we allow God to change us, to rescue and heal us, we will find that even though our circumstances *don't* change, we become agents of healing and restoration.

God changes us so that we might become change-agents.

We don't get a do-over, but God *does* offer us transformation. God changes us so that we can change our circumstances.

God changes us so that we can change the world around us. God heals us so we can heal the world around us. God gives us hope so we can bring hope to our painful circumstances.

[Scripture Slide 1] If you have a Bible, turn with me to 2 Kings 2. If you grabbed one of our free bibles, you can find 2 Kings 2 on page XXX.

As you're turning there, this is the final Sunday in our series called Is This On? For the last 6 weeks, we've been investigating what it looks like when God speaks to us. We've seen that God speaks to us in the middle of the chaos of our lives, in the midst of the hustle and bustle. That we don't have to be perfect or put-together for God to speak to us. We've seen that if we want to hear from God, we must fill our lives with people and practices that make space for God to speak to us.

Today, I want to step back from all that and show you a big, beautiful picture of exactly who this God is. This God created the world to be a place where humanity lives in relationship with God. And from the beginning, we have been promise-breakers. God invites us into life and we choose death.

[Let's do a whole timeline here] God mounted a rescue mission through a man named Abraham. God told Abraham that he would use Abraham's descendants to rescue the whole world. Abraham's grandson had 12 children, and they became the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.

[10 Commandments Tablets/Golden Calf?] They ended up in slavery, and God raised up Moses to rescue them, to lead them into the land promised to them. Moses leads them to a mountain where God meets with Moses and gives Israel the terms of their covenant, which will become their Law, their Way. But before they even leave the mountain, Israel loses faith and begins worshiping another god. So God gives them a do-over.

From the mountain, God leads them to the Promised Land, but they're too scared to enter. So God nourishes them in the **desert** for 40 years, until they're ready for a do-over again.

This time, they cross the **Jordan River** into the Promised Land. They come immediately to **Jericho**, a fearsome walled city. But God delivers them there, and following, until they're settled in the land.

Over and over, the people refuse to trust God to protect them and they're conquered by neighboring peoples. Once they're conquered, they return to God and beg for rescue, and God gives them do-overs again and again. One of the main temple sites where God spoke to the people was called **Bethel**.

Finally, they reject God altogether and demand a king. So God's prophet calls Saul, Israel's first king, to meet him at **Gilgal**, to offer peace offerings to God, before meeting with the leaders of Israel to be anointed as the first king.

The monarchy does not go well. For ever good king, there are several bad. The fourth king in the monarchy is so bad he causes a civil war that forever splits Israel into two nations.

Which brings us to 2 Kings. The books of Kings are a chronicle of Israel's monarchies. And reading through, you really get a sense of how bad things are. King after king refuses to follow God. So to protect the people, God raised up people to oppose the kings, to invite the people back to God.

One of the first prophets was a man named Elijah. He was *awesome*. He was bold, powerful and did some truly amazing stuff (his story is the last part of 1 Kings if you want to read it... a lot of my favorite stuff in the Bible is Elijah's story).

But now we're to the end of Elijah's time. And despite the amazing things Elijah has done, At one point as he was standing against King Ahab (who turns out to be Israel's worst king ever), he got worn down. So God brought him a man named Elisha who was sort of the Robin to Elijah's Batman.

And God has told Elijah he's done, that God is taking Elijah away. So Elisha is understandably upset. Let's read together beginning in verse 1:

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were traveling from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to Bethel."

But Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you!" So they went down together to Bethel.

The group of prophets from Bethel came to Elisha and asked him, "Did you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?"

"Of course I know," Elisha answered. "But be quiet about it."

Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to Jericho."

But Elisha replied again, "As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you." So they went on together to Jericho.

Then the group of prophets from Jericho came to Elisha and asked him, “Did you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?”

“Of course I know,” Elisha answered. “But be quiet about it.”

Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the Lord has told me to go to the Jordan River.”

But again Elisha replied, “As surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, I will never leave you.” So they went on together.

Fifty men from the group of prophets also went and watched from a distance as Elijah and Elisha stopped beside the Jordan River. Then Elijah folded his cloak together and struck the water with it. The river divided, and the two of them went across on dry ground!

When they came to the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken away.”

And Elisha replied, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit and become your successor.”

“You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah replied. “If you see me when I am taken from you, then you will get your request. But if not, then you won’t.”

As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father! My father! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel!” And as they disappeared from sight, Elisha tore his clothes in distress. -- 2 Kings 2:1-12

[Map of Israel] Now, something that's fun to do when you read a story like this, full of unfamiliar place names, is to plot them on a map. So the dynamic duo starts in **Gilgal**, which is where Samuel met Saul to make peace offerings before crowning him king.

Then they go to **Bethel**, which is one of the temple sites where God met with Israel before the monarchy. And then they go to **Jericho**, the first city Israel faced in the Promised Land. And finally, Elijah makes the Jordan River dry up and leaves the Promised Land, returning to the wilderness. He replicates the miracle God used to bring Israel into the Promised Land, except he's going *backwards*.

If you don't see that Elijah and Elisha are rewinding Israel's story, it sort of looks like they chose to GO, to leave. But they're not leaving. They're rewinding. They're reversing all those years of rejecting God. They arrive in the desert and Elisha asks for a "double share" of Elijah's spirit.

Elisha fully intends to return to the Promised Land doubly ready to follow Elijah's legacy. He wants to carry on in his mentor's footsteps.

Let's rewind and start over. Except it's not really a do-over. Elisha doesn't have a time-machine. Nothing about Israel's story has changed. Nothing about their continued unfaithfulness to God has change. So what *has* changed?

Elisha returns to the broken world he left, but now *he* is different. God changed Elisha so now Elisha can change Israel.

That's how God works.

And you might be wondering how Elisha did - did he make a difference when he returned to Israel? He most certainly did - enough so that he's considered one of the great prophets.

But Israel didn't finally change. They continued to fail, to follow wicked kings and foreign gods and eventually it led to their total destruction.

[Scripture Slide 2] Which has been the state of God's people for nearly 500 years by the time Jesus is born. Turn or click over to Mark 9.

Jesus lived in a world where people felt the consequences of their sin every day. They longed for God to come among them in a new way - not like with Moses, on top of a mountain. And not like Elijah in the form of prophets. But to come as a king, to rule, to rescue, to deliver them. They longed for one more do-over, for God to come and FINALLY make everything right.

And then Jesus announces that God's kingdom is here. And he calls 12 disciples - just like Israel had 12 tribes. And he begins to call people to repent - which is to stop and turn around. He calls them to *do over*.

So people begin to wonder, Could this Jesus guy be more than just a teacher? Could he be doing more than simply helping us get by, helping us limp along in exile? Could this guy be greater than Moses, greater than Elijah?

That's where we are in Mark 9. Jesus' disciples have just figured out he's God's promised Messiah. They're still reeling from that revelation, trying to figure out what it means. And Jesus takes three of them up on top of a mountain:

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them. Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus.

Peter exclaimed, "Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He said this because he didn't really know what else to say, for they were all terrified.

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus with them.

As they went back down the mountain, he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. -- Mark 9:2-9

Three of Jesus' followers have a wondrous experience - they climb a mountain with Jesus and see him transformed - they essentially get a sneak preview of Jesus as the exalted king of the universe. And who should appear beside him but two of Israel's greatest heroes - Moses and Elijah!

But it's Peter's response I want to focus in on. Peter says, "Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He said this because he didn't really know what else to say, for they were all terrified."

We might look at Peter's words and think they're nice - he's excited, he's offering to build shelters. But that's not what's happening. Mark tells us they're *terrified*, not excited. And it's Peter's fear that make his words so fascinating.

Peter and Jesus' other followers aren't dummies. When Jesus called 12 disciples, they understood that he was symbolically reestablishing Israel - 12 disciples for the 12 tribes.

And now Jesus has taken them up a mountain, which is how Moses affirmed God's covenant with Israel. And part of the Law was the building of the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting.

[Maybe a side-by-side Mountain map – Moses – 10 Commandments/Tabernacle – Down again// Jesus/Peter – Transfiguration – Down again?] That's what God did last time. And clearly, that's what Peter thinks Jesus is doing again: Jesus is giving Israel a do-over, and it's going to look like it did the last time. So when Peter gets freaked out, he falls back on what he knows - we're on a mountain, let's build a tabernacle. Let's build THREE tabernacles!

If that sounds strange to you, that's probably just because we find the idea of building tents strange. But we all understand Peter's fear. When we're in positions like him, we tend to do exactly what he did: we repeat what we already know.

When you're in *another* fight, do you try something different, or go back to the old arguments you've always had?

When you're frustrated at your job, do you try something new, or just put your head down, do what you've always done and complain again?

When that family member is coming again, do you take time to figure out a new way to interact with them, or just brace yourself for the same conflict again?

When you feel lonely, do you face that loneliness and fear, or do you text them again, even though you know it's going to end painfully, because that's just easier?

We tend not to learn from our mistakes. We tend to do the same thing over and over and over. That's why Israel, even after God gave them do-over after do-over, kept ending up in the same place again and again.

That's why churches today are closing their doors because even though they're faced with the fear that the world is changing and people aren't like they used to be but rather than face the hard work of changing, of transforming, we keep doing what we've always done, but we do it louder and hope it'll work.

So yes, we can relate with Peter. We want things to stay the same. Because at least they're familiar. And the pain we know is better than the pain of change.

Peter wants to Stay. He wants to do the same thing Israel did last time, the same thing that didn't work. And he thinks God is giving Israel one more do-over. That God is looking backward, reenacting what Moses experienced on the Mountain, what Elisha saw when Elijah was taken.

But this isn't what happened *before*. This is what's going to happen next. God is giving Peter, James and John a sneak peek, a preview of Jesus' Resurrection. Peter thinks God is looking back, but God says, No. I'm not looking backward. I'm looking forward. I'm doing something *new*, Peter. This isn't going to be the same as it was before. In fact, God speaks the very words Jesus heard at his baptism - this is my beloved son. Do what he says.

Peter wants to Stay. God says No. And then they leave the mountain.

No tabernacles. No temple. Because this time it's going to be different. I'm transforming humanity, and it's beginning here. With my son. Listen to him.

This is what God's do-overs look like. They're not moving backward. They're not staying where we are. They're changing. Transforming. Moving forward.

For the last 6 weeks, we've been learning what it means to hear God's voice. Because now that Jesus has come, God is speaking to all of us, to everyone. And we've seen over and over in this series, when God speaks, it is to heal us. To transform us. To bring us from death into life.

Today, we begin to look toward Lent. The season of repentance. Lent is what happens when we acknowledge that God is speaking to us. We confess that we *need* God, that we *need* to be changed. That we can't keep going the way we have been.

We need God to transform our marriages, our families, our workplaces. We need God to transform our culture, our nation, our world.

We need God to bring life.

But before we need God to transform anything out there, we need God to transform *us*.

Choosing to be changed is much harder than staying where you are. No matter how painful your circumstances are, they have the comfort of the familiar.

And choosing to be changed is much harder than leaving. When I leave, I can blame everyone else. I can point to what *they* did wrong, how *they* created a toxic environment, the effort *they* didn't put in.

So I leave.

But when I choose to be changed, I enter into the pain of that change for the promise of the glory on the other side.

The do-over isn't in my circumstances. It's in my Self. I get to do life again. To become a new person, a healed and whole person.

Elisha didn't want his mentor to leave.

Peter wanted to settle on the mountain.

Where are you tempted to settle? What is the broken thing in your life?

God transformed Elisha and sent him back into a broken Israel to be an agent of healing and change.

Jesus took Peter back down the mountain, back into the brokenness of Israel so that he could rescue and transform Peter and the other disciples and all of Israel and the whole world.

[Stay vs. Go. Vs. Transformed] God wants to give you a do-over. Not to erase the mistakes you've made, but to give you life despite them. God wants to transform you. God wants to heal you and change you and send you back into your broken situations made new. God wants to change you so that you can be an agent of change.

You will never know what God wants to do in your circumstances until God changes you. That is where all healing begins. Should you stay or should you go? I don't know. I can't answer that question for you. Only God can. And God will. Because God is speaking to you. God is calling you to be transformed. God is calling you to become an agent of healing and reconciliation.

Are you willing to begin that journey? Are you willing to say, I will embrace the pain of change. I believe that the transformation God wants to work in my life is worth it?

If you are, then this Lent journey is for you. For the next six weeks, commit to *listening* for the voice of God, and *responding*. Pray for healing, for transformation, for wholeness, and believe that God will make you new so that you can become an agent of healing in your family, your job, your marriage, your world.

### Examine

1. What circumstances in my life do I need to change?
2. How have I contributed to those broken circumstances?
3. What does it look like for me to ask God for healing this week?
4. What does it look like for me to be an agent of change this week?