

Good morning. I am so glad to be with you. I had the privilege of being at The Chapel last night for our Saturday evening service and Kelly just did an incredible job of feeding people God's word, challenging them and he lifted our church up and thank you for loaning him out for the weekend. There are times when people use figures of speech and there are other times when their words are quite literal. And when Kelly said we were exchanging pulpits, it was literal. They had to bring that giant size pulpit out to The Chapel. He is at least one foot taller than I am and this is your short pulpit and I feel like I have to jump a little bit to see over the top of it. And I love seeing your faces. It's a joy to see people that I've known for the years that Cathy and I have lived in Fort Wayne and to see familiar faces. But you know what's best is to look out into a church and to see hundreds and hundreds of faces each hour that I don't know. Those are new people who've come to faith in Christ, come to grow in Christ, come to serve Christ here. And so if you're an old friend, good morning. If you're a new friend, I'm glad to meet you today.

I was here maybe two years ago and I was rebuffed a little bit by some people who said, you didn't tell us anything about your family. So thanks for asking about my kids and my grandkids. I just happen to have some pictures today. What a coincidence! This is our oldest daughter – yeah you can say oh one more time. This is our oldest daughter Rachel. She is 29. Her husband Tom is a financial planner and the little girl Grace is six years old. Grace was born in Maldiva. Spent the first two years of her life in an orphanage. Rachel and Tom adopted her, brought her here and she took over the universe in about two weeks. She runs things in our family. And her little brother Jacob is sitting on his dad's lap. Jacob when he was eighteen months started memorizing Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans. By the time he was two he said, "I think I can say them backwards." And he could. He's the brains of the family. We're not sure where that genetic stream came from, but, And then Jack is the life of the party. He's probably going to work for Jake because he's just a fun-loving guy.

This next picture is our daughter Rebecca. And she's married to Fred. Fred is a principal in Southwest Allen County Schools. He's holding Hudson and Hudson is going to Kindergarten next year at his dad's school and he's going to be big stuff. And Lola is in Becca's arms. Lola is the one, you've got to work to get her attention. When Jack sees you, it's Grandpa aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!!! When Lola sees you she goes... And you've got to work to get her attention.

And this is a picture of our son Adam and his wife Carly. They have two dogs, not pictured, and they've been married three and a half years and Adam's got the short hair cut because at that time he was a part of the Marine Corp and I know many of you prayed him safely home, so thank you.

Well, I don't know where that emotion came from but uh, I can't tell you how much I love these kids and these grandkids. There's nothing more important to me in the world than them. And I say that to you not because I want you to see their pictures, but I want you to know that God loves you more than I love those kids. As much as they have been the life of our family and I would do anything within reason for them, God loves you more. You matter to God. No matter what anybody else has told you, if your dad was a great dad or if he was a dead-beat

dad, your Heavenly Father loves you. And He places more value on you than anything else in this world. You can pile up all of the world's money and God would push it aside just to have you. Your mom may have neglected you and you may have felt like in your family you didn't count. Well, you've got an older brother in the name of Jesus who loves you this much. And today we're going to talk about overcoming life's hurts, habits and hang-ups. All of that comes from Jesus Christ.

Anything that we say about a particular ministry like Celebrate Recovery, it's just how we've chosen to arrange the verses. It's all about Jesus and His power to save, His power to heal, and His power to create a brand new creation when you come to faith in Him. Celebrate Recovery is certainly for people who have the traditional addictions. Alcohol, drugs, pornography. But it's also for anyone who's struggling with life. If you've ever been to an AA meeting or a Celebrate Recovery meeting, they usually begin with these words: Hi, my name's Rick. And I struggle with addiction approval. I make promises that I later regret. I make them because I don't want to feel the pain of disappointing someone. I avoid dealing with problems because I cannot stand conflict. I over-invest in projects, trying to make them better than they need to be, hoping that you'll approve of me. I measure my worth in people liking me. I feel like a failure when I experience disapproval. Even from people I hardly know. You see, we all have our hurts and our habits and our hang-ups.

The lady of the house was running around telling everybody get up, get ready, we've got to get to school. Everybody up, let's get moving and everybody got up but this guy. He's in bed. So mom comes in the room says get up, got to go to school. He says I don't want to go. She says why not? He says, well the kids all hate me. She says well, get up, get dressed you have to go anyway. He said but the teachers all hate me. She said that's alright, get up and get dressed. He said why do I have to go? She said because you're the principal. Now get your clothes on and you've got to go to school.

You see, we all struggle with this approval addiction a little bit. That's my big hurt. I want people to like me. Well last week, you looked at the first step of eight in what was called Celebrate Recovery and step one is realize that I am not God. Of course, we never think that we are really God, but we do think I'm at least the god of this little part of the universe called my life. It's my life. And so when Bon Jovi thunders it out, we cheer back, it's my life. Nobody's going to tell me what to do. As William Henley wrote, "I am the captain of my fate, I am the master of my soul." Well if you know a little bit about history, the ancients believed that the universe was geocentric. By that we mean they thought the earth was the center of the universe and everything revolved around the earth. But by the sixteenth century the Polish astronomer Copernicus came to the new theory that the world and the universe were heliocentric meaning that the sun is at the very center. But now we have learned that actually the world is Rickocentric. It's all about me. And we will get along just fine if you know that it's all about me.

I was listening to a great testimony from an AA speaker who said, "My life may not be much, but it's all I think about." So the first step on the road to recovery is to realize I'm not God; it's not all about me. This universe wasn't created with me

at the center. This marriage is not created with me at the center. This life is not created with me at the center. My life, my family, my world is to revolve around Jesus Christ and the first step is realizing I am not God.

So here we are today for step two. Step two comes out of Hebrews chapter eleven. It is this, "Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to Him and that he has the power to help me recover." There is hope in Jesus Christ, not only for comfort, not only for life transformation."

I've asked a great friend of mine, Art, to come and to share his testimony as to how God changed his life so that you can hear firsthand the hope and the help that God will give. Art, thank you.

My name is Art. I am a follower of Jesus Christ and I struggle with a sin nature. I'd say I struggle with chemical dependency but it's been since 1983 since my last drink or drug. On a daily basis I struggle with life in this world. You see, I'd like everything to be OK. I want a perfect marriage, perfect children, a great business, but I didn't want to work at it. Isn't life supposed to be perfect? Isn't life supposed to be easy? I thought so when I left my core family at eighteen and I struggled in a big way to find the tools to cope in this world. I found ways to cope by using drugs, alcohol and women for my self-worth and comfort. I used these coping tools to live my life and eventually these habits turned on me and I was left shallow, lacking maturity and caught at 26, married to a woman I didn't love. There was no intentional nature towards life. I went to church growing up, but God was to be feared and I didn't have a personal relationship with Him.

At 26, I was tired of being sick and tired and I was determined to do something about my addictions. God started putting people into my life at the right time who walked me closer to Christ. But still I struggled with a negative self-image and years of perfecting self-hate. My journey of recovery has been long and I've made mistakes even while being clean and sober. In fact, in 2004, I was on the verge of another serious problem – bankruptcy. My spending was out of control and my business was killing me and my family. I was losing respect in my life from my wife and I lost her trust. The motivating tool God uses to awaken me is my children. I have dedicated my life, my generation to stopping the cycle of unintentional living. I want my son to see what a man is supposed to be based on biblical knowledge and I want my daughter to see the type of man to marry.

We are here to speak about this new ministry called Celebrate Recovery. A program for which I am so grateful for at The Chapel and so happy about being started here at Blackhawk. Celebrate Recovery is a Christ-centered recovery program which brings together those of us who struggle with hurts, habits and hang-ups. Celebrate Recovery brings people together who struggle in this world. There we worship God, support each other and lovingly hold each other accountable. We are intentional about looking deep into our character defects, which keep us from Christ. We hear personal testimonies and we learn about God's word and what He teaches about who we were meant to be. I've learned that Celebrate Recovery is food for my spirit. Things that once baffled me personally – my marriage, work, money, my children – have become easier as I now stay in front of the potential problems. I do this by having tools and friends that truly care and love me. What a great way to life. With the responsibility to

lead CR, Celebrate Recovery, I have found that God challenges me with love, grace and patience, which only He could. Today I believe it, I desire God and I'm staying out of His way as much as possible. This blessing has made every day exciting and new. In so many ways, God has taken this self-hating, weak, shell of man and taught me in a deep place that I'm His son.

Let me share with you a most profound experience recently. On December 26, I received a call from my brother that my dad was admitted to the hospital for shortness of breath. Dad was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. The next five weeks became a blur of trying to understand medical terms, hospital procedures and care, and family issues. You know that God whispers in our pleasure, but shouts to us in our pain. And the pain in this example was shouting very loudly. During the next weeks, I traveled to Cleveland several times and stayed for extended periods. You see, me, the alcoholic, drug addict, self-hating, all alone middle child was leading his family through a difficult time. I simply used the tools that God had been teaching me. Early on, I held a small group with my siblings and mom and we told dad how much he meant to us. Also, during those difficult hospital days, I was prepared and intentional about asking dad to accept Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior and he did. Through the family stuff I was able to persevere and continued to do the next right thing for my dad's comfort. These are not easy things, especially for me, but let me tell you, I received calls from men who also follow Christ. They called with supportive words constantly. God had prepared me well for this difficult time and on several occasions I led prayer for my entire family. In crunch time I had people and I had Jesus. I got to see deeply what the Spirit feeding was all about. I was ready, God led me and I am proud to say I led others, my family.

On January 31, 2009, my dad went to see Jesus. I was there. I spent the last days with dad and I will always hold that time near to my heart. God was there in the early hours of that morning too. During the night about three times as my dad was struggling to breathe, he sat up in his bed with his eyes wide open and said "oh my." At the time I was thinking he was in great pain. I could not comprehend what was happening, but the stare and the wide look in his eye was something I never saw from him before. I can say dad was looking somewhere he had never seen before. He was on his way to heaven. And seeing what God has waiting for us all. God to see our program and other Christ followers have helped me prepare for this time. And I was available to be used by God to do his work. I know today as the serenity prayer says, I can be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. The struggles of this world can be overwhelmingly difficult alone. We don't need to be alone. Celebrate Recovery is available for us to begin or to continue a process to grow towards Christ. We need to work hard to get closer to Jesus and to make that our number one priority. His arms are extended for us all. We just need to turn to Him. I have dedicated my life to following Him. And someday it will be my time to see heaven, just like my dad saw on his way to heaven. And be able to say oh my, oh my, oh my. Thank you for letting me share.

Thank you Art. I asked Art to come be a part of this hour this morning for two reasons. First to give you the hope of what God can do in changing a person's

life. And secondly to know that God raises people up out of their hurts to use their pain to help somebody else on the road to recovery. So if you're in pain this morning, the book of Second Corinthians, the first chapter says, "God will comfort you so that you in turn can comfort others with the same comfort that you receive from God." Art thank you.

Well, here is point number two, step number two. Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to Him and He has the power to change my life. He has the power to help me recover. Point number one is earnestly believe that God exists. There are many valid, intellectual reasons to believe that God exists. Since man has walked the steps of the earth, we have known that there is a god. One of the sources of evidence we have is the universe with its cause and intentional existence, its design and its intricacy. Way back as far as the fourth century B.C. Aristotle reasoned that there had to be some force, some intelligent power that brought the universe into existence. He reasoned in this fashion. Aristotle would observe that for something to exist, it had to have a cause – that the world is a result of cause and effect. But as he moved back from the effect to the cause, he realized well, that cause had to have a cause, so he looked for the preceding cause and found it, only to discover that that also had to have a preceding cause and that had to have a preceding cause and that had to have a preceding cause so Aristotle said there has to be an uncaused cause. In other ways he phrased it, there had to be an unmoved mover. And by that, he meant there had to be some force that was intelligent enough to create all of this order. And powerful enough that he could take his will and his creativity and make it happen. Now we're talking 400 B.C. And ever since then, brilliant minds have talked about the cosmological reason to believe there is a god. Cause and effect. We've heard scholars over the centuries talk about the teleological argument. Intricacy and design. There are other arguments, but perhaps the most compelling reason why you should believe that there is a god today is that you are here. You're in this room. You might have rather have preferred to have gone to the golf course or to the brunch, but you're here. And the fact that you're here reveals that inside you, you sense a need for God. You came this morning, because intuitively you are wired to know God. Pascal said that God has created each of us with a vacuum shaped so that only He can fill it. Rather fascinating, a man by the name of Dean Hamer who is a geneticist and the director of Gene Structure and Regulation at the United States Cancer Institute wrote a book entitled The God Gene. It is his belief that you and I are hard wired to believe in God. I don't know whether his scientific genetic study is valid. I'm not prepared, qualified in any way to evaluate that, but I can tell you that he echoes Romans chapter 1 and 2 where the Bible says God has put the knowledge that he exists in each one of us. You're here today not because you couldn't think of anything else to do on a Sunday morning. But because you are either a believer in God or a searcher for God.

This second step begins by earnestly believing there is a God. I am not in this alone. I am not abandoned. I have help in the form of a loving creator. Now you may have fallen under the same influences that I did as an academic student. And being told that faith is a crutch. It's a sign of a weakness. That in the

academic world faith is sort of leaping into the dark and hoping that there's somewhere to land and someone to catch you. But I love the writing of John Polkinghorne. Polkinghorne is a quantum physicist at the University of Cambridge. He is also a deep believer in Jesus Christ. Polkinghorne wrote, "Faith is not a question of shutting one's eyes, gritting one's teeth and believing the impossible. It involves a leap, but a leap into the light rather than into the dark."

Earnestly believe that God exists. The second point is earnestly believe that I matter to God. And that becomes perhaps more difficult for some of us than even believing there is a God is believing that I matter to Him. You see, all of us at all times are constantly evaluating ourselves and comparing ourselves. Last week was the NFL draft and once again I wasn't picked. It was very disappointing. And we watch the ESPN as they went through months of telling us who will be the number one picked quarterback, who will be the first take in lineman and everybody was given points and who ran the fastest forty. And everybody was being compared. Here are the first round picks. Here are the second round picks. Here are the wanna-be picks. Here are the couch potatoes. And we know who's where in this continuum. And the same thing happens. You go to school, somebody is the valedictorian. Somebody is the salutatorian, somebody is get out of the auditorium. I did so well in the third grade, they asked me to stay back and help the next group of kids through. And so I know where I'm at on this academic continuum. I'm the guy making it possible for somebody to be that valedictorian. You turn on the television set and they give awards. This is the best actor, this is the best actress, this is the best supporting actor, this is the best supporting actress, and everything is compared. We go to work. You know that your work is being evaluated. You know that you're being compared. And deeper than all of that you and I know we are being morally evaluated. We know there is a right and a wrong. We know that we have this deep emotion called guilt. And guilt leads to shame. And when we think about our guilt and shame our instincts are to do the exact same things that Adam and Eve did. That is to back up, to turn and to hide and hope that God doesn't see me. The good news is God cares deeply about you. You don't need to hide. He loves you. And you matter to Him. We tend to think that there are all these good people and over here you've got Billy Graham and people like Mother Theresa and I'm somewhere south of them. There was a woman who had so much guilt and so much shame. Five marriages. We don't know whether she was divorced, a widow, abandoned. Probably a little bit of the above when you had five. And she was now living with a man. And her shame was so great that she could not bear to hear the whispers of the other women when they came to the city well to draw water. You came in the cool of the morning before it became scorching hundred degree temperatures at noon, but not her. She came at noon with the hope and security that no one else would be at the well. And then when she thought she had a safe, private moment to draw her water, Jesus walked up and He asked for a drink. She was shocked. Her words were, "Why would you speak to me? You must be new in town, because if you knew who I was, you wouldn't talk to me." And Jesus intentionally wanted to talk to her. She mattered to Him.

Please don't think that the Bible has good people and bad people. The Bible only has people who need Jesus. Even the ones that we look at as great people, and maybe they were great compared to me, they had their failures, their faults and their flaws. You think of Noah. Noah was great. He had the faith to believe that it would rain so hard the world would be flooded and then he said, "By the way God, what's rain?" He had great faith, but he also had a drinking problem. I mean, a fall down, don't know where your pants are kind of drinking problem. Abraham was a great man. By faith, he followed God from the land of Ur of Chaldeas to a place he didn't even know existed. But he was also a dead-beat dad. He wanted a son, God promised him a son. He is now very, very old and he had no son, so he says God's plan's not working, I'll come up with a plan. And he takes a mistress. Her name's Hagar. She has a son named Ishmael. Then lo and behold, his wife does have a son named Isaac. Now he's got two women, two sons, and too many problems. So he goes to Hagar and Ishmael and says go, just go. No here's your half of the estate. No here's your child support. No here's joint custody. Just go.

David is described in the book of Acts as a man after God's own heart and he was. But he was also a politician with more sex scandals than anybody you know of. I mean this guy had multiple wives, mistresses, affairs and this son born to that woman didn't get along with this son born to that woman and this son liked that half sister and raped her. And then her full brother went over and killed that son and then David's family became so torn up over his scandalous behavior that one of his sons deposed him as king. Now this isn't beat up on the old guys today. This is please know that no matter who you are or what you've done, you matter to God.

God knows all about my situation. God knows where your next paycheck's going to come from. He knows how you're going to make your next car payment. He knows how long your plant's going to stay open. He knows who's going to get laid off and who's not. God knows who you're going to marry. God knows where he or she is at at this very moment. God knows how you're going to bump into each other. God has that all planned. He knows your situation. Here's how Jesus put it. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father?"

Did you ever notice when birds migrate, sometimes you look up and there's just thousands of birds going whoosh, whoosh and you wonder how do they all move? And could you imagine while they're moving trying to count them one, two, three, four - hold still - five, six, seven, eight. Would you please stand still? God has no trouble keeping track of every one of them. And then Jesus added, even the number of hairs on your head are numbered. They're known by God. I don't know how many hairs are on the top of my head. I notice there's more and more in my hairbrush, but on top of my head, I don't have a count. But Jesus does; he knows you that well. He knows you by name and He knows you by need. He not only knows your situation. He cares about your situation. God cares about my situation. Here's Psalm 103:13, "The Lord is like a father to His children. Tender and compassionate to those who fear Him, for He understands how weak we are. He knows that we are only dust." Peter invites us, "Cast all of

your worries, all of your cares on Him, for He cares what happens to you.” Our final point is this. Earnestly believe that God has the power to change my situation. believe that God exists. It’s great to believe that God cares about me, but what ultimately matters is believing He has the power to change your life. If you have a father wound, your dad was a dead-beat dad or your dad was there but never gave you affirmation, approval or affection and your carrying that father wound through life, God can heal that. He can step in and fill the hole and be the heavenly Father that you didn’t have in an earthly father. If your wound is you’ve been overly bonded with your mother and you don’t know how to stand up to your mom and say, ‘Mom, I love you, but I’m married. I have my own kids and we’re going to spend Christmas as a family. We’ll drop by and visit you, but we’re not coming to your house on your schedule to do everything the way we did it when I was a little boy. I’m now a big boy.’ And if you don’t have the ability to cut those apron strings, God will give you that ability.

If you have found that it is easier to drink alcohol than to face reality, God will give you the ability to overcome the alcohol addiction and to face reality. God wants to do in your life what God did in Art’s life. And that is to take a man who was addicted to things that controlled him and not only set him free from that addiction, but to raise him up as a spiritual leader. Now as you embark in this particular ministry called Celebrate Recovery, this has to be a grassroots movement. There are some things that pastors can dream up. Like somebody dreamed up Saturday night church, and we’ve done that and it’s worked, but a pastor cannot dream up Celebrate Recovery. Celebrate Recovery has to have people in it who have overcome addictions, hurts, habits and hang-ups. And Celebrate Recovery has to have people who say I believe in the transformational power of Jesus Christ so much, I’m going to invite my friends. I go to Celebrate Recovery quite often at The Chapel, sometimes I just need the encouragement, but if I see a man who needs it, I don’t say, ‘Hey, you ought to go on Monday night.’ I say, ‘I will go this Monday night. I will be there to introduce you.’ You can’t say to somebody who feels like their life is a mess, they have no help and they have no hope and just say, ‘Hey, go to Blackhawk on Friday nights. Somebody there will help you.’ It’s going to take this body of people saying, we want to be the church to those who need Jesus the most. And Celebrate Recovery begins here at Blackhawk on Friday night. There’s a brochure in the lobby if you want all of the details, but it’s going to be Friday night here in the south campus at 7:00. It will begin with a worship and a teaching time and a testimony. Then there will be gender specific groups where if your issue is dealing with pornography, there’ll be a support group for that. If yours is alcohol, there’ll be a support group for that. If yours is co-dependency there’ll be a support group for that. Help is available in Jesus Christ. Would you today come to the second step and say, I earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to Him and He has the power to change my life. Let’s pray. At this moment, if you’ve never given your life to Christ, I hope that you will personally say the following things to Him – in your own words and in your own ways. Jesus, I believe you are God. Forgive me for thinking I was a god of even this life that I call mine. And Jesus, I need help and I need hope. Please forgive me of my

failures and my flaws and my sins. Please come into my life. It is yours. Amen. Well, thank you for the privilege of being a part of this wonderful church once again and I hope that you will be at Celebrate Recovery if it will help you. That you'll come with a friend on your arm if it will help them and you'll be Christ's ambassadors. If you'll stand we'll have a benediction and send you out to change the world.

And now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, our Savior, to Him be the glory both now and forevermore. Amen. Good afternoon. God bless you.