

FREEWAY

MIKE FOSTER | *Step 3: Ownership*

Thank you so much for joining us today. If Central has impacted your life in any way, send us an email at mystory@centralonline.tv. And if you'd like to give financially to our ministries, go to our website centralonline.tv and click the 'Giving' link at the top right of that page. While our Henderson location is under construction, so let's join Jud in the tent for Week 3 of Freeway.

[Mike begins]

Alright! Hey Central, it is great to be with you today. I am excited that we're going through the Freeway series together and I'm just so excited. I've been following on Instagram some of the group stuff that has been happening in here and some of the stories and it's so powerful to see what God is doing here and I'm always so inspired by you and your stories. I want to welcome all the campuses that are joining us right now and I want to say a special hello to those who are watching in a correctional facility with our partnership with God Behind Bars. We love you guys and think you're awesome and believe in you. Freedom. Freedom is something that we all want in our life and it's something that God wants us to embrace. And we've been talking about how do we get to freedom and sort of this pathway and the steps that we go on in terms of living a free life, free from the burdens of our past, freedom from sin, freedom from regret. The last couple weeks Jud has talked about the first step of freedom is awareness and becoming aware of the brokenness in our lives and what God needs to heal and slowing our lives down and just kind of saying, "Okay, God, what do we need to do? What does that work look like?" And then last week Jud talked about discovery and how we start getting into some of the specific things of our story and really

address the pain points and the loss and some of the struggles that many of us have never dealt with in our entire lives. Today I want to talk about step three in this process toward freedom and that is the step of ownership. And I've got to be real honest with you, this is a tough topic. It's one that you know, that old saying, "The truth will set you free, but first it will tick you off"? I sort of feel like this first step of ownership and taking personal responsibility for our lives and moving from this place of living as a victim or blaming people for where we are at in our lives and the reason why our lives are in the condition that they are, moving out of this place of sort of powerlessness. And really trusting God to say, "God, I am in a pit. I need your help. I'm stuck." And here's what God promises us: He says, you know what, if we're in a pit, if we're stuck, then we need to stop digging, right? You see, whatever we're doing, that's not working. And the God provides a ladder out of that pit. But here's the deal: God provides the ladder, but we provide the legs to walk up that ladder. You see, it's a partnership, our spiritual walk and our spiritual growth and our pathway towards freedom. It involves obviously what God is doing and has done through the cross, through grace, through forgiveness, through having a future and a plan for our lives. Giving us purpose but He says, "You've got to show up. You've got to take responsibility for your life today." I played little league when I was a kid and I wasn't a great player but I loved baseball. And my strategy for my little league career was very simple when it came to coming up to the plate and hitting, and I did not actually have a hitting strategy, I had a walking strategy. See, my goal was not to swing the bat, it was not to drive one into the outfield or hit a home run. No, my strategy for my little league baseball career was get on base by walking.

That was my plan. The problem is even at 12 years old, these pitchers still knew how to throw strikes. And so if I never swung the bat and they're just going to start throwing strikes, I'm never going to get on base. In fact, most of my little league career was me striking out, just kind of looking at the balls going by, never swinging, me crying at the home plate, and then walking back to the dugout. That was my career in baseball. And I think sometimes when we approach life, it's sort of that same way. We get up to plate and God's saying, "Are you ready? Are you ready to swing, to go for it, to get in the game?" And we're like, "Yep, God, I'm ready. But I'm not going to swing that bat; I've got a walking strategy." And when we take ownership of our lives, we take personal responsibility and we stop blaming people and stop living as victims, we actually can have a great career in baseball, just like we can have a great career in life. And we can enjoy life and experience everything that God has for us. But so often we just sort of say, "Well, I just hope to walk." And God's saying, "Man, just swing the bat. Just swing the bat." I think a lot of us are tied up with pain and suffering and our lives, we get confused and we come up with some very bad strategies like, "Hey, I'm just going to walk" or "Maybe I'm just going to live as a victim" or "Maybe I'm going to blame my parents or blame the pastor or blame church or blame God." I mean, we have all kinds of blame targets, right? And what happens is we sort of ... I was doing some science research this week and I don't know if you know this, I found this to be fascinating, but one glass of water, this one little glass of water here, meteorologists say that just one glass of water can create 8 blocks worth, 100 feet deep of fog - you know the fog that comes in - this is all the water it takes to make that amount of fog. That's a lot of fog: 8 blocks, 100 feet deep, full fog. And I think that's what happens in our lives - we

have this pain, we have this moment, we have loss, we have a storm that we go through, we lose a marriage or a child or we get fired or we go through bankruptcy. Whatever the pain point is, maybe it comes from our family of origin. So we have this water but what happens is then the water turns into this very deep fog that infiltrates all aspects of our life. It impacts our relationships, it impacts the way that we see ourselves, it impacts our relationship with God. And until we start doing something about it and addressing the pain, addressing the loss, saying, "God, I hurt and I need you". Until we sort of move in that place of ownership, we're just going to be people of the fog instead of people of the second chance. And so God is inviting us out to the freeway, to the place of freedom. You see, you don't have to live like that anymore, you don't have to show up to home plate and just hope for a walk.

I've got something for you. And yet, here's some truths of life that are very unfortunate. I like to call these the Five Bummer Dudes because it's sort of like this: you know, your friend comes up to you and he goes, "Hey man, my dog died this week." And I always just go, "Bummer, that's a real bummer." I can't do anything about it, I can't bring your dog back, I'm not resurrecting him, laying hands on him. There's nothing we can do about that. Or, "My transmission blows." "Bummer, dude." And there's just things that happen in life that we can fight against these things, we can work against these truths, but here they are, here's five of them. And you're going to feel really encouraged by this chart, I know you're going to love this. But these are the facts of life, these are the five things that because we live in a broken world are true. Number one:

I. Life is unfair.

And if you don't know that yet, you will soon come to know this. Life is unfair.

Number two:

II. People will hurt you.

It's just a fact of life, no matter how hard we work against this truth, we know that will happen. The other, number three:

III. Yesterday is gone.

We can't get the past back. We can try with all our effort and energy and try to do things and create things, but yesterday is gone. Number four:

IV. You are not in control.

Not sure if you knew that or not, but you are not in control. I mean, things are going to happen in your story, in your life, in your typical day that just surprise you, that you had not planned for because you are not in control. And number five: this is a cheery thought:

V. You will die one day.

How about that? I'm done with my message, just take that; there you go. It's encouraging, huh? But these are the Five Bummer Dudes and these are the truths of life. In fact, turn to your neighbored right now and say, "That's a bummer, dude." Let's just admit this. And part of ownership and part of taking personal responsibility in our life is saying, "Yes, these things are true." But we also know this, that life is unfair, but God is good. We know that people will hurt us, but God will never leave us nor forsake us. I think about my own walk with Jesus, like, just because this exists, this is why I desperately need Jesus in my life and you do too, right? And yesterday is gone but God says, "I'm planning a future for you" and we have today, so let's do

something with today. Also, you are not in control but God is in control. And number five, we will all die one day, but if we know Jesus, we know that we can have everlasting life with him where there is no pain, where there is no hurt, where there is no sadness. So these are the Five Bummer Dudes of life. And we can look at our lives and we can look at our stories and our histories, and we can blame people and we can fight against this, and we can try to make these things not true, and we can live as victims, but God says if you want to be free, if you want to experience the freedom that I have for you, you've got to take ownership of your life. If you have your Bibles, let's look at Genesis 3 and we're going to start in Verse 1, and this is basically the Fall of man where we see a really great example of how blame works. And it was from the very beginning and there's some really interesting insights in here about blame and victimhood and the need to take ownership of our lives. And the first verse says, "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 from any of the trees in the garden?'" - I love the fact that the Bible states from the very beginning that the serpent, which is the devil, Satan, is shrewd and he's cunning. And if you think he's working in obvious ways, oh no. He's coming through the back door of your life and your story and he's saying, you know what? He's going to fool you, he's going to let you walk around in your fog as long as he can because he never wants you to know what he's doing and how he's trapped us and kept us captive. So the serpent is shrewd and cunning. Verse 2, it says: "'Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,' the woman replied. 'It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it

or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'" Verse 4: "'You won't die!' the serpent replied to the woman. 'God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.' The woman was convinced." Don't you think that's funny how quickly we went from Eve just holding onto the truth like, "No, God said we're not supposed to eat this, we can eat the other fruit in the garden and from the other trees but not this tree", and then Satan and the serpent kind of throws one little thought in there and then all the sudden she's convinced. That should tell you how good Satan is at deceiving us, he's that good. Verse 6: "The woman was convinced. She saw that 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." There's this little funny joke that us pastors kind of enjoy, but they say that it took Satan himself to deceive the woman. But it only took a naked woman to deceive the man. Isn't that interesting? Isn't that interesting? It's like Eve's there like, "Hey, Adam, you want the apple?" "Uh huh, I do, yes, yes." I mean, naked women have a lot of control over men, it's just a fact of life. We see it in the Bible. So they both take the fruit, they eat from it, and Verse 7 says: "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." And isn't that what we do when we sin? When we have shame in our life. WE hide from God. So they hid from the Lord God in the trees. "Then the Lord God 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.'" I love that little section that says, "So I hid." Isn't that so often what we do when we do something wrong, when we sin against God, we take things into our own hands and try fix it instead of giving it over to God? Verse 11: "'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?' The man replied, 'It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.' " Every time I read that verse, people laugh. And I just love that the Bible's funny, because that is a funny line. It's like, "The woman! She made me do it, she was naked." It's like all this stuff and like, I guess that's one way to deal with the issue, to blame Eve. Verse 13: "Then the Lord God asked the woman, 'What have you done?'" And what does she say? : "'The serpent deceived me,' she replied. 'That's why I ate it.' " [Genesis 3: 1-13].

So there's three things that we can see here in this passage and kind of truths about blame and the lack of ownership by Adam and Eve. So number one is this: if you're taking notes, you might want to write this down:

I. Sin plus our shame equals blame.

Right? So they sinned against God, they felt shame, and what was their next step? I'm going to blame. Not take responsibility, not repent, not say, "God, what can I do to be forgiven?" It's just blame. Number two:

II. We see that blame is hard-wired into us.

Right? I mean, nobody had to teach Adam and Eve how to blame. They didn't go to online courses, they didn't go to college for this. They just inherently knew that when I feel shame because of my sin, I'm going to blame somebody else. It's just the way that we do it, it's so easy and it's so natural and we see this in our kids, right? They do it

all the time: "It's my sister's fault, it's the teacher's fault." Kids know it, it's just hard-wired into us. And number three:

II. Blame is a quick way to discharge pain.

Okay? So what does that mean? Well one of the reasons that we blame other people for our circumstances is it gets the pain off of us and that hurt and that shame And that makes sense, and all the studies show, all the research shows that that is what happens. The problem is it doesn't make us free, it doesn't deal with the real issues of our hurt and our sin. You know, one of the things that we write about in freeway and in the workbook is this truth: that you cannot blame your way to freedom. You just can't. And yet this is exactly what Adam and Eve did in their lives. So what are a few things, what does ownership look like? Well, number one: taking ownership of my life means that my past refines me, but it does not define me. My past refines me, but it does not define me. And so often, our lives are organized all around our past and how we've been hurt and how horrible it is and our struggles. And we allow our past to define us versus just refine us and make us into who we are today. But our past is not our identity, it's not. As Isaiah 43:19 says, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" And I don't think we do perceive that God is doing a new thing in our lives. He says, "I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." So it's sort of like this: When I think about ownership, this idea of taking personal responsibility for our lives, there's two groups of people. There's who I would call the under-owners, and let's just call this "victims", we just see our lives through the lens of victimhood. And we have this circle, this pie, and there's three pieces of this pie.

And if we're a victim and if we're looking at our lives through this lack of personal responsibility for our freedom and our growth, we'll see that the biggest piece of the pie is "How I've been hurt." And that's the defining thing, that's what we see and that's all that really matters. And then the smaller pieces of the pie, which we sort of ignore and not recognize is number one: "How I've hurt myself" - which is true, this is through our choices, things that we have decided to do that have been against God and we've hurt ourselves. And number two is "How I've hurt others." So these pieces of the pie are much smaller and if we're living under this under-ownership mentality, we don't really pay much attention to those two because really, our life is defined by how I've been hurt by others. So that's under owners and we can kind of refer to those people as victims, and I know so many times in my life I've kind of lived with that lens. Now here's the other group of people I call the over owners and they have a pie chart, too. And it sort of looks like this, and their life is defined by control or denial and all they look at is, "How I hurt others." And they're racked with guilt and shame and their life is weighted down by all their mistakes and maybe they've destroyed a marriage or hurt their kids, they've hurt others and they're just over-ownership. There's too much focus there. And then they deny the fact of how they've been hurt, you know, my hurt. My writing is really getting bad, sorry about that. My hurt or how I've hurt myself, right? And these things, all these things are a part of our lives and a part of our stories, and the problem is this is an unhealthy way to see pain and hurt. In fact, these over owners often just totally deny the fact that they've been hurt themselves in their lives. Like, that doesn't matter. It's like, "My parents were abusive, but my dad was a good dad." You've probably met these people, right? They just totally ignore the fact that they've

been hurt because they just focus on how they've hurt others. But here's the deal: when you're an over owner or an under owner, all of our hurt and all of our pain needs to be surrounded by the grace of God and His new beginning and His fresh start. And to say, you know what? All of this is true, it is there in all of our stories, but we need to have a better balance in terms of how we see that. My past refines me, but it does not define me. Number two: ownership means I am more committed to being free than placing blame. Because sometimes we're more interested in being right than being healed. Sometimes we're more interested in placing blame than being free, and we have to really look at our stories and say, "Is that me? Am I more focused on those people and how they've hurt me and my past and all the messy stuff of my life? Or am I really pursuing God and His grace and letting Him change my life and make my heart new?" What is your focus? I think we have to ask ourselves the question, "Do we want to get well?" I think a great example of that was in John 5 when Jesus set the healing pool and he's surrounded by lame and crippled people and he comes up to this guy and he goes, "Hey, do you want to be healed? Do you want to get well?" And the man goes, "Well, I can't because I can't get into the water." You see, the water was a place where you'd be able to be healed and but he says, "I can't get in there, somebody beats me down to it" and what does that sound like? Blame, right? Or an excuse. And Jesus says, "Hey, man, do you want to get well?" And he poses the same question to us, He says, "Do you want to be healed?" Do you want to be free? And that is the crux of the question that every one of us have to ask if we want to be on the freeway. And we want to live in freedom and we want to have our lives be defined by a second chance and not by our pain. So here's

the deal: imagine you're in an automobile accident, you're going to In N' Out Burger or Chipotle after church today and you're in an automobile accident, and there's two groups of people that you can call in terms of this accident, this mess. Number one is call the police, right? Or you can call an ambulance. And so I want you to think about your life and the different struggles that you've had. Maybe how you've been hurt by people. Are you more concerned about calling the police because what do police do? They decide who's right and who's wrong. They work out the facts, they put all the pieces of the puzzle together and they're the ones who decide who's at fault. And that's important at some level, but maybe today the key to our freedom is that instead of spending so much time calling the police, maybe we need to call the ambulance driven by an Ails Guard Savior who's come to rescue us, to heal us, to make us whole, to free us from the weight of the mess of our lives. Who are you calling? Maybe today you need to start calling the ambulance and calling Jesus and letting Him heal you. And finally, ownership means I recognize that my life is hard but trusting that God is good. Life is hard, but we have to trust that God is good. I have some friends named Jay and Katherine and I want you to hear their story. It's a powerful story of the fact that life is hard, but God is good. Check this out, this is Jay and Katherine. [Video clip]

I had what's called an Arteriovenous Malformation, which is a condition in your brain that you're born with, it's congenital. And it grew and grew, and one day it ruptured. And when I was 26 years old, I had a massive brain stem stroke and nearly died. God saved my life, and in so doing a lot was taken away. Life was wonderful before the stroke. I just had a baby James 6 months before and we were living on the beach in Malibu, Jay was in law school and life was fun and easy

and we loved our church, we were deeply plugged into our community there and we were just really living our wildest dreams.

I was concerned because Katherine had felt a little strange that morning and I went to the other room as my son was taking a nap and I was working on a paper. And I heard Katherine cry out. I ran to her side and she was collapsed onto the ground, she was non-responsive. And so I called 911 and the paramedics quickly came and realized she needed to be taken to a hospital immediately. And she was wheeled out on a stretcher from that place we called our first home and she would never return again there. An AVM it's called and it's a very rare condition that Katherine didn't even know she had until that moment when it finally ruptured. And that pressure building in her brain was so great that there was almost no chance for her to survive. And in that moment having this idyllic, perfect life with so much hope and expectation for our future turned upside down.

Losing my motherhood was perhaps the saddest and hardest thing above all other issues I faced throughout my ordeal. Before the stroke, I was able to have 6 months and 5 days with James. I was just a happy mother, enjoying new life with the baby. Once the stroke happened, I was not able to really engage my son, I was not able to be much of a mother at all. Now today, while the picture looks different, I'm there, I'm with him and I'm able to take care of him again and it is the greatest joy in all of this, is knowing that I can be his mommy again. We have been very blessed to suffer greatly at a young age because it informs the way we live the rest of our life. The future is definitely uncertain, but whose isn't? We're living out a picture of what - if we're all honest - each of our lives looks like. We don't know what tomorrow will hold, if it will be the best day of our life or the last day of our life.

Our circumstances and the storms that might surround our lives are not nearly as important as our turning our eyes toward Him. And in that dependence, in that trust, in that tension between all-powerful loving God and a broken world, we found hope. And in that hope we found identity.

I was having lunch with Jay and Katherine a couple weeks ago and I remember her looking at me in just a very honest and real moment, she goes, "I don't know if it's going to get better, my condition, the pain, the physical deformities." They don't know what tomorrow is going to hold for them and their life is radically different. And I look at Jay and Katherine and I go, "This is unfair." God is there in the midst of their pain and they are trusting him because the thing that maybe you saw in their story, it is so evident and if you spend any time with Jay and Katherine that yes, life is hard but they are the most hopeful, joy-filled people I know. And they inspire me because they are trusting God in the middle of it. They're taking ownership of their life and they're helping others. You know, I don't know if you remember growing up as a child, we used to have these Crayolas and we used to draw pictures. And the beautiful thing about crayons - and I think it sort of represents what God is doing in us - is that your crayons are maybe broken, maybe our life has been busted up, maybe we've been stripped of our dignity, maybe things haven't gone the way we thought they would, but the beautiful thing about broken crayons is that they can still draw and they can still color. And I don't know what your story looks like and I don't know what you've been through, but God can use our brokenness, and He can create things and He can do things. Maybe put some apples on the tree, maybe take your broken crayons and put some birds in the sky.

I don't know what your story is or what hurt you've dealt with or the struggles you might be in right now. Life is hard but we can trust God through it. He uses broken crayons, He uses our pain, He wants to set us free today. Let's pray: God thank you so much for helping us own whatever it is in our life that is painful or hurtful or unfair. God, give us the courage to take personal responsibility of our life. We trust you with everything, God, we want to be free. Say that we are more than conquerors, that we are never alone, that you have a plan in the future for our lives. God, we trust those promises today. And it's in your son's name we pray, and all of God's people said: Amen.