Testimony Sunday | Andrew, Alliene and Kenny

A heart back in rhythm, a body brought back from poison, and a shoulder healed in a blip

SPEAKER	Andrew, Alliene and Kenny
DATE	Sunday, April 24, 2022
PASSAGES	Mark 10:13-15; Romans 8:32; Romans 12:15; Isaiah 6:13; 1 Corinthians 15:57; Romans 8:11; Luke 5:12-13; Genesis 32:24-31
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:09:34 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

We rarely need prodding toward less faith; we need prodding toward more. On the Sunday after Easter three people told what God had done in their bodies, and each story ended in the same place: God is willing, he is near, and even an incomplete healing can be his way of keeping us close.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Jesus told us to receive the kingdom like children. That is how we can hold great faith in God's power without first needing every "why" answered.
- When others weep we do not explain at them; we weep with them. When they rejoice, we rejoice with them.
- Andrew went from forty-eight heart episodes a year to one after he began to pray, and now treats prayer as the fourth option alongside accepting, changing or leaving a hard situation.
- Alliene's healing began with repentance, was carried through by standing on the word of God, and turned on settling one question: is Jesus willing? He is.
- Thinking you are too far gone for God to want to heal you is the one thought Alliene asked the room never to allow.

- Kenny's shoulder was healed "in a blip" at a gathering he had been sitting in judgement on – a rebuke to both his cynicism and his small faith.
- A healing that is not total can still be a gift: like Jacob's hip, it leaves us marked and coming back to God, for the sake of the relationship.

▶ 1:09:36

Matt had promised on Palm Sunday and again at Easter that the following week would be given to testimonies of miracles, the way the disciples built one another's faith by telling what they had seen. Before handing the room to three members, he picked up where his Easter sermon had ended.

Like children: believing God for more

▶ 1:09:36

That sermon came down to one verse: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). "It's my opinion that we rarely need prodding for less faith. We usually need prodding for more faith." He did not end it with a way to negotiate why God does or does not act, and he is comfortable with that, since Jesus told crowds that great faith moves mountains "with no footnotes" about provisos and limited-time offers.

▶ 1:10:47

> "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."
>
> MARK 10:13–15 ↗

Believing in a vague higher power takes little faith. Believing that God is great, powerful and so interested in your life that he knows the hairs on your head takes a great deal. Matt's answer is to approach it the way Jesus said to: as children, who can accept what their father says without understanding it completely.

▶ 1:12:34

God does wonderful things, and people still get sick and die. Lazarus came back to life and, presumably, later died again; everyone Jesus healed eventually died. So why does he do wondrous things at all? We could suppose it is to reveal who he is – and that only raises more questions. The

answer, again, is to believe the way he asked. And when tragedy comes, follow Paul: we do not explain at those who weep, we weep with them; we rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15).

Andrew: death was arrested

▶ 1:15:00

Andrew Bowen noticed the band had just sung "Death Was Arrested," and said that was his subject. A member since June 2020, he loves that Hope is a Bible-based church that believes the miracles in it are true. That August he woke in the middle of the night as if he had sprinted a mile, heart pounding at around 150 beats a minute. A neighbour who struggles with agoraphobia got him to the emergency room anyway. The diagnosis was atrial fibrillation, inherited from his father.

▶ 1:18:19

Andrew has had low blood pressure since childhood – he once blacked out and needed twenty-six stitches – and he lives alone and loves the wilderness, so fainting was a real fear. The common drug he was given wrecked his sleep for a month. A former practicing scientist, he read the research himself, found the drug can badly disrupt melatonin, and moved to an electrophysiologist, who told him he could probably live with ten or twelve episodes a month – or buy a device to shock himself back into rhythm.

▶ 1:21:31

For four months he "just kind of sweated." He had a deadline: a January trip back to Big Bend Ranch, where he had studied geology in 1991. He tried every relaxation technique the doctor suggested. Nothing helped. "So out of desperation one night, when I was in the shower, I prayed. I prayed that my heart would go back into rhythm, and moments later it did."

▶ 1:22:49

The trip went fine – "I didn't faint, the bears didn't eat me." Through 2021 he had one or two episodes a month, a ninety percent drop. A masters swim coach, he later wore a monitor for three weeks and ran the River Place stairs for an hour trying to provoke an episode; he recorded one, unrelated to the exercise. In the first three and a half months of 2022, one. From forty-eight a year to one.

▶ 1:24:45

"People may say that's not a healing event, but I don't seek perfection, and I don't think I'll ever find perfection on this earth." He now prays at stoplights, in the shower, at work. Our culture offers three responses to any hard turn – accept it, change it, or leave it. "There is a fourth option that is both logical and emotional, and that's prayer." He keeps a journal of the grace and mercy he has received, to keep "expectancy" – the sense that I deserve this – out of his life, because that appetite is never

satisfied. His hope: that we would reflect on what God has done for us, tell others, and hand our problems to Christ and pray often.

Alliene: is he willing?

▶ 1:27:47

Alliene had always been strong and athletic. Then, she said honestly, came a season when she turned away from the Lord into thrill-seeking and rebellion, "like a tornado of destruction" that caught her family in its wake – and her health, "really mad at me," left. It began in 2019 with a urinary tract infection that kept coming back through one antibiotic after another, a doctor who threw up her hands, and a urologist who did the same.

▶ 1:33:20

Finally she was put on Levaquin, a fluoroquinolone carrying an FDA black-box warning. On day twelve she woke in a violent panic attack; within hours her knees would not work and her joints burned. Searching online, she and her husband Alan found fluoroquinolone toxicity syndrome: progressive, degenerative, attacking connective tissue, sometimes permanently disabling. "I realized I'm in trouble. I'm going to get worse, and I don't know how worse."

▶ 1:37:04

The fear brought her to repentance – toward the Lord and toward Alan, who for the first time in months of counselling saw her weep bitter tears. Opening her Bible somewhere in the middle, she came to the end of Isaiah's sixth chapter:

▶ 1:37:43

> "...like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump."
>
> ISAIAH 6:13 ↗

She knows it is a messianic verse, but she heard the Lord speak through it: *your tree did not bear fruit and it was cut down, but if you let your roots grow down into my word, your tree will come back and bear fruit.* Then she saw herself falling into a deep pit with the hand of the Lord coming after her – a promise that the catastrophe ahead would not be the end.

▶ 1:38:41

What followed was hard to describe: she could not walk, barely slept or ate, and dropped toward a hundred pounds. Stuck in bed, she read the whole Bible and filled a hundred note cards with verses. By week five she read one card five times and could not take it in. So she made a plan: go to church, go

forward for prayer, and hold God to his promise. Alan wheeled her to the front. She felt nothing – but by the time she got home she was sweating buckets, and the nausea, tinnitus and burning lifted. A week later, with her left Achilles failing, two old friends prayed for her; at home a warmth wrapped her ankle, and when she stood there was no pain. "The Achilles heel is like your weakness, but the Lord made that my strength."

▶ 1:43:02

Then, in December, the infection came back, and she wondered whether God would not heal it because she did not deserve it. A kidney infection followed. Sick in her pew one Sunday, she poured out her story to a woman who was not moved by her tears: "You see yourself as a victim and not as a victor. Jesus Christ in you is the victory that overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4). Be moved only by the word of God; speak it out. "It might seem kind of harsh," Alliene said, "but you know what, it saved my life."

▶ 1:48:08

The one antibiotic left to her then set off a rare and lethal lung toxicity – in the spring of 2020, when going near a hospital meant risking COVID. Shortness of breath filled her with terror. And something clicked: "From the beginning the Lord wanted me to read the whole Bible and study it, but now I think he wanted me to use it, and to believe it, and to really stand on it." Pleading had not changed anything, so she started speaking scripture with what breath she had:

▶ 1:50:05

> "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:57 ↗

She meditated on the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead giving life to her mortal body (Romans 8:11). The atmosphere changed; she felt Jesus come close, and felt his enormous compassion for her suffering. Her prayers moved to *I trust you*, then to *I love you, I'm committed to you and to Alan and to my family*. Then she came to him with the leper's question:

▶ 1:51:40

> "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him.
>
> LUKE 5:12–13 ↗

▶ 1:52:12

The leper had no doubt Jesus *could*; his question was whether Jesus *would*. "Jesus answered that for me and for everyone here: yes, he is willing." She heard, *Daughter, according to your faith you are healed*, and the terror broke. With five children and Alan carrying a ten-man job, she went to do the dishes – and her lungs opened. She picked up her toddler and danced. That night a warmth wrapped her bladder as she slept. It was the day of her father's funeral, which she had not been able to attend; she called her mother, went, and it became a day of rejoicing, "which is the way my dad would have wanted it." That summer she and Alan climbed the Grand Teton.

▶ 1:54:53

She left three things. First: "If God can heal me for the things I'd done… yes, he would do that for anyone. You are not allowed to even think" that he might be unwilling. Second, she believes the Lord required her to face honestly what she had done and repent sincerely. Third, he required her to stop looking at the storm and fix her trust on him. She closed with lyrics that felt like her story: "There's a grave without a body, and now that power lives in me."

Kenny: a bag of loose Legos

▶ 1:58:04

Kenny put a picture from his medical file on the screen: a year and a half after the break, his shoulder blade hanging on his spine, the collarbone straining against the skin, tendons severed and withered back, the arm losing muscle. "The nutshell is, my shoulder was just like… and now it's not."

▶ 1:59:53

He loves miracle stories, but healing meetings are a mixed bag for him because they attract manipulators with audience plants, and "the blasphemy of that just offends me in such a very deep, very personal way." He slipped into one such gathering alone and sat judging it – the stories, the giggling and weeping, the dancing. He was about to leave when the leader said they should pray for shoulders: a bones thing, tendons missing, "not even a shoulder." That was, Kenny said, exactly what he had: "a bag of loose Legos and Lincoln Logs."

▶ 2:03:55

"When it's so specific that I can't rationalize it, I am duty-bound to my King to respond." People around him prayed while he held his arm where it ought to be. When he lowered it, it stayed. "It was one way, and then blip, and then it was just another way." He ran to the men's room, pulled off his shirt and stood at the mirror laughing and crying – "dancing on the devil's grave."

▶ 2:06:22

Two things stayed with him. One was how inglorious it was: after so long in pain and insomnia, just a blip. "God's just walking in our midst, removing curses and healing cancers… I'm God, I'm just doing

God stuff." How dare he judge others' experiences – and worse, how dare he have so little faith as not to ask for more.

▶ 2:07:31

The other: the shoulder is not one hundred percent. Why heal him and still leave him needing to be fixed? His answer came as a prayer, recalling Jacob, who walked away from wrestling with God limping on his hip (Genesis 32:24–31): "You would fix me but not all the way. You would leave me marked, so that I kept coming back to you like a beggar in need – and you would do this just for the sake of our relationship." He had expected to pull a sword from the stone; God probably expected a bit more faith than "field goal prayer hands and shameful doubt." "If that's the case, then I've got something to say to you in return: I love you too."

Closing

▶ 2:09:26

Matt thanked all three – "that was exactly what I had imagined" – and opened the usual time of prayer at the front, noting that, as one of the stories had shown, you can also get prayer right in your pew.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Romans 8:32
- Mark 10:13–15
- Romans 12:15
- Isaiah 6:13
- 1 John 5:4
- 1 Corinthians 15:57
- Romans 8:11
- Luke 5:12–13
- Genesis 32:24–31

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said we rarely need prodding toward less faith. Where in your life are you asking God for less than you could?
2. Andrew calls prayer the fourth option beside accepting, changing or leaving a situation. What situation in front of you needs that fourth option?
3. Alliene moved from pleading, to speaking scripture, to trust, to love. What did each stage add, and where are you in that progression?
4. Kenny was healed while judging the very people praying around him. What cynicism or self-protection keeps you from receiving what God might do?
5. Who could you tell this week about something God has done for you, and how will you write it down so you remember?

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Andrew Bowen has been a member of Hope Chapel since June 2020; a former practicing scientist who studied geology, he coaches masters swimming. **Alliene** and her husband Alan have five children; it was at Hope's Sunday prayer times that she was prayed for through much of the illness she described. **Kenny** spoke on the healing of a shoulder documented in his own medical file. Matt asked all three to come prepared to tell what God has done in their lives.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5E576Q-plk&t=4174s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.