

Good morning Newsong and Good morning to all of our first time visitors. I'm so glad you are with us this morning. Isn't it good to come together and praise the Lord! Last week we started a series called back to the 90's. We went through Psalm 91 with Pastor Barbara. Isn't it good to know that we have God's protection in our lives? This week we will be looking at Psalm 94.

Before I get into the sermon I feel led to share something with you that God shared with me a few weeks ago. It was one of those nights where I couldn't sleep. No matter how hard I tried. Have you had nights like that? I was going through some things personally and sleep would not come. My mind was going a hundred miles a minute and as I laid in bed God began to speak to me about this message. This word today will be a hard pill to swallow. Let me explain... the week before this I was very sick. We had got back from India and four days later my throat was on fire and I could not eat, I could not drink, I could barely swallow my own saliva. That is how bad I was. I had both a bacterial and viral infection in my throat. Once the dr's realized how sick I was they gave me iv fluids, and steroids and all kinds of stuff to make me feel better but before that they gave me this antibiotic in the form of a pill. It was huge! Like the size of Mount Rushmore! You heard me say I could barely swallow my own saliva and I looked at this pill and I had no idea how I was going to swallow it but I was desperate to get better and so I stuck the pill in my mouth and I swallowed. And it hurt! And I continued to swallow that pill twice a day despite the pain. You know why? I knew that if I got that pill into my body, it would bring healing.

The same is for you today. This message for some of you will be painful for you to digest. But if you will let the truth of God's word into your heart...healing will come. You see when I swallowed that pill sometimes it would get stuck in my throat and there would be a bitterness that would come up into my mouth. Everything within me wanted to spit it out. Today for some of you there will be a bitterness that comes up inside of you and you won't want to swallow but I ask you to allow the truth of Gods word, not my

words, but God's word to penetrate your heart and start applying it to your life and I know there will be healing. These truths I am going to share today they aren't easy to swallow, they go against everything you may have been taught or have come to believe but I assure you God's word does not return void and even though it may be a hard pill to swallow....healing is coming. Amen!

Let us pray.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Psalm 94** and let's read:

O Lord, the God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, let your glorious justice shine forth! ² Arise, O Judge of the earth. Give the proud what they deserve. ³ How long, O Lord? How long will the wicked be allowed to gloat? ⁴ How long will they speak with arrogance? How long will these evil people boast? ⁵ They crush your people, Lord, hurting those you claim as your own. ⁶ They kill widows and foreigners and murder orphans. ⁷ "The Lord isn't looking," they say, "and besides, the God of Israel doesn't care." ⁸ Think again, you fools! When will you finally catch on? ⁹ Is he deaf-the one who made your ears? Is he blind-the one who formed your eyes? ¹⁰ He punishes the nations-won't he also punish you? He knows everything-doesn't he also know what you are doing? ¹¹ The Lord knows people's thoughts; he knows they are worthless!

¹² Joyful are those you discipline, Lord, those you teach with your instructions. ¹³ You give them relief from troubled times until a pit

is dug to capture the wicked. ¹⁴ The Lord will not reject his people; he will not abandon his special possession. ¹⁵ Judgment will again be founded on justice, and those with virtuous hearts will pursue it. ¹⁶ Who will protect me from the wicked? Who will stand up for me against evildoers? ¹⁷ Unless the Lord had helped me, I would soon have settled in the silence of the grave. ¹⁸ I cried out, "I am slipping!" but your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me. ¹⁹ When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer. ²⁰ Can unjust leaders claim that God is on their side- leaders whose decrees permit injustice? ²¹ They gang up against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death. ²² But the Lord is my fortress; my God is the mighty rock where I hide. ²³ God will turn the sins of evil people back on them. He will destroy them for their sins. The Lord our God will destroy them.

I probably don't have to tell you today that evil exists in our world. My guess is that the majority of us here have been harmed or affected negatively in some way by others. Just this week these were some of the News Headlines

- ❖ 2 women visiting NYC from Mexico were pushed into the subway tracks early Monday morning by another woman.
- ❖ On Monday a burning body in Yonkers led police to additional dead bodies in the Bronx
- ❖ Wednesday night 6 men were shot in the Bronx
- ❖ Taylor Swift had to cancel several concerts due to a suicidal terror plot.

When someone hurts us or causes us pain because of their actions whether on purpose or not... we want justice! We have here in the U.S. a pretty complex justice system and one could argue that it is one of the best in the world but if any of you have ever had anything to do with our justice system you know that as great as it is, it does not get it right all the time. It is slow, It can be burdensome to victims, and many times people walk away from our justice system not even sure what justice is.

Here in Psalms 94 – this unknown writer is writing at a time when Israel and Judah the 2 kingdoms of the Israelite nation are under heavy attack by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Some may have already been taken away as slaves, others are living under heavy oppression. There is great pain and the writer is not just writing about his pain but about the pain of others, the widows, foreigners, and orphans.

This morning I want to take an in depth look at this writer's words. How do we apply this to our lives today and our own injustices? Perceived or real? I will tell you right now. I am not qualified to speak on this topic even though I actually work for the Department of Justice and I have seen it all. I have seen depths of injustice that would make you want to scream and cry and give up and I have also seen justice at work to the best of our human ability. I have no great answers to the questions we all carry around with us. Such as why do bad things happen to good people. Why do the wicked seem to flourish when they hurt others continually? And many more. What I will offer you today, is the truth found in scripture and the truth that will bring healing to a pain that cannot be understood on this side of heaven. There are some pains that will never go away completely but I believe that God is able to heal and bring beauty from the ashes of our lives if we allow him to. Let's start together at the beginning.

O Lord, the God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, let your glorious justice shine forth! ² Arise, O Judge of the earth. Give the proud what they deserve.

The writer starts in prayer to God by proclaiming who He is. The God of vengeance...Judge of the earth. We will learn that the Hebrew word for vengeance does not mean what we think it means but we will come back to that. So the writer starts this prayer by proclaiming who God is and that's a great place to start. The Lord's Prayer starts in the same way...by establishing who God is. Our Father who Art in Heaven. This allows us to get our eyes off our problem and onto the one who can actually fix our problems. The writer continues:

How long, O Lord ? How long will the wicked be allowed to gloat? ⁴ How long will they speak with arrogance? How long will these evil people boast?

In verses 3 & 4 the writer shifts to a complaint. Basically he is saying...Lord, I know you are the ultimate judge of everyone but how long are you going to allow the wicked to carry on before you exact your judgement on them! It reminds me of a recent 8 hr car ride with our youth....How long till we get there? How long? We are impatient people! We want our day of justice and we want it now! That is unless we are the ones to be judged. Then we want God to be patient and long-suffering with us for as long as it takes.

And in order to make his point, the writer continues by telling God how bad the wicked are...as if he doesn't already know!

They crush your people, Lord, hurting those you claim as your own. ⁶ They kill widows and foreigners and murder orphans. ⁷ "The Lord isn't looking," they say, "and besides, the God of Israel doesn't care."

If you have multiple kids, you know that they don't always get along. And when something goes wrong between them you can expect one to come running up to tell you exactly how they were wronged. And

then they might end it by telling you something extra to get you to get involved. The writer tells God, Like they said you don't even care so there! And then the next portion really reminds me of my kids arguing because the writer starts to talk in a way that is directed to the wicked. I can see him talking just loud enough for the wicked to hear.

Think again, you fools! When will you finally catch on? ⁹ Is he deaf-the one who made your ears? Is he blind-the one who formed your eyes? ¹⁰ He punishes the nations-won't he also punish you? He knows everything-doesn't he also know what you are doing? ¹¹ The Lord knows people's thoughts; he knows they are worthless!

The writer is not holding back. He calls them fools and kind of makes fun of them like do you really think the one who made your ears can't hear you? And then he ends by saying God knows the very thoughts of people and those thoughts....they are worthless! How true these words are. My very thoughts are so limited...wicked or not.

Isaiah 55:8 & 9 puts it this way:

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD . “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

9 For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

The writer then quits his complaining and begins to focus on truth.

¹² Joyful are those you discipline, Lord, those you teach with your instructions. ¹³ You give them relief from troubled times until a pit is dug to capture the wicked. ¹⁴ The Lord will not reject his people; he will not abandon his special possession. ¹⁵ Judgment will again be founded on justice, and those with virtuous hearts will pursue it.

What are the truths in these verses that apply to God's people when they are going through pain caused by others?

- **God provides joy through discipline and instruction** – You can not truly receive instruction and discipline from someone unless you are close to them. Look at Jesus and his disciples. The same is for us. We cannot be true disciples of Christ unless we are close to Him. As we become close to Him something happens to the sorrow and pain that we experience in life....it becomes Joy!

Psalms 16:11 NIV You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand

- **You are not abandoned.** You are accepted. – never ever ever will God abandon you! It may feel like He has abandoned you but He has not. And when you begin to think He has abandoned you, you need to align your thoughts with the truth of God's word!

Paul puts it this way in **2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NIV**

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

And Moses spoke to the Israelites before he gave over his leadership to Joshua saying in

Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

- **Judgment will come and it will be founded on justice.**

What is justice?

Justice is the idea that people should be treated fairly, impartially, and reasonably by the law.

Even our best attempts at justice come up short. Not one of us really know what justice looks like and even when we attain what we perceive is justice we many times still feel empty. That is because we confuse justice with revenge, getting even, or being made whole. Not one of us no matter how honest or good we are – are completely fair; impartial, and reasonable. We all have biases. And none of us are made whole by hurting someone else.

Be honest, when we say Vengeance is the Lord's! We are actually envisioning our enemies being struck by lightning or completely annihilated! You know you are. We want to be on top. It's our human nature and when someone hurts us we want to get even or hurt them back. Its called repaying evil with evil.

The scripture says here that judgement will be founded on justice and those with virtuous hearts will pursue it.

How do we have virtuous hearts and seek justice when our very nature is the opposite? Righteousness.

Without righteousness, there can be no justice. Justice is the application of righteousness. You see man made laws are no good. They can't account for motive and the heart and what has happened to a person that caused them to do what they did. Our society has learned that all these things have context, and they try to make adjustments in our justice system to account for these things but our justice system is made on manmade laws that are fallible. God's

justice system is based on righteousness. It is not arbitrary or based on what's popular that day or what someone deems is truth that day. It is eternal. It is the absolute of what is right and It is the foundation of God's throne.

Psalms 89:14 says

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Unfailing love and truth walk before you as attendants.

Psalms 11:7

For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face

There are many more verses that show the relationship between God, righteousness, and justice. For now, you should know that God is righteous and just. These are characteristics of who He is.

Let's go back to the first verses the writer wrote?

O Lord, the God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, let your glorious justice shine forth!

We have this American view of what vengeance is but here the writer uses the Hebrew word naqam. This word actually means to bring healing – restoration.

God longs for restoration with humanity - Long before restorative justice was a thing – he created it. You see God was all about fairness, equality, & restorative justice long before humans ever

thought of it. He sees and knows things that you and I will never know. His goal is that I be healed and you be healed and the people who have wronged us be healed and that we will live in communion with Him. I get it. It doesn't happen that easy and it doesn't always end that pretty but that is when **Proverbs 3:5** has to come into play.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.

Can I get a couple volunteers? Pick any piece of this puzzle. Look at it intently. Now tell me what this picture is? You can't? Why not? Well here pick 5 pieces of the puzzle. Now can you tell me?

You see our lives are a lot like this. We don't have the final picture. We can only see the pieces. Sometimes we get so focused on a few pieces and we try what we think is every possible solution but the pieces just will not go together? Anyone been there? Sometimes the pain in our lives is like that. We become so focused on the pain that we can't even begin to see the bigger picture that God is creating. I'm not saying the pain isn't valid. What I am saying is the only one who can heal the broken pieces of our lives is the creator of life. He sees where pieces are broken and sharp and hurtful. He even sees the missing pieces. There is nothing more frustrating than getting to the final few pieces of a puzzle you have been working on forever and you realize one is missing. It happens in our house every year! And I get so frustrated and I throw it away because what use is a puzzle with

missing pieces? But when it comes to our lives God sees those missing pieces. He sees the child who grew up without a father or a mother, the husband and wife who can't have a child, the friend that was betrayed, the parents who lost a child to a drunk driver. He sees the missing pieces and He does not throw us away. When we choose to give Him our pain He is able to make something we could never imagine. He makes new pieces and new connections and He links our lives to others that create beauty and joy. They may never fully take away the pain of the missing piece but I assure you when you are able to see the bigger picture you will see beauty and you will have joy and somehow the final product is more than you could have ever imagined because he sees the bigger picture! Our lives don't look so pretty when we try to keep the pain for ourselves. The bitterness, revenge those things never fill our missing pieces. They only create a bigger void in our lives.

Remember our understanding is limited. It's my trust in Him, my relationship with Him, that I have to lean on. Proverbs 3:5 This is the growing and the stretching. This is where discipline and instruction become our JOY!

I want to take a minute to look at the words of Paul. Don't forget he caused much pain for many – he put many Christians to death for their faith before finding Christ himself. What a changed man he became. **He instructs in Romans 12:14-21**

Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them.

15 Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep.

16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD .

20 Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."

21 Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

This is counter culture to our world today. Bless those who persecute you! Don't curse them! - Some of us curse much less than our enemy. I mean if someone cuts you off when you are on I-95 – you definitely aren't blessing them! If your enemies are hungry – feed them. When was the last time you stopped to think about the person you consider your enemy and what their needs are? Take a minute and think about this. Have you ever thought what the person who has caused you pain might actually need? This might be leaving a bitter taste in your mouth because you want to fight evil with evil but remember God's goal is healing ...restoration. He sees the bigger picture! Don't let evil

conquer you...but conquer evil by doing good! You will never conquer evil by doing more evil. It will swallow you up! I know I have been there. When bitterness and anger and hurt ran so deep that I could not see the blessing God gave me. And you know what....try as I might that anger and bitterness never brought a sense of relief. It just festered and affected the good things in my life. There was no healing there was no sense of justice only pain.

Paul must have known how hard it would be for some of us to repay our enemies with good, I think he added verse 20 just to help us out a little bit. He said you know when you do those good things to your enemy, you heap burning coals of shame on their heads.

He is saying take the high road! It might be painful but you lift your head high and do good!

I want to stop right here and take a minute to say this – nowhere here does it say you can't have boundaries; nowhere here does it say you have to let your enemy get close to you; nowhere here does it say you have to restore your enemy in your life or there has to be restoration. He is saying pray for your enemy (that can be done with boundaries and at a distance) He is saying don't repay evil with evil. Do good! Don't seek revenge! When I spoke about healing and restoration, I am talking about that for you and where possible I am talking about restoration with God for those who might have hurt you. God can most certainly bring restoration between two people that have hurt each

other but that is a process and takes time and that is not what we are talking about today. When Pastor Barbara shared 2 weeks ago about the individual who sexually abused her as a little girl; we heard how she was able to forgive and even pray for that person's salvation but I am sure that Pastor Barbara would never leave her children in that person's care and I assure you that God would not ask her to do so. God gives wisdom and common sense for a reason.

I want to continue on in Psalm 94 with the last portion of the writer's words:

¹⁶ Who will protect me from the wicked? Who will stand up for me against evildoers? ¹⁷ Unless the Lord had helped me, I would soon have settled in the silence of the grave. ¹⁸ I cried out, "I am slipping!" but your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me. ¹⁹ When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer. ²⁰ Can unjust leaders claim that God is on their side—leaders whose decrees permit injustice? ²¹ They gang up against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death. ²² But the Lord is my fortress; my God is the mighty rock where I hide. ²³ God will turn the sins of evil people back on them. He will destroy them for their sins. The Lord our God will destroy them.

Here the writer shares a personal testimony of God seeing him through a time of personal pain. He says that when he thought he would surely die, God's unfailing love supported him. God gave

comfort, renewed hope, and cheer despite the fact that there were unjust leaders that condemn the innocent to death. The Lord is my fortress; my God is the mighty rock where I hide.

I stand here today as a living testimony of God's restorative power when I trust in Him and not my own understanding. Your pain may be different and your experiences may be different but there is no one on the face of this earth that can take away what God has done in my life or what God has done in your life. The writer here shares his own experience I think to 1) remind himself in the face of pure evil what God has done and how He has not abandoned the writer in the worst of times and 2) to encourage those (the orphans, the widows, the foreigners) that are facing pain due to the evil of others. Some of my favorite reads are stories of Christian Holocaust survivors for this very reason...it bolsters my faith to hear about God's sustaining love during the most unbearable of circumstances and how He makes beauty from ashes. One such author and one of my very favorites is Corrie Ten Boom. She puts it this way, "This is what the past is for! Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see."

So today in closing I want to share a personal testimony with you. To be honest this story is hard to share because I am embarrassed of my own shortcomings and inability to trust God but I am sharing with you so you can see how God can bring healing and beauty to our pain. I

also want you to know I have spoke with my kids about this testimony, and they have given their blessing that I share it with you today.

It might seem hard to believe but I suffered from infertility for almost 10 years. I'm not sure one can understand what that feels like until you go through it yourself but when all your friends who got married around the time you did start to have kids and it doesn't happen for you. It hurts. And when months turn into years. It begin to hurt even more. And that hurt becomes compounded by the many questions of friends and relatives. Even though well intentioned – asking someone if they need a tutorial or lesson on how children are conceived? - does not help! It is hard to be mad at anyone but God when you are dealing with infertility, and I remember wondering if this was His punishment. As a child I had been sexually molested by two different family members and I always felt like it was my fault. I would think to myself, maybe this was God's way of dealing with me. So I alternated between deep anger and guilt. These feeling although very real were always pushed deep down because life was busy and no body want to deal with that. Before Dustin and I were ever married, my sister struggled as a teenager. She was rebellious and wild and our relationship was tumultuous but I never imagined that just a few weeks before her 16th birthday she would run away and we would not know where she was for months. When she returned she was not the same and she began a lifelong battle with addiction. There were court

orders, rehab, long trips to see her in a girls home and then she moved out of state. By this time Dustin and I were married and my sister called us and told us she was pregnant could she live with us until she got married. She came to live with us and then she was married, Dustin and I moved to NYC, and my sister gave birth to Dalton and then she had Lyric and I thought that being a mom had set her on the right path. She would do what was right for her babies. And she did until her marriage fell apart when Dalton and Lyric were 1 and 3 years old. Then everything fell apart and her addiction took control. My parents took custody of Dalton and Lyric for 7 months and during that time Dustin and I moved back to Oklahoma to help them out. What we didn't know was that their marriage was falling apart and after 26 years of marriage they divorced. So here we were going through infertility treatments, dealing with my parents divorce, never having kids ourselves and we- took Dalton and Lyric into our home. Our goal was to help my sister get her life together so she could be the mother they needed and deserved. The Foster Cares goal was reunification. Having longed for a child for so long myself I could not imagine that my sister would not do what it took to get her kids back, but I did not understand the power of addiction. 2 years had passed. We attended court hearings every few months, we met with foster care workers, we took the kids to doctors and took Dalton to counseling and we did all the things we were supposed to all while continuing fertility treatments. Everything had failed with these

treatments...everything. So with all these emotions, we went to court on the Friday before Mother's day in May of 2007. I will never forget it. My sister was trying to get custody of the kids back but she had not done the things she was supposed to do. I was on the witness stand being questioned about the care we were giving the kids by my sisters attorney when he asked me if I would be cooperative in setting up a visitation schedule with my sister so that the kids could get to know their new brother when he was born. What? My sister is pregnant again? I can't even tell you what I said or what was said after that. All I remember is the 2 hour car ride home – Dustin driving and me losing control. You see all those emotions and feelings came tumbling out. The pain was too much to bear and the only one I could find to blame was God and my sister. So I let Him have it and Dustin was my witness. I'm so very embarrassed by the things I said that day. I'm going to be 100% honest & transparent with you. I asked God to take her baby. I told God that the baby would be better off dead. I asked God to take my sister and put her out of her misery. I asked him why He would bless her with another baby when she didn't take care of the 2 he gave her. I asked God why He would choose to bless her and not me. I asked God every hard question I had. I screamed my contempt for my sister and all the hard places she had put me in and I screamed my contempt for God. I told him I was done loving these kids that I would just have to give back and I cried until I could not even speak. I am sure Dustin thought I had lost my mind. Sometime during that

weekend, the unfailing love of God put me back together and the peace of God settled upon my heart. I didn't understand it. I sure didn't like it. The sting was still there. But I decided that I needed to replace all the evil I felt in my heart with good. I started loving Dalton & Lyric as if they were my own, I worked on my marriage, and I allowed God to replace the anger in my heart with compassion for my sister and when her friends deserted her, I threw her a baby shower all while I continued to take care of her older 2 children. It wasn't easy. At times I wanted to quit. But I trusted that God had a bigger and better plan for my life. My justice would only bring more pain. The day after I threw my sister the baby shower I found out that I was pregnant. A few months later Kuper was born and six months after he was born I gave birth to Samara.

I'm not sure if it was the busyness of caring for Dalton and Lyric and then becoming a new mom to Samara or if it was the strained relationship between me and my sister but when Samara was just a year old, we moved back to NYC with 3 kids (that's another God story for another day), in 2011, I gave birth to Malakai, and in February 2013 we officially adopted Dalton and Lyric. We were a family of 6. Our motto was four no more! Only God wasn't done. You see between us moving and the strained relationship between me and my sister we did not see Kuper much when he was young. Unfortunately, he and three other siblings on his dad's side spent 11 years living the

life of a child being raised by two addicts. He would live from time to time with my mother, he would be placed in foster care, and he would see way more domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse than any child should ever see. All along I could not see it but God did. In 2011 Kuper (this child that I had prayed for God to take) would be the completion of our family. Believe it or not I had forgot about my prayer until one Sunday morning, I was standing right over there and the worship team was singing, "You took what the enemy meant for evil and you turn it for good, you turn it for good." And God took me back to that day. You see for me on that day, it felt like the enemy had won but what I didn't know was that I could not see the bigger picture. I could not see how all the pieces of the puzzle would connect. God was making something beautiful despite all the pain and hurt. I could have gave up. I could have said I can't keep doing this. It too hard. There are pieces missing. Or it hurts too much and I can't possibly give what I don't have but then I would have never experienced the fullness of God's plan for my life. I would have never experienced the beauty and joy. If you look over and see tears in my eyes when I watch Kuper play guitar its because every single time he picks up that guitar I am reminded of the goodness of God. You see its in those moments God shows me a glimpse of my picture. I can't see it piece by piece but he gives me glimpses. My thoughts are futile! My pain is but temporary. His plan is perfect. If only we could trust His plan for our lives. It will not be without pain. Without pain there is no growth, no

maturity, no need to hold tightly to our maker. We can trust that the God of vengeance...the judge of the earth - He is just and righteous and His ways are higher than our ways. His plans are good because He sees the bigger picture.

You might wonder why I gave you so much background to my story. The infertility, the sexual abuse as a child, my parent's divorce, my sister's addiction....that's because all of those things affected me. You can't see it, you may not even be able to understand it, but God does. I'm so thankful that it's his righteousness and justice that I must face and not anyone else's. And that causes me to pause. I'm glad that no one else has to face my justice either because what I think is justice is really not justice. I don't have all the facts, I can't understand all that someone else has gone through, and my thoughts are so limited. I don't know what is good for me let alone what is good for you. But God does!

Jeremiah 29:11-14

For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD . "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

12 In those days when you pray, I will listen.

13 If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.

14 I will be found by you," says the LORD . "I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land."

(Worship team come up)

Those 11 years after Kuper's birth were not easy and I know there were times that God carried both me and Dustin because we could not do it in our human flesh. There were times that my flesh got the best of me and I repaid evil with evil. There were times that I wanted what I thought was justice. I wanted my sister to know how much she had hurt these kids. You see it wasn't even my own pain but watching my kids pain that would provoke me. The mamma bear in me would rise up but what I didn't realize and what took me many years to see for myself was that there was no viable justice in my eyes and the price that had been paid was more costly than I could ever imagine. And most importantly when I returned evil for evil I did nothing but hurt those that I loved the most and I actually went against the plan that God had for our lives. It was like me destroying the puzzle. There has been beauty that has come out of this story of pain but there is still much pain. There are broken relationships, issues of abandonment, and the bondage of addiction. No one can understand the pain of the bondage unless you have lived it, no one can understand losing a family member to that bondage unless you have lived it, but my God can. He can take that pain and replace it with joy. I am still learning to choose good over evil and you can choose it to. There is JOY in his instruction. How is that? Well if I had repaid evil with evil I would never

know the JOY of what is now my family. No matter what pain you have been handed or dealt with in life you can choose good. I've seen it. Not just in my life but in the lives of others. You can choose to give your pain to the one who sees the bigger picture, let Him be the God of justice in your life. He will never abandon you. He never will! And when you give him your pain I assure you His justice will be righteous.

What can we take home from this today?

If you are hurting if someone has caused you pain or maybe your angry with God because you believe He has caused your pain – you can let go. You are not abandoned. He loves you with an ever lasting love and He is waiting to take your pain. Maybe you are seeking justice but there is no justice like His justice. Release that today. How do you do that? You bring good into the picture. You love, you pray, and you follow His instruction for your life. You realize that maybe the person who caused you pain is not the enemy. Maybe they are hurting, maybe it was unintentional, and if it was let God handle it. He will take care of it!