

Season 4 | Episode 7

## How God Redeems Regret, Hurt, and Fear to Make Better Humans

Scott Sauls

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating and you're listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you encouraging conversations about finding hope through hardship... and sharing practical ways that you can include people with disability in your church and community.

We all carry regret, hurt, and fear, and these are burdens that weigh us down and make us feel trapped. Scott Sauls has been there and understands. As a pastor for over twenty-five years, he's walked with countless individuals through weary seasons and circumstances.

He's also battled his own anxiety and depression. He knows what it's like to be worn out and burdened by life. Pastor Scott's newest book is *Beautiful People Don't Just Happen: How God Redeems Regret, Hurt, and Fear in the Making of Better Humans*. And he's joining us on the podcast today to reveal how these burdens can help unlock God's healing work in our lives.

Welcome to the podcast, Pastor Scott.

Scott Sauls:

Thanks, Crystal. So good to be with you. Such a fan of your ministry of Joni and Friends. Love what you do and love that we get to talk today.

Crystal Keating:

Oh, me too. I know you and Joni have a great connection. So, it's finally such a pleasure to meet you.

You know, I really enjoyed your book and throughout it, you're very open about your own struggles with anxiety and depression. So, as we begin this conversation, I'm wondering if you'd like to share with us what brought you into this darker part of your life? What were some of the circumstances that led you into this valley of depression?

Scott Sauls:

Oh, you know, I think in the seasons where I've struggled with anxiety and depression, which have been at various times, it's actually honestly been a while, thankfully, since I've been in that place. But it usually relates to some loss of perspective for me, or maybe some, uh overemphasis in my heart on something that is less important and an under-emphasis in my heart on things

that are more important, namely the promises of God and all that Jesus came to do and to be for us.

So really generally it's been a loss of perspective, more than anything else. And I do recognize that there are a lot of people who do wrestle with the affliction of anxiety and depression for whom it's more clinical and biological. And I would say mine has probably been more circumstantial and just not having my heart right during those seasons if that makes sense?

Crystal Keating:

It does. Yeah. That's good to clarify some of the differences, but how easily our thoughts and what we believe and what we're clinging to and what we long for, what we desire, what we hope in has such an effect on our mental health and our body.

Scott Sauls:

Yes, I think so. I think so. There is a section in the earlier part of the book where I talk about the counter-voice of God and organize the book around three pain points of regret, hurt, and fear. And one of the things that the scripture does is it gives us a strong, what I've called divine counter-voice to all of those different things. You know, Jesus comes into our places of regret with his forgiveness and with his comfort that there's no failure, there's no regrets so great that it's beyond the reach of his kindness and grace for those who receive it. And then the counter-voice of hurt is his comforting presence of how he's with us always to the very end of the age, and that he also suffered. And so, he's able to empathize and even, you know, enter in with us in our tears and in our sorrows.

And then the third pain point is the pain point of fear, where Jesus holds out these wonderful promises that you know, the long-term worst-case scenario for any Christian, especially is resurrection and everlasting life and, and that's as bad as it will be. And I know Joni's written some about that just in reference to the place of her wheelchair in heaven.

She's written some beautiful stuff about how she'll push that wheelchair to the corner of the room and not need it anymore and then dance in glory. And I think we all have a certain kind of dance of our own to look forward to for those of us who know Christ. And so, you know, at every turn where we experience any kind of affliction or struggle, there's always the voice of God coming in and offering hope there.

Crystal Keating:

Oh yeah. Oh, and we so need that. We can get so bogged down and burdened with our own thoughts and the things that make sense to us, but it's like the scriptures say we don't walk by sight, right? We walk by faith. And so, we have to know what to put our faith in. What do we put our hope and trust in? In your book, you also explain another key principle that admitting self-defeat is key to a successful recovery.

So as a pastor, you have these expectations of people that you're held to this standard. Did you find it hard to be open and honest about the seasons of depression and anxiety that you had experienced?

Scott Sauls:

You know, I can't say that that's ever been hard for me, Crystal, because I'm so personally compelled and moved by the way that King David in the Psalms or the apostle Paul in some of his more vulnerable sections of his writing, like Romans 7 when he talks about his coveting or 2 Corinthians 4, where he talks about, uh how he's hard-pressed from every side or Romans 8 where he's facing death all day long, or 2 Corinthians 12 and his thorn in the flesh.

But there's such a transparency that there, and, you know, just the people that I know in my own life who are willing to share their own stories of struggle as a way to offer hope, by also telling the story of how God has come through for them. You know, this is one of the reasons why we love Joni so much her ministry and her voice for so many years is that she is a voice of hope in the face of suffering and sorrow. As one who not only has been there, but who is there all the time, living it and, and the voice of hope and the voice of the power of God through weakness just rings through so powerfully in her life in ministry. And, you know, it's people like that that I find to be so deeply inspiring and that I want to imitate. One of the things we have to be careful of though when we're being transparent about our own regrets and hurts and fears is we gotta be careful not to bleed all over people, not to overdramatize our story to where it becomes about us instead of about what God has done and can do in our lives and in the lives of others.

And so, we've gotta be really discerning about how and to what degree and with whom to share those stories. But as a pastor, you know, the pulpit, isn't a weekly confessional for me. But there are important moments here and there where I think people find it helpful when they realize that their pastor is just as much a sheep as he is a shepherd, if that makes sense.

Crystal Keating:

Oh yes, that you're human too. And the same grace that we need, you need as well. Why are these raw, honest conversations really pivotal to actually getting well?

Scott Sauls:

I think we can learn a lot from the recovery movement in that regard. There's just something powerful about a group of people getting together who share the same struggle and also share the same desire to heal, and who tell their stories in such a way that offers strength and hope that only community can provide. And when you add Jesus Christ to the mix, it just becomes that much more hopeful and powerful.

I'm mindful of something that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote once, and I think this was in *Life Together* where he said, "The word of Christ on my brother's mouth is stronger than the word of Christ in my own heart." In other words.

Crystal Keating:

I agree. Oh, my goodness.

Scott Sauls:

Yes, the gospel gets so much more rich and full and meaningful for us when we express it in community, rather than just holding it on the inside. And I, I wonder if that's why Paul in

Colossians doesn't just say sing to the Lord, but he says sing to each other so that we can receive that encouragement from those who are on the same journey as we are.

Crystal Keating:

I love that. Well, what are some of the ways your community came around you when you shared your personal struggles? It sounds like you might be able to do this more regularly. How have you seen them come together with you?

Scott Sauls:

Honestly, in my current situation, I really haven't. It's been quite some time since I've been kind of in that abyss. And so...

Crystal Keating:

I'm glad. That's good.

Scott Sauls:

Yeah, me too, me too, but when it, when I shared it with my congregation here, that was probably, it started about eight years ago when I started talking more openly about it.

It was about two years into my time here, but I was talking about past experience at the time, and I think the effect that it had on people was, uh, wow. If, if one of our leaders can be that open about his struggle, maybe there's a way for me to come out of hiding as well, and to not feel like I have to be put together all the time and, and can, you know, find a community also for just working out what hope looks like and what the power of the gospel looks like in the face of suffering.

And so, so I think it really has that effect of sort of galvanizing the community to talk more openly about their own sufferings and struggles. And of course, I had people come up to me and tell me that they appreciated me being willing to share that part of my story just because it gave them hope for theirs, that God can do great things you know in their lives as well and show up for them as well.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah, we talk about confession. God's way of actually starting to heal us is through saying out loud, the things that we're struggling with, the things that we need help with. So that God can start working in our heart and the enemy has no foothold when we bring it to the light. He can have a heyday in our hearts when we let it fester in the darkness.

And so, if it starts with you as a pastor, what a great example for others that we can be real. The church should be a place where we are real and growing and fighting for one another. I love that.

Scott Sauls:

Yeah, I think that's right. Even the scriptures tell us, confess your sins one to another, that you may be healed.

And I, think that's true of our sorrows as well. I don't think it's confined or our sins. I think it's also our sorrows that if we confess our sorrows to one another, that can turn community into a healing place as well.

Crystal Keating:

Well, all of us have some level of insecurity and I don't know about you, but I benefit from encouragement. But maybe few of us want to really admit it. So how can our relationship with Christ free us from just that sense of I need other people and maybe I'm not willing to say it or I feel insecure? So, I don't even want to be so open about how badly I'm struggling.

Scott Sauls:

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's an insecurity and a fear that's natural, that probably everyone deals with. And, and I, I think one of the things that can be helpful is, is to make the investment of beginning friendships. And don't go straight into the super confessional posture until you've had a little bit of time, at least to, to be together and to get to know one another and build that trust and so on, so that you can be more transparent and open with one another. But, I find too though, sometimes, you know, when somebody decides to go first and say, hey, you know, can I tell you about a struggle that I have, that I, I'd really appreciate your prayer and support and encouragement in, and that can also be a way to build trust and grow a friendship and create more opportunities for that kind of sharing back and forth, and praying together and encouraging one another in that way.

Crystal Keating:

That's so good. And when we really put our hopes in the Lord and start trusting in the promises that he's given us, we're able to find a strength from him. And then in community that I know is God's design. And you know, it's interesting as we look throughout scripture, we see men and women of faith who had intense emotional struggles. So, be encouraged, right? They were just like us, and they were chosen instruments to bring truth, grace, and hope into the world. So maybe you could mention a few of these key people and history and talk about how God the Redeemer transformed their hardships into stories of hope.

Scott Sauls:

Well, we only, we need only start with the Bible where almost every book of the Bible was written by somebody who was either a slave or in prison or seeking asylum or awaiting their own execution. There are so many of those stories just among the people who wrote the books of the Bible, which was really birthed out of the context of trial and suffering and sorrow. And so, we need only to start there and, you know, we've already talked a little bit about the apostle Paul. We've talked a little bit about David who, you know, spent a good part of his younger life running for his life.

Of course, Jesus himself - who the Bible says mysteriously learned obedience through the things that he suffered, and of course is the suffering servant who came to rescue a suffering and sinful world from its own sorrows. And so just the Bible itself, but we can also go throughout history, and you know think about how CS Lewis was married for only a couple of years before he had to bury his wife from a cancer that took her life. Or you can think of Tim Keller, even today, who's

living with incurable, pancreatic cancer, just waking up every day, knowing that his days are numbered and yet still, you know, contributing faithfully to the work of God in the world.

Or um, you know, Martin Luther King, Jr. with civil rights or Henri Nouwen with all of his beautiful, compassionate, grace-centered writing, much of which was formed through his own experience with loneliness. I mean you could go on and on with the different examples. And of course, as we've already discussed, Joni herself, who's just a remarkable picture of grace and hope in the midst of trials and sorrows.

Crystal Keating:

So good for us to have examples of those who have had difficult, difficult circumstances. And God is continuing to work through them. Well, you know, as we close our time together, what's your prayer for readers of your book, *Beautiful People Don't Just Happen*?

Scott Sauls:

I guess the dedication of the book is really the best answer I can give to that. I write it, especially for those who sin and suffer and feel tired or afraid, that they would recognize themselves as those who are beloved by Jesus Christ and also have the hope that the best is always yet to come like we already talked about.

I really hope that this book does a good job convincing people of that, that there's hope in any situation for those who trust in Christ and that the best is always yet to come. And I'm also hopeful that it will be a helpful resource to those that Henri Nouwen called the wounded healers, you know, ministry workers, mental health and disability advocates, recovery counselors and sponsors, spiritual directors, social workers, caregivers, embattled parents, faithful friends who keep showing up. Uh, I hope it will be a helpful resource for those valiant men and women as well as they enter into the space of other people's sin and sorrow.

Hope it helps everybody in those categories, which I think on some level is all of us.

Crystal Keating:

All of us. Definitely. God uses broken people to bring hope to the world. Pastor Scott, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.

Scott Sauls:

Thank you. Likewise.

Crystal Keating:

Thank you for listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. If you've been inspired, would you leave a 5-star review? And don't forget to subscribe! You can also visit [joniandfriends.org/podcast](http://joniandfriends.org/podcast) to send me a message. I'm Crystal Keating and thank you for joining me for the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast.



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