

Unfinished
God Is an Artist, Not an Eraser
Isaiah 64:8

Good morning! My name is Patrick Gibbs and I am one of the pastors here at Moon Valley. Pastor Bob has a couple of weeks off.

Consider for a moment this canvas represents your life. For the next couple of weeks, I'd like us to consider God an artist. In fact, that's the big idea of my message this morning, "God is an artist." Let's read Isaiah 64:8. ►

^{NIV} **Isaiah 64:8** Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Today we're starting a short 2 week series called ► "unfinished." If God is an artist and this canvas is my life and I am still breathing then God is still working and I am unfinished. At MVBC, we capture this concept with belong, believe and become. We want to be a church where someone can belong and explore who Jesus is. We do that because we pray they will believe in Jesus for eternal life. For those who believe in Jesus for eternal life, we want to be a place where we can become more like Jesus. Most of us probably recognize there are places and ways we could grow to be more like Jesus. But there are some things that get in the way. And my prayer for this series is that we might be able to clear the way a little in 2 huge areas that get in the way of becoming like Jesus. Because we are all unfinished.

I met Monica when she was in jr. high. She was outgoing and fun. She loved coming to church and she had lots of friends. She was an ok student and played sports. But I also noticed that Monica craved attention from the boys, more than your average jr. high. She had a need to be "loved" and it stood out. It also led to behaviors that got her in trouble. And then rejection got her depressed. And that depression fueled her need to be loved again. And the cycle would start all over again. I later learned that when Monica was

about 7 years-old, her neighborhood friend down the street had a dad who molested little girls, including Monica.

I met Megan after she dropped out of high school because she had a meth addiction. She really wanted to get her life back on track and promised to stop doing drugs- a promise she had made several times before. She blamed her drug use on bad friends and vowed to be different. But she couldn't seem to do it. It took a discussion with her mom to discover that 2 months before Megan started using drugs, she accused her step-dad of molesting her and no one believed her.

Unfortunately, I know a bunch of these stories. And from these stories I have learned some a few principles about being unfinished.

1. Principle #1- Our current behavior is driven by our past experiences.
2. Principle #2- We don't get principle #1. We might intellectually agree, but emotionally and spiritually, many of us think this is a bunch of hooey OR that it doesn't apply to me.

I don't have time to convince you this is true this morning, but I have seen it play out over and over and over again. I've seen it teenagers and adult alike. You can't escape the effects of past experiences.

3. Principle #3- We try to erase our bad experiences.

Both girls are trying to erase their past but in different ways.

For Monica, she has been taught in church to forgive, forget and move on. She is trying to erase her experience by ignoring it. She hasn't really talked to anyone about being molested because, "What's the point?" She doesn't know or understand the shame and guilt and bad self image she has. She only knows that boys will love her, but she is learning they will use her and reject her too. But so far, the need for love is outweighing the pain of rejection. But the need to be loved and the pain of rejection continued to grow as Monica got into high school.

Ignoring the past does not erase it. And neither does pretending to give it to God, which many of us in the church do repeatedly.

For Megan, she tries to erase the past by escaping from it. For Megan, drugs provide the escape she needs to deal with the pain, shame, embarrassment, loneliness, and abandonment she feels from those who are supposed to love and protect her. She's tried to stay clean but "just can't." When I asked her to tell me about her step-dad, she asked me why he mattered. In her world, looking at life through her glasses, she doesn't get the connection.

Escaping the past does not erase it.

And this proves true with all of our experiences- good and bad. Many of us would be hard pressed to point to the good experiences that affect our behavior, unless we really sat down and thought about it. But our bad experiences are worse, because they are painful and we have spent so long dealing with it a certain way. The things that have happened to you- the things that caused pain when they happened- affect your responses and behavior today. Our past experiences shape our current behavior, and can't be erased.

BIBLE

But none of this surprises God. God knows Monica and Megan's stories. God knows the human experience; he created our defense mechanisms. This morning I want to look at 2 things as we consider God as an artist and us as unfinished.

1. God cares about our pain
 - ►^{NIV} **Matthew 9:36** When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
 - ►^{NIV} **John 11:35** Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

God is not some emotionless higher power who doesn't understand how humans think and operate. Nor does God allow these things with no thought of our pain.

►^{NIV} **Psalm 34:18** The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

When you picture Jesus or God, do you see him as compassionate? Do you see yourself having value as a piece of God's art gallery? Do you imagine God weeping over your past? Can you see God cradling and comforting a 7 year-old abuse victim? Can you see God having compassion and concern for a teenager addicted to drugs? Can you see yourself-past and all- being comforted by God? God is moved by our experiences on earth. He is pained by our past experiences.

2. Our past (the things done to us) does not wreck God's art
There is a paradox in the Bible that I do not understand, but trust is true. It goes something like this. On one hand, humans can make choices and are responsible for their choices. On the other hand, God's plans and purposes are always achieved. How does that work? Does that mean God planned for my pasted experiences? Did God want Monica and Megan to be sexually abused? And my answer is, "I don't know." I know the Bible teaches man is sinful, has choices and consequences. I know the Bible teaches that God is pained by man's evil on one another. And I know the Bible says God has a plan and purpose for me.

- ►^{NIV} **Jeremiah 29:11** For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
- ►^{NIV} **Job 42:1** Then Job replied to the LORD: ² "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

Somehow, in the way God has created things to work, our canvas is imprinted by more than just God. Our canvas has the imprint of others on it. And our canvas has the imprint of our own choices on it (which we will talk about next week.) But God is still the artist.

And it doesn't matter what someone else has splashed up on our canvas, God will create from it. Look at what Joseph said in Genesis 50.

- ►^{NIV} **Genesis 50:20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Joseph's brothers wanted to kill him, but instead sold him to slavery 30-40 years before this. Some how God used the abusive decision of Joseph's brothers to accomplish his plan. And God's plan saved the lives of the same brothers. There has to be some irony there. God used their horrible and abusive decision to save their lives. Does God need evil to accomplish his purpose? I don't think so. But he doesn't let evil stop Him from creating your canvas.

God is an artist, not an eraser. God doesn't need to erase our past.

- ►^{NIV} **Jeremiah 18:4** But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

You see, God doesn't need an eraser. He is an artist. An interesting thing about artists- they see things differently than the rest of us. They see what can be; they rest of us see what is. They see an entire canvas to create; we only see what's already there. And as each of us is being draw or created or shaped- whichever language makes sense to you- God creates as seems best to Him. He is not restricted by what's already on my canvas. And He wouldn't allow something that would wreck my canvas.

CONCLUSSION

►What does it look like to let God draw?

When I was 8 years-old, I had a best friend named Joey. Joey and I lived in the same apartment complex right across the grass from each other. We played together. Got in lots of trouble together. We were the 2 boys that teachers always made sure didn't end up in the same class. We terrorized the older people in our apartment complex. On one

occasion, Joey and I were playing Starsky and Hutch in the parking lot by jumping from car to car on the trunks all the way down the line. We about gave "Old Man Smith" a heart attack when he saw us jump on the trunk of his mint green Cadillac. Joey and I were inseparable. He was at my house or I was at his. My first kiss even came on the lips of his older sister. But Joey didn't have a dad. His parents were divorced, and so his mom signed him up to have a Valley Big Brother. Joey's Valley Big Brother was Blaine. Blaine's job was to hang out in Joey's world and provide a male influence and mentor for Joey. And Blaine did that. In fact, he did for our whole circle of friends. He hung out with all us kids in the neighborhood. He took us to the circus, the movies, swimming, out for food. He spent time investing our lives- being the man Joey and others didn't have.

But Blaine turned out to be a pedophile. And in a very short period of time he destroyed my innocence. He exposed me to things that children should not see. He exposed me to experiences that I should not have experienced. He took a whole bunch of crap and threw it on my canvass.

And like Monica and Megan, I did my best to erase it. But let me tell you, it didn't go away.

My method of erasing proved to be ignoring it. And as I got a little older, I spiritualized my ignoring by saying things like, "I gave that to God a long time ago." When really what I did was make a deal with God not to draw there. That part of my life was in the past and no more work was necessary on that part of my canvas.

Frankly, I'd love for God to erase it. And for several years in my life, I was convinced that he did.

Like many people, I chalked it up to something in my past that really sucks, but I'm not going to wallow in it; I'm moving on. And so I have.

And it hasn't really affected me all that much. I am a pretty functional guy. I have a wonderful wife of 18 years, 3 great, mostly well-adjusted kids- a good job that I love. I am a pretty normal guy- in front of you. But I am unfinished. And over the last few years, God's been wanting to draw over here.

I don't have time this morning to tell you my whole journey, but as long as I ignored my past experiences, it remains this ugly unfinished part of me, and most of the time- because I was ignoring it- I did not know it was ugly.

Over the last few years, I have learned that this part of my canvas is way more obvious than I thought. I thought God had erased it, but He didn't. I had no idea my current thinking and behavior had been so shaped by what I thought didn't matter, by what I thought I was ignoring, by what I thought God had erased.

Things like . . .

- Not trusting people- very lonely; lack of connection (including God)
- Being afraid- abusers were abused- wondering if someday the switch would flip
- Lack of emotion- always served me well in the workplace, but not in my faith or family.

Do I wish God would erase this stuff? Sometimes. But when I stopped ignoring my past and I let God in, he began to use my past to further develop this part of my canvass. I wish I could draw something cool out of this, but I am not an artist. But God has given me enough glimpses of hope that I trust He can make this a part of his masterpiece. And what looked like a big blob of ugliness to me, God has taken and is shaping. I'd love to tell you I can see how God has used this for good. But I can't yet. But I have seen God shape it so it doesn't feel so painful and ugly anymore.

I am still unfinished. But you know what? I am glad God began drawing on the part of my life I wanted Him to erase. And as scary as it has sometimes been, He is still drawing.

On your chair this morning, you should have found a pencil with no eraser. And on this pencil is says, "God uses this end." Take it as a reminder that God is an artist, not an eraser, and we are still unfinished.

NEXT STEPS

- We want to help you become, and sometimes our past gets in the way.
- "Lord, is there something I've been trying or hoping you'd erase?"
- "Are there parts of my life I've made off limits?"
- Mending the Soul Open House on 6/13
- Speak to our pastoral counselor
- Write anything else we can help you with