

Pray 30

NEW HOPE
Phase 2
Advancing the Kingdom

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Advancing the Kingdom

NEW HOPE CHURCH

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Welcome to Pray 30 - Advancing the Kingdom

At New Hope, we each have a rare privilege, a front row seat, to a modern-day activity of God. Future generations will look back on this era and inquire what it was like to participate in the work being done in our lifetime as the Father advanced His Kingdom through us. The evidence of God's powerful hand moving among us is measured in the lives being changed for eternity, and the physical growth we continue to experience. However, as we've noted previously, the growth of New Hope is also a consistent reminder of the great reality that there are many more in our region who are not yet in relationship with Jesus. It is both of these realities which drive us forward with the Phase 2 initiative.

The question before each of us currently is: **“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”** To determine that demands prayer so that the Father can reveal His purpose for you in this endeavor. I invite you to join New Hope's leadership team, staff and others over the next 30 days for 3 minutes each day, asking specifically in prayer: **“Father, what would You have me do?”** This prayer guide, written by various members of our team, will assist you as you earnestly seek God's heart.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pastor Mark".

Pastor Mark

Preparing My Heart to Hear from God

Day 1

Matthew 6:11, 33; 7:7

It happens to every one of us. We begin our day full of anticipation to tackle that big project at work or around the house. We've put it off for weeks until the day finally comes when we can give total devotion to it, no more excuses.

But no sooner do we begin, than the interruptions and distractions ensue. Our phone rings. We forget about a meeting. A neighbor or coworker comes by to chat. Before we know it, the day is half gone and there's no time to complete the project. Once again, we're putting it off for another time.

Such a scene is all too common. We become so engrossed in our day-to-day needs and problems that we lose sight of the big picture. A similar thing can happen in our spiritual lives. We get so caught up with the basic needs of living, we forget what's most important – growing in our relationship with God.

Jesus gave clear instruction on this very topic in Matthew 6:33 – **“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”**

Make no mistake, the responsibilities to meet our daily needs are very real. We do need to pay the mortgage, put food on the table, and set aside money for the kids' college education. When times are tough, these can become heavy burdens. With the urgency of these needs, our pursuit of God can fade into the background.

But the Lord reminds us there's a priority even higher than daily necessities: His Kingdom. As we seek His face, praying that His plans would be accomplished through us, we can rest in the assurance that He provides for our every need. God is worthy of our trust as we make Him our top priority.

As we purposely enter these 30 days of prayer for God's leading and direction in our own personal lives, our church and the Greater Lansing area, let's determine to put HIS priorities first. Let's ask God to help us be deliberate about praying daily, and to give us the determination to chase after His righteousness. If we keep first things first, we can know by faith He will prepare our hearts as we open them up to His will.



"Father, what would You have me do?"

An Appetite for Prayer

Day 2

Colossians 1:3-4, 9-10, 4:2; Matthew 26:38-39

The Apostle Paul bookends his letter to the Colossians with prayer. He models it by opening in chapter 1:3-4, and 9-10 with:

**“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...”
“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you...”**

Paul ends his letter in chapter 4:2 by commanding Christians to:

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

The language Paul uses is not “spend one minute before bed praying.” He says, **“continue steadfastly”**; it carries the idea of DEVOTING yourself to prayer - attaching yourself to prayer, giving constant attention to it. Which for some of us sounds...less than fun. Doesn't it? Can I say that, especially when we are being called to pray for 30 days?

You know the feeling you have when you first wake up in the morning and you're groggy and it's SO HARD to get out of bed? You hit that snooze button again...and again...and again. Prayer can feel like that; there can be a grogginess in our prayer lives. We don't want to do it or we say, “I'll do it later.” Why did Paul, and more importantly Jesus, love prayer and why do we inwardly groan at it? Why does our soul drag our feet to it?

I think it's because we don't find the same delight in it that they did. Isn't that true? We don't know what to pray for, we don't know how to do it well, and it can sometimes feel boring and dreadful or useless. There's an expectation for us to pray, but we have little or no appetite for it. We don't understand that prayer was

given to us to share our hearts with God and to hear from Him. We don't see prayer as an incredible privilege to spend time with our Father.

God doesn't want our begrudging prayers. God doesn't want us to "do Him a favor" by praying to Him. Prayer was given for US. It was made to be a part of our relationship with God; we were made to communicate with Him through it.

Right before Jesus did the hardest thing anyone in eternity will ever have to do, go to the cross, He threw Himself on God in prayer.

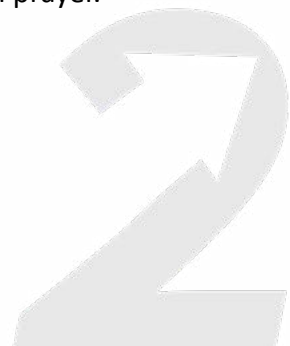
"Then He said to [His disciples], 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.' And going a little farther He fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will'" (Matthew 26:38–39).

Paul commanded us to be DEVOTED to prayer. He understood the good that it will bring to others and ourselves, and the glory it will bring to God.

Pause and ask: What are you devoted to in life? (This isn't a trap.) Do you have to be intentional in it? Do you have to work at it? Of course! You plan for it; you set aside time to pursue it. When we make a plan to pray, when we put energy and effort into it, we'll get better at it!

We will never be devoted to something we don't love. And so, for some of us, we need to first taste that prayer is good; it is a good gift that connects us with our Father, the One we are devoted to, and the One who desires to hear our hearts. Ask God to grow your love and desire to spend time with Him in prayer.

Begin and continue steadfastly in prayer, New Hope.



Jesus' Pattern for Prayer

Day 3

Luke 11:1-2a: Matthew 6:9-13

New Hope, what if you don't know how to pray? You are in good company! Jesus' twelve disciples also needed to learn how – and Jesus gladly taught them.

“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ And He said to them,

‘Pray then like this:

(This is the pattern for prayer with elements to include, not merely words to be recited.)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.¹**

(Praise God - Worship and revere God, His name, and His character.)

**Your kingdom come;
Your will be done,²
earth as it is in heaven.**

(God is our sovereign King. We are to be loyal and committed servants aligned to His supreme rule. We are joining Him in His work, His will, His plans.)

Give us this day our daily bread,³

(Ask God for His provision to our needs and thank Him.)

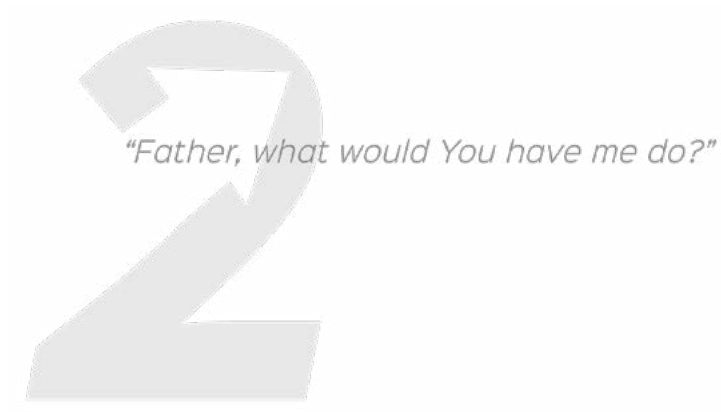
**And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

(Confess and turn away from sin. Ask for as we also have forgiven our debtors. forgiveness. Forgive others.)

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.⁴**

(Be alert and watchful; stand firm in looking for the way of escape and asking for God's protection.)

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”



Footnotes (biblegateway.com)

1 Matthew 6:9 Or *Let your name be kept holy, or Let your name be treated with reverence*

2 Matthew 6:10 Or *Let your kingdom come, let your will be done*

3 Matthew 6:11 Or *our bread for tomorrow*

4 Matthew 6:13 Or *the evil one; some manuscripts add For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen*

What Do You Believe About God?

Day 4

Jeremiah 33:3; Romans 8:28; 2 Chronicles 16:9

In the Bible, we are told of the things God has done in the past. At the same time, we can see evidence of things He is doing in the present. And we believe with confidence that He will be faithful to His nature in the future. With that in mind, we can truly look forward with a sense of anticipation. A large part of praising and praying is understanding that God has purposes which have not yet been accomplished, specifically things for GOOD, according to His own Word.

It is in 2 Chronicles 16:9 that we see clear evidence of an earthly king who had an opportunity to trust the King of Kings for marvelous things in the future, things even beyond his own personal experience and dreams. God made it clear that He desired to do things for this earthly king to demonstrate His capacity and faithfulness. Yet, because of the king's lack of knowledge and inability trust in God to show Himself powerful, he failed. In response, a prophet was sent by God to visit the king and remind him that God is always watching, always faithful, and always seeking opportunity to show the world just who He really is. Therefore, the prophet said to the king; **"...for the eyes of the Lord roam to and fro throughout the whole earth, seeking to show Himself powerful on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal to Him..."** 2 Chronicles 16:9a.

The prophet followed up by saying to the earthly king, **"...in this you have done foolishly,"** 2 Chronicles 16:9b. A failure to trust God's capacity and nature is not something which the Lord allows to easily slide. God does not wink at being ignored and He specifically wanted this king to know that he missed out on the great things which God had intended to do through him.

Today, we confidently look forward in prayerful expectation to what God wants to do in the metro region of Greater Lansing, including all the far-reaching areas. He

has already demonstrated His desire to reach a lost world. He continues to give us proof of that reality today; therefore, because we believe He is consistent to His nature, we can say with assurance that He has the same intentions for tomorrow. Our responsibility is to act on that knowledge by trusting, when we work together to “Advance the Kingdom,” we are acting in a way that pleases Him. God is looking for those who will be loyal to Him so that He can act powerfully through them.

As we advance forward, let’s determine to pray for a greater measure of confidence and the ability to trust that our ancient and mighty God really does want to show Himself powerful in our situations today!



2

“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”

God's Map

Day 5

Matthew 4:19, 13:44; Romans 12:2

In the 1500s, mapmakers began drawing in the “Strait of Anian,” a waterway that promised a new passage through North America to Asia that would lead to great riches. Speculated to come from the writings of Marco Polo, these false “Anian” maps informed the decisions of explorers around the world. However, the Strait’s alleged location on the maps kept moving. Some maps had it closer to Alaska, while others pinned it near California, resulting in dangerous and unpredictable journeys. Several explorers lost their lives in search of the promised passage that was never real to begin with.

Worldviews are like maps. They are a collection of what we believe to be an accurate representation of how life is laid out, and depending on where you want to go (from where you start), how to navigate it successfully. The difference between safety and death will depend on the accuracy of the map you are following.

The Bible is humanity’s map, given to us not only by the Creator of this physical world, but by the Creator of our lives. God has given us His Word as the most accurate representation of reality we could ever have this side of eternity. However, it doesn’t just show us the pathways that allow us to navigate the ships of our lives safely and successfully to where we want to go. This map is more like a treasure map where the Map-Giver has also shown us where the “X” is that marks the location of the greatest of treasures. On top of that, He has also provided us with Himself as a guide to personally assist us should we decide to seek out that treasure.

Keep this image in your mind as you read the following two verses. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus (the world Creator and Map-Giver) says to some new “explorers,” **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** Jesus knows the location of the best treasure ever found, and is willing to show us how to obtain it if we follow Him

in trust. Matthew 13:44 says of that hidden treasure: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells everything that he has, and buys that field.”**

Paul had been following a false map before the Map-Giver showed him his error. After following the true map and discovering the treasure, he told his fellow explorers to **“not be conformed to [the maps of] this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God”** (Romans 12:2).

God has given us His Word, the Bible, to help us understand who He is (the great treasure), who we are (the misinformed explorers), and how we can come into a right relationship with Him (the greatest of treasures).

As Christians (literally “followers of Jesus”), we need to allow the Bible’s true reality to be our primary map for how we navigate through this world. We cannot afford to trust any other maps.

Consider what parts of your life are still being navigated using the worldview maps of this world. Where are your values and decisions being conformed to beliefs and values that are misaligned with what Jesus has shown and told us is true? What step(s) can you take today to bring transformation to your worldview?



“Father, what would You have me do?”

The Vine and the Branches – Fruit that Lasts

Day 6

John 15:5; Hebrews 4:3; James 4:6

Does your Christian life ever feel unproductive and useless? Do you feel powerless, unable to break sin patterns or bored with spiritual things? Perhaps you're trying too hard. You read that right. Perhaps YOU'RE trying too hard. Jesus used the Greek word *menó* (abide, remain, dwell, continue, be present) in John 15:5 as He addressed His disciples for one of the last times before His death. He said, **"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."** Our independent efforts to be fruitful will be fruitless. Apart from the True Vine, we can do n-o-t-h-i-n-g. God alone is our Source of spiritual life and abundant production.

If you understand the meaning of abiding it will change your life. We are to continue to be connected to Him by faith, humbly walking with Him and allowing His constant provision to supply what we need for fruit that lasts. Apart from remaining in Jesus, we can do nothing. This doesn't mean that we are physically paralyzed, but rather, that we can do nothing of any consequence for God's kingdom without God's strength.

The real danger is we're often busy living the temporal Christian life, but we're not productive in the eternal sense. In fact, you can be involved in full-time ministry as a pastor, missionary, or Bible teacher, and yet accomplish nothing that lasts for eternity. How is that possible? Self-effort is unacceptable to God. James 4:6 says, **"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."** Detached from the True Vine, we have no chance of bearing true fruit. We are to humbly remain connected to Christ by faith. God then will produce the fruit, and is the One who will get the glory.

Abiding is closely tied to the idea of resting and waiting. Resting and waiting begin

where we end. Biblical rest is entered into through belief. Hebrews 4:3 says, **“For we who have believed enter that rest...”** The Bible repeatedly tells us to walk by faith. Many times, we relegate faith to something we did once when we accepted Christ or prayed a prayer. Faith isn’t an event. It’s a way of life. Faith keeps us connected to Jesus, our source of strength to live the Christian life.

In John 15, Jesus was preparing His disciples for hard times ahead. They would face difficult times, physical separation from Christ, intense persecution, and deaths as martyrs. If they learned to stay connected to the Vine, to tap into Jesus as the source of their strength and sufficiency, then by faith, they could withstand the coming storm.

How about you? Do you find yourself busily going about “God’s work” without tapping into God’s strength? Do you check your heart to discover that church, your faith, and the things of God have lost their former spark? Are you striving to drum up feelings of excitement toward the things of God from your own reserves of strength? Are “resting” and “abiding” the furthest thing from your mind when the storms of life hit?

Let’s focus on abiding in Jesus – humbly and dependently remaining in Him, and continuing in Jesus by faith. Draw your strength and nourishment from Him in times of prayer and by being in His Word. Pray for God to help you abide in Him, and to produce lasting fruit in your life – fruit that will remain for eternity.

Elevator Wisdom

Day 7

2 Corinthians 4:18; Revelation 21:3-4; Romans 8:18

Elevators are stuffy, claustrophobic, and lack the customary conditioned air we are all used to. At quitting time and busy times, elevators can reduce humans to animal-like behavior as they rush the door, crowd in, and try not to look each other in the eye. Those who ride elevators together are subconsciously aware that it could break down and leave them stranded for hours without pleasant bathroom options. It's also true that we barely notice the décor on elevators, which range from “you should have changed the fake wood paneling in the eighties” to slight relief that someone thought to paint the walls a few years ago. Nevertheless, we usually resign ourselves to the practical function of the elevator, ignore the aesthetics, and clamber on. We are relieved when the doors finally open, we exit onto our desired floor, and get on to better things.

Now imagine if the next time you got on an elevator you began to think of it as your permanent home. That would be crazy. Who in their right mind would begin remodeling an elevator to live in it forever? But that is exactly what we do when we treat our earthly existence like our forever home.

An elevator reflects our temporary and short-term existence here in the following ways:

- Much like elevators, our earthly bodies and existence here are temporary conditions; they are not permanent. 2 Corinthians 4:18 encourages us to not look **“at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen,”** and instructs us that **“the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”** The temporary nature of our time here on earth should temper the amount of time and energy we spend stressing about creature comforts on the “elevator.”

- Elevators, much like our earthly existence is actually hampering our potential as God’s created beings. In our eternal state, we will be given a new body with faculties designed to experience life with God. We will be experiencing an unceasing euphoria that should make even the best of times here seem like a warm-up act for the eternal bliss there. Revelation 21:3-4 promises, **“And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’”** What a glorious day that will be!

In the same way the end of our life will open a new door for us, elevators present us with new beginnings. Romans 8:18 says, **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”** We should remember this the next time we find ourselves uncomfortable in this life (or on an elevator). Our present, difficult state of being will soon give way to a brand-new beginning. One without pain, limits or end. This overwhelming reality should make suffering and sacrificial living here much more doable based on wonderful realities there.

Like an elevator, our present and temporary life restricts our eternal potential, dims our possibilities, and can create angst for what’s next. Instead of insanely investing large amounts of time, money, and energy trying to extract enjoyment from life on an “elevator,” we can focus on the door of eternity that will open in front of us, and steward our time in the elevator wisely. Soon the doors will open and we will realize that elevators were a great place to visit, but living there was our opportunity to invite others along for the ride.

The Throne of Grace and Mercy

Day 8

Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 53:6; Hebrews 4:16

What is the hardest thing you've ever had to forgive someone for? Maybe it was a cheating spouse or a best friend who betrayed your trust or a wayward child who said things they didn't mean. Maybe you were the person who needed forgiveness. Praise the Lord that as believers we know God has forgiven each of us for our sins - past, present and future!

Never lose sight of how much you've been forgiven. Isaiah 53:6 says, "**We all like sheep have gone astray.**" But God's divine saving grace isn't like human grace in one very important way: God forgives completely and utterly for all of eternity. We are so forgiven that the Bible says in Psalm 103:12 that God has removed our sins "**as far as the east is from the west.**" So far, in fact, that the children of God no longer need to concern themselves with the appropriate penalty of sin: death and separation from God for eternity.

Let's reflect on God's grace and mercy; attributes that are so true of God that they're associated with His throne in Hebrews 4:16, "**Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**" Humans make thrones that intimidate, awe, and terrify. Human thrones are places of judgment, where criminals are sentenced, laws are passed, and edicts are decreed. For believers, God's throne is a place from which to draw comfort and strength rather than a place of terrifying dread.

If you were suddenly beamed into God's presence right now, He'd be smiling at you, extending an arm in a warm gesture of love and acceptance. Today, pray with confidence, understanding just how God sees you: accepted, forgiven, loved, and cherished.

Perhaps you feel unworthy, unclean, and undeserving of His grace. You are! And that's the beauty of the Christian life. Undeserved grace means you did nothing to earn it, you can do nothing to keep it, and you can do nothing to lose it. The result is confidence and boldness in approaching God. You are forgiven once and for all.

Living in the reality of God's grace means everything changes.

How does the reality of God's grace and mercy rearrange your priorities as you face this week? Are there people in your life who need forgiveness? Do you need to ask for forgiveness from someone? Do you need to let go of past sin that continually rears its ugly head, screaming you're not worthy of God's grace? Do you need to go boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace?



“Father, what would You have me do?”

God Cares

Day 9

Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 12:6,7

Imagine you find yourself in this situation: a financial crisis hits your world, perhaps through a job loss or an unexpected medical problem that results in bills you could never afford. Many people in recent years have seen just this type of financial crisis enter their world, leaving them struggling to keep up. Worse yet, when in the midst of that type of crisis it can seem that no one is concerned with your dilemma, much less willing to help. Sometimes it feels like even close friends would rather point out the mistakes that led to the problem, than offer help.

Perhaps you're there right now. The good news is this: we are not alone or overlooked when any crisis comes. Our God is intimately concerned with our problems and His incredible compassion is vividly illustrated by Christ's words in Luke 12:7 – **"Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."**

The message is clear. God places a value on us that is immeasurable. His knowledge of our cares and our fears reaches beyond comprehension. So, when you find yourself suffocating under the anxiety of financial or other stress, look to God for help. When you don't know where to turn and it seems like you're all alone, give your burden to the Lord. He knows your needs. He sees your challenges. He understands the struggles. Trust Him for wisdom, strength, and provision. Find comfort in the assurance of two simple but powerful words: God cares.

Determine to pray that God will allow us to remember He cares deeply about the problems and needs we face. Especially as we look forward to what He is doing and His desire for each of us to play a role in "Advancing the Kingdom." Don't let your present circumstances cloud your ability to trust God for His provision even when you can't see a way out.



2

“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”

Satisfied and Thankful

Day 10

Psalm 107:9; I Thessalonians 5:16; Daniel 6; Hebrews 13:5

Many of us spend a large portion of our thought-lives pursuing ideas related to acquiring more of what we don't have, such as larger homes, fancier cars, or lavish vacations. We can be tempted into believing that "stuff" can satisfy our souls. The result, when one of these desires is realized, is often a temporary feeling of happiness. It's not long before the sparkle and shine of that thing (that we worked so long and hard to get), gets a dent or we end up with food poisoning on our dream cruise. The happiness we felt initially can fade, and cannot be described as true and lasting joy.

Why the focus on stuff? Why the dissatisfaction? What is truly missing from our current situation? What is our heart longing for? No thing on earth can bring full satisfaction. Our hearts will only be truly satisfied with the Lord as Psalm 107:9 reminds us:

"For He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul He fills with good things."

After refocusing on the Source of our true and lasting joy, what we actually may be missing in our current circumstances is a focus on thankfulness to God. The Apostle Paul tied real and lasting joy to thankfulness in I Thessalonians 5:16:

"Be joyful always, pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

The prophet Daniel prayed to God, giving thanks knowing that the king had issued a decree that anyone who prayed to any god or man, other than the king, would be thrown into the lions' den. Daniel continued praying to God and was thrown into the lions' den! Miraculously, God sent an angel who shut the lions' mouths. God

protected Daniel as he prayed and gave thanks in his difficult and faith-challenging circumstances. (You can read the story in Daniel 6.)

Joy and contentment rise when we begin expressing thankfulness to God in all things, trusting His sovereignty and goodness. Rather than seeking what we do not have, or desiring a skill, talent or item that someone else may have, we can give thanks for what we do have. Hebrews 13:5 says this:

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”

Consider beginning each day with a prayer of thankfulness for your circumstances, the provisions God has given for your needs, and for God’s faithful presence in your life. Identify a few things you are thankful for and write them down. You may find that your level of joy and contentment rise dramatically, freeing your mind to focus on God’s will for your life.

Belief vs Faith

Day 11

Matthew 19:26; Luke 17:6

A familiar story is told of a stunt man who strung a rope across Niagara Falls to perform a daring high wire act. A crowd formed as he made his way back and forth over the Falls. The excitement level grew as he added a bicycle, then a wheelbarrow to the act. Finally, he asked the crowd, “Do you believe I can carry a man across the wire?” His question was met with loud cheers. The performer then singled out one especially enthusiastic observer and asked, “Do you really believe I can carry a man over the Falls?” “Yes!” came the immediate reply. The great entertainer smiled as he shot back, “Okay, then. Hop on my back and let’s go!” Within a matter of seconds, the suddenly reluctant man retreated into the crowd.

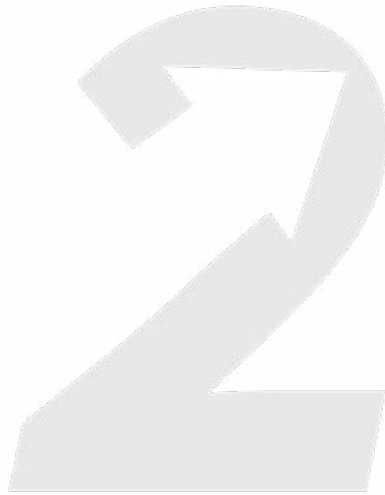
Why do you think the spectator balked at the offer of being carried on the high wire? Obviously, he believed in the stunt man’s talents. But he lacked the faith to truly put that belief to the test.

In many ways, the spectator’s response in this story mirrors the difference between belief and faith in the Christian life. Many people believe in God as the Creator and highest power of the universe. But they struggle with putting that belief to the test when it comes time to trust God. Sadly, these people fail to realize the great power and possibilities of faith that Jesus described in Luke 17:6 – **“If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be planted in the sea’; and it would obey you...”** Jesus Himself reminded us nothing is impossible with God.

Life challenges present an opportunity to let our trust in God shine. He wants us to place full confidence in Him, believing that He will intervene to meet all our needs. Are you facing such a crisis today? In those moments, we can feel like our faith is small and feeble, almost overwhelmed by the desire to take the burden solely

upon ourselves. Take a step of faith by placing your trust in the Lord. You might be amazed at how faith that seems feeble and small like a mustard seed will bring about incredible results. In the end, you'll discover that God is indeed faithful, and nothing is too hard for Him.

How do you define the word "faith"? What's the difference between faith and belief? When you face a time of crisis, in what ways is your faith demonstrated by your actions? How can you demonstrate faith in God during the thing you are struggling with right now?



Do You Want to Hear a Secret?

Day 12

Philippians 4:11-13; Jeremiah 9:24; Psalm 131:2

Does the very sound of this question pique your curiosity? What if God looked right at you and, with His eyes alive with excitement, whispered, “Do you want to hear a secret?” The look of anticipation on His face would imply that the information to be received is of great value to the Giver, and therefore, of great benefit to the receiver.

If you’d like to hear this secret, lean in and read on. God revealed this particular truth to the Apostle Paul over time, and he hoped that we could also gain from it. Paul tells us in Philippians 4, “**...I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**”

In this passage, the secret to behold is the ability to be content no matter what is going on around us. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “contentment” as “freedom from worry or restlessness: peaceful satisfaction.” This is the very heart of the Father. Have you ever seen a child, or even a pet, alarmed by a thunderstorm? One form of consolation is the ole’ “It’s okay, it’s just God moving His furniture.” Well, what if the storms of life are merely God “pulling up His chair” to invite us to jump into His lap for comfort? The Father longs to wrap His arms around you in the very situation you find yourself in.

Paul boasts of this secret place in which he dwells, and it is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. The Father delights in the finished work of the cross! As we sit on the Father’s lap, cozily wrapped in Christ, we find ourselves in that secret place of contentment. We become the happy recipients of His steadfast love, justice, and righteousness. What more could we ask for? Hmm...how about another secret!?



“Father, what would You have me do?”

Is God Lord Over All?

Day 13

Job 1:1, 42:3,6; Proverbs 3:5; Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Corinthians 13:12

Generally speaking, Christians are oftentimes quick to give thanks to God when things go well. I am reminded of the sports hero who just claimed victory. As they are being interviewed by the sports reporter, their first comment typically is to thank God for getting them to the victory circle. And well they should. It is God who blesses us with certain talents that we hone and perfect. But what about those who came out on the losing end? Are they still thankful for the gifts God gave them?

The story of Job tells of a very successful, God-fearing man who **“was blameless, upright, feared God, and turned from evil.”** Yet this blameless man suddenly lost everything he had - his servants, his livestock, his possessions, even his family - all within a few short hours. In spite of this horrific, sudden trauma, the Bible says, **“through all this Job did not sin, nor did he blame God.”**

Job realized that God was bigger than himself. He recognized God is omniscient (1 John 3:20), that God preceded time (Isaiah 57:15), and that He created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). God knows when a sparrow falls and He knows the number of hairs on our head (Matt 10:29-30).

Through all of life’s ups and downs, in the good times and the not so good times, we must always keep in mind that God is in control. There is nothing in this life that catches Him unaware and nothing that He has not preordained. While we may not understand why, He has purpose and reason for every event, every issue, everything that occurs regardless how big or how small.

In the end, it was never revealed to Job why such horrible calamity befell him. As he pleaded his case before God, Job stated that he was innocent, and was without sin. But he quickly realized his error when God challenged him, asking if he was

around when the heavens were formed, when the earth was created, or when man was birthed. Job concluded his encounter with God saying, **“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know”** (Job 42:3). Job realized he had transgressed and concluded, **“I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes”** (Job 42:6). Job understood that God has a greater plan in place, one that we don’t always understand.

“For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even also as I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Let us all be more like Job - thanking God during the victories in our lives, but celebrating Him and worshipping Him even in the hard times, even during the times we don’t understand.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. **“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”** Isaiah 55:8-9



Partnering with God is Going to Be _____

(You fill in the blank) Day 14

Psalm 50:21; Romans 12:2

Our worldview is the grid through which we interpret every aspect of life. Since we developed our perspectives in a broken world that is far from God, our view of reality does not naturally line up with God's. During our New Hope E2E study, we have seen many biblical examples of men and women who have honored God by aligning their thinking with His, while others have stubbornly resisted.

Which word do you automatically supply in the following statement: Life should be _____. Maybe your knee jerk response is to finish it this way: "Life should be easy." Others fill in the blank with "fun" or "fair." Our answer pulls back the curtain on our worldview and the misguided sentiments which can lurk in our souls. The danger of wrong thinking is that it can infect our relationship with God. We can automatically expect that "partnering with God should be fun and easy," which it isn't. Wrong expectations cause us to cringe and turn back from serving God when it ceases to please us. Consider the following...

The Psalmist speaks of our tendency to make God out to be human. Psalm 50:21 says, **"These things you have done and I (God) kept silent; you thought that I was just like you; I will rebuke you and present the case before your eyes."** Note the phrase, "You thought I was just like you." This wrong thinking causes us to put God in a human box where He should put our ease and comfort first (just like we expect other humans to do).

When we enter into what God is doing, we should expect that as part of the process, there will be a realignment of our old thinking to match His. Romans 12:2 encourages us, **"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."**

Tensions arise when God presents us with an opportunity to join Him in His work. Our preferences for comfort, having our own way, and even desiring that God get on our agenda tend to conflict with what God desires. When we expect our walk with God to be easy, God is using stretching circumstances to conform us to His image and realign our thinking to match His. The toilsome day-to-day partnering with God isn't always fun, but it is eternally rewarding.



2

“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”

Contentment in God's Provision

Day 15

Philippians 4:11, 19; James 1:17

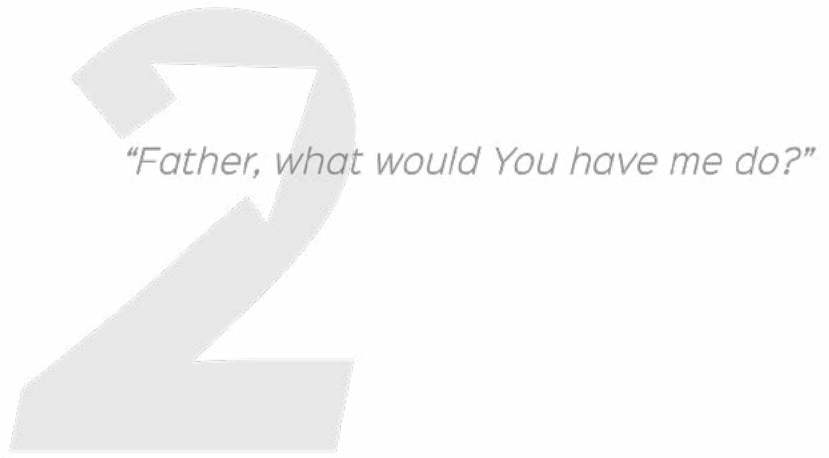
There it is, in the middle of your mailbox, a large envelope that says: "You may already be a winner!" If you're like most people, you ponder whether or not you should even open it. Once opened, the contents cause the average person to begin dreaming about all the things they could own.

Usually, the message inside invites you to choose the type of luxury automobile you desire and to decide if you want the millions in a lump sum or twenty yearly installments. Without a doubt, the creators of these mailings do a great job of helping us envision what life might be like if we had everything we ever wanted.

But would such "good" fortune really make for a happier life? Would we be more satisfied if every earthy desire was met? When we begin our relationship with Christ, He gives us a new perspective, one that looks to Him for provision and contentment. This outlook allows us to maintain incredible joy no matter our current circumstances, and not be crushed or disillusioned when the things of this world elude us. Instead, we can echo the Apostle Paul's incredible words of divine confidence and trust found in Philippians 4:19 – **"My God will meet all your needs, according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."** Note this verse doesn't go into specifics regarding what we will have or lack, nor does it indicate that it's better to be rich or poor. It's simply a statement of confidence that God will bring into our lives everything we need to live and function according to His plans for us. In essence, God changes our definition of the word "contentment" when we follow Him.

We can now be at peace with our circumstances no matter where we find ourselves. If we have plenty, we rejoice in the opportunity to use those resources to help others and further His Kingdom. If we're experiencing hard times, we rest in the

assurance that God will provide in His way and in His timing. He allows us to break free from the overpowering tendency to seek money as the answer to a happy, fulfilled life. Once we've experienced true life in Him, we know that, indeed, He provides what we need. He is enough.



Jeremiah 29:11; Isaiah 25:1

Walking through my home last week, I saw all of the disastrous messes from my kids playing, dinners being made, and piles that had built up from just never having enough time. I felt overwhelmed and disappointed with the state of my life. I began counting and adding up in my head the never-ending list of house projects I wish I had time for. I began comparing myself to others who seem to have their life together. From my perspective, they have all the time and money to do whatever they desire. Later in the day, the thoughts came back as I remembered hearing a success story from a friend who had just achieved a wonderful milestone in his life. I felt unsettled thoughts growing in my head, “Why couldn’t that have been me? Why do I have to be in this place dealing with all these things right now?” I knew these thoughts and feelings were not of God, and not what I should be dwelling on. I realized I was feeling unsatisfied.

It can be all too easy to have those feelings, and let them hijack our thoughts. One of the best ways we can help ourselves in times like these, is to remember that God has a plan and He times His will to it. Jeremiah 29:11 says, **“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans for prosperity and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”** The process through which God moves us from one place to another is what shapes us for His future works. Many times, I need to remind myself of this and be encouraged by His Word. I desire to be satisfied and to appreciate the work that God is doing in and through me while I am in a low spot. I may not be where I want to be, but God has me right where He wants. Even when I think things are moving in the wrong direction, God is moving me according to His plan, and I want to be thankful.

I challenge myself and you to pray that God would continue His good work through us. When we find ourselves disappointed and unsatisfied, we can pray that we

would be satisfied with the timing and the things He has given us to do in our homes, our schools, our jobs, and our church. We can ask for God's guidance and for patience while we wait for His timing. We can pray that we will be satisfied in the process that He is faithfully bringing us through in order to do amazing things in Advancing the Kingdom.

“Lord, You are my God, I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; for You have worked wonders, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.” Isaiah 25:1



“Father, what would You have me do?”

Be a Giver

Day 17

Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38, 11:42

The story is told of a man stumbling through the desert, dying of thirst. Literally hours from death, he came across a deserted town with an ancient, rusty pump in the middle of the square. Overjoyed, he grabbed the handle and began pumping the well. His enthusiasm died when he realized nothing was coming out. But then he saw a note carved into an old plank nearby. It read, “Under this board is a jug of water. To get water from the pump, prime it by pouring all the water into the pump shaft. Make sure you refill the jug for the next person.”

The man lifted the plank, grabbed the jug, and sure enough, it was almost full of water. But now he had a dilemma. If he drank the water, he might live long enough to get back to the main road. But if he poured the water down the pump, he could end up with more water than he’d ever need. Or maybe the message was wrong and he’d have nothing at all. Reluctantly, he poured the water down the pump and began working the handle. One minute...two minutes...nothing. What had he done? But then a little stream began to flow. Before long it was gushing pure, cool water. He drank all he could, then filled his empty canteen as well as another jug he had found. Finally, he refilled the priming jug and replaced it. As he left, he added to the note on the plank: “This really does work. You just have to trust it.”

There are times when our financial status leaves us feeling a little like that man stranded in the desert—desperate, endangered, and definitely lacking. Yet no matter how little we have, God calls upon us to be givers, helping others in times of need. It’s times like those when we need an extra portion of faith to follow Christ’s clear command in Luke 6:38 – **“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”**

How do you respond when facing an especially difficult financial crisis? Do you go into “conserve” mode and search desperately for ways to recapture a sense of security? That’s a common response. But God’s command is clear: Be willing to sacrifice for others, even when you have only a little. You might be surprised at the blessings He will pour into your life.

What are some ways we can give, even when we’re lacking resources? Pray to overcome the very natural temptation to hoard resources instead of being willing to give in whatever ways you are able.



2

“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”

Heaven is Real

Day 18

Psalm 16:11; Revelation 21:4-5

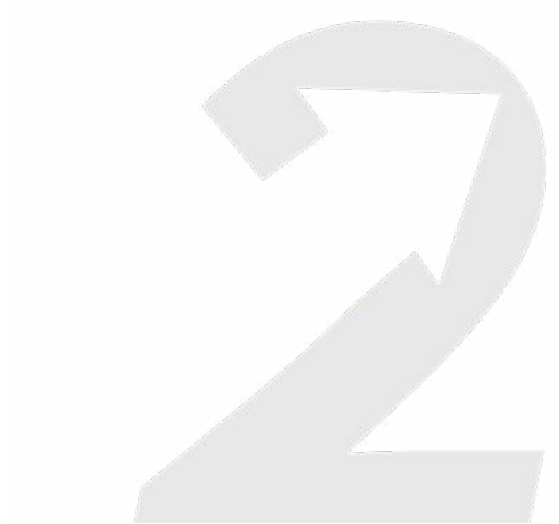
Do you ever slip into “here and now” mode and forget what the Bible teaches about heaven? Heaven exists. It’s real. Someday, as followers of Jesus, we’ll spend eternity there. What does that mean for you today? How should that change your future plans for the next year? Two years? Ten years?

Well first, it’s important to remember heaven is going to be fabulous. In heaven you’ll enjoy and glorify God. You’ll get to know Him intimately forever, fulfilling the very reason you were created, and satisfying the deepest desires of your heart. That doesn’t mean strumming a harp while floating on a cloud with a halo! We were given a natural desire to work which continues when we get to heaven. Remember that God Himself is a worker according to Jesus in John 5:17 – “But He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.’”

The implication for the here and now is clear. The Christian life isn’t about attaining Biblical knowledge or reaching inner peace with yourself in a meditative trance. The Christian life is about serving and working for God and His purposes now as we prepare for eternity. As A.W. Tozer said, “For each of us the time is surely coming when we shall have nothing but God!” Nothing but God. Can we accept the reality that God has only promised us one chance to choose where our priorities and our hearts lie?

Today, let’s keep in mind the reality of heaven and how that affects our lives today. Are we living as though we could step into eternity today? Are we building, investing, praying, and working as though there really is a future reward, a future purpose, and a future reality?

God plus nothing. We’ll be infinitely content with that reality for eternity. Can you be content with God plus nothing today?



God's Watching You

Day 19

While in the Temple courtyard, Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on." Luke 21:1-4

I often ponder the reality that God is watching me, all the time! That Jesus was watching this poor woman at the same time He was observing the wealthy participating in the exact same action, is fascinating. In this brief four verse description from Dr. Luke, we discover God's interest in watching human behavior and rendering His evaluation. And I'm always surprised to be reminded that His evaluation is often not what my evaluation typically is. That's true because Scripture says His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

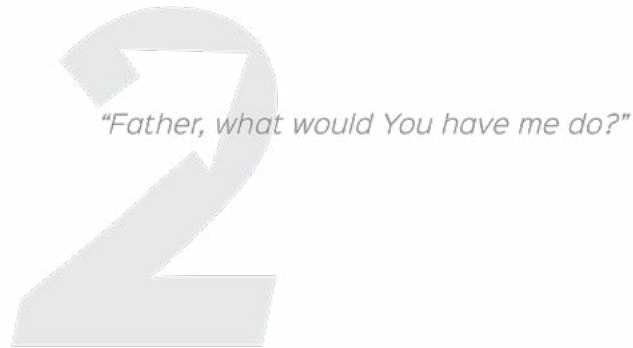
Giving anything to God is always a good thing and in this short account we don't see Jesus diminishing the gifts of the rich who had resources to give more. Rather, He elevates the sacrificial giving of the poor woman and His evaluation (which is the only one that really counts) is that she was generous beyond measure toward the things of God. It's also worth noting that Jesus felt this entire episode was worth pointing out to His followers; it was a "teachable moment," He wanted them to know that He was watching these things, that He saw giving as very valuable, and He caused Dr. Luke to write it down so that two thousand years later you and I could also see the value.

The true value is this; in her generosity, the widow gave to God without any agenda, without knowing what He would do with it, and without doubting He would supply her needs. She simply gave it out of love and surrender. We know that to be true because God not only watches our external behavior, but He sees our hearts as

well. He didn't see any flaw in what the poor woman did. He merely applauded the raw simplicity of her pure heart.

That we as a church and as individuals could be seen by God in that same way is a fabulous thought. I love the idea of God's eye being on us and that He might also applaud our authentic faithfulness. Today, I encourage you to pursue an objective in your prayer time; ask the Father to help you fully surrender to what He wants to do through you with the resources He has entrusted to you. Pursue it in authenticity, and He will show you the best way to approach your giving.

It's a high ideal and one that gets God's attention and touches His heart.



Praying Together: Releasing God's Power for God's Purposes

Day 20

Watchman Nee was a remarkable Chinese Christian pastor and author who preached to crowds of thousands, and had a powerful influence on the growth of the Chinese church during his nearly thirty years of ministry. He was born in 1903 and came to faith during a powerful experience with God at age 17. He then dedicated his life to serve Jesus Christ no matter what the cost. He wrote and preached extensively, and was persecuted and tortured for his faith. He was ultimately imprisoned by Chinese authorities in 1952, after the Chinese revolution of 1948. He died in his prison cell in 1972. His daughter found a note under his pillow, which read, "Christ is the Son of God. He died as the Redeemer for the sins of mankind, and was raised up from the dead after three days. This is the most important fact in the world. I shall die believing in Christ."

Watchman Nee believed in the power of corporate prayer; that is, Christians praying together, and the role of the church in manifesting God's power and will here on earth. He wrote in *The Prayer Ministry of the Church*, "Brothers and sisters, you have to remember that the highest and greatest work of the Church is to be the outlet of God's will. The Church becomes the outlet of God's will through prayer." That is, as we pray together, God manifests His power and His will in individuals, in families, in our churches, our schools, our communities, our country, and the larger world. Jesus promised us that, "**Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son**" (John 14:13). *But we have to pray.*

Is it possible that we do not yet see all that God desires to do in our lives, our families, our church, and our larger world because we have not asked? Do we approach prayer too casually, as an afterthought or an empty exercise, with no confidence that God will actually hear and answer? Could this be why James (in James 4:2) wrote, "**You do not have, because you do not ask**"? Again, Watchman Nee wrote, "On earth, God's power is manifested to the degree that the Church prays. The amount that the Church prays will be the measure of the amount that God's power

is manifested. Consequently, the Church has to learn to pray big prayers and make big requests.”

As we pray together, the Holy Spirit shapes our prayers and helps us to align our will with God’s purposes for our lives, our families, our church, and our community. As Jennifer Kennedy Dean reminds us in *Live a Praying Life*, “Your prayers will never do anything except release God’s power for God’s purposes. On the other hand, your prayers will always release God’s power for God’s purposes.” What purposes of God are as yet unrealized for us, our church, and the community where God has placed New Hope at this point in history, because He is waiting for us to pray? Let’s dedicate ourselves to the spiritual discipline of prayer, individually and as a church, as our most important work.



2

“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”

God's Work – Our Rest

Day 21

Galatians 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:7; Matthew 11:28; Philippians 1:6

The ringing in of the New Year often reminds us of areas in our lives in which we would like to “do better/be better.” As soon as the fireworks and New Year’s toasts are over, we drift to our list of self-improvement goals. Thoughts follow about how we need to be “stronger” and just work harder.

One example is the first week of January in local fitness facilities – it’s the busiest week of the year! Memberships are over-sold knowing that soon most people will return to their previous, exercise-less routines. We can feel undisciplined or out of control in other areas of our lives too: finances, anger, gossip, addictions, or the harmful verbal trail we leave in our wake.

Galatians 5:22 tells us that self-control is one of the fruit of the Spirit, and 2 Timothy 1:7 says this: **“For the spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.”** These verses teach us the source of self-control and discipline is God. Rather than “trying harder,” and only leaning on our own abilities, we can pray, seeking God’s help in our efforts to gain discipline and self-control. God alone can grow these attributes in our lives as we grow in our faith and dependence on Him, and do our part by engaging in faith building activities. Apart from God, the harder we try, the less successful we will feel and be when we try to make these changes. With God, however, when we are given over to His timing and His ways, we can trust that He will continue to be at work in our lives as we ask Him for self-control and discipline. Only God is wise enough and strong enough to accomplish such an important task in His children, and He is faithful to complete His work in us (Philippians 1:6).

Frequently, I get a picture in my mind of the old tug-of-war game. In it, I’m pulling on a rope as hard as I can in order to control or overpower the other side; in my

case, it's the very issue confronting me! Pulling on that rope every minute of every day can be exhausting. Let's consider letting go of the rope, turning to God, and asking Him to do the work. Be encouraged by His message to us. Matthew 11:28 says, **"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."**

Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will work in and through us, individually and corporately, giving us everything we need to become disciplined, self-controlled agents of our Lord Jesus Christ in His timing and way, for His glory.



God's Dependable Word

Day 22

Ephesians 2:8; John 14:6; Romans 12:2

Often, we wake up in the morning and the first thoughts that come to mind are our feelings about conversations and activities from the previous day. Am I feeling sad, happy, angry, lonely or all the above regarding my interactions, choices, conversations, purchases, and so forth from yesterday? Our feelings are real and unique to us; however, we have to ask ourselves, are they always accurate and truthful?

For example, I may feel like my supervisor doesn't approve of my performance, and I begin to wonder if my job is in jeopardy. I start questioning things that I've always felt confident doing. Or, I wonder if a friend no longer cares for me. I'm fearful that she has been talking behind my back. I review my last interaction with her, going over everything I said. Rather than acting on those feelings, first we need to find out the facts. What is actually going on? What is the real truth?

In addition to human relationships, many of us can feel unworthy or unacceptable to God - but what does God say about His children? The God of the universe that created you with your unique blend of strengths and talents has this to say about you:

"It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8

We may feel unacceptable, or unlovable, but when we have faith in Jesus, He saves us, and provides an inheritance of eternity with Him. He has made us worthy and acceptable through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus shed His blood for us, once and for all. We are safe in Him.

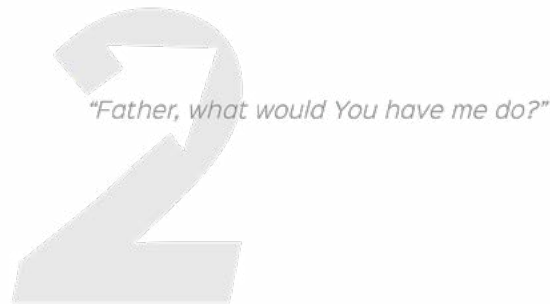
Fortunately, God has provided the Bible for us so we can check our feelings against truth. Meditating on God's Word and His description of us is the foundational truth from which we need to start. Changing our thoughts and feelings begins by filling our minds with accurate and truthful information. In John 14:6, Jesus says:

"I am the way and the truth and the life."

Jesus Himself is truth, and His words are true and dependable. Do you "feel" that you can change your sometimes undependable feelings? Maybe not, but the truth is, God can. He transforms us by the renewing of our minds through His Word. We can ask God to do His work of transforming us as we commit to regular times in His word and prayer. In Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul tells us:

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is."

If we make decisions based on feelings alone, it can lead us on a path away from God's will for our lives. Pray that God will renew our minds and open our eyes to see truth. Ask God to help us, as a church, to see truth, believe it and live it. Pray for God's vision, not our vision, and His will, not ours.



Widening Our Tent Stakes

Day 23

“Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your dwellings be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.” Isaiah 54:2

V.G. Beers in *The Victor Journey Through the Bible* explains: Tents of the Bedouin desert people were probably first made of animal skins crudely patched together. Later, after the process of weaving was learned, the tents were made by spinning and weaving heavy fabric from camel or goats’ hair. This coarse cloth provided families and guests with shelter and shade in the summer (with the side walls rolled up), and protection from cold winds in the winter season. To allow more room inside the tent, additional tent material was spread over the poles (or added poles), and fastened to the ground by lengthening the ropes, and widening and strengthening the stakes.

Years ago, our family visited a church, and the sermon included the above verse. I honestly don’t remember anything else about the sermon, just this verse, but it seems appropriate for New Hope Church in general right now. God is at work; He is bringing new students, families, and individuals to our doors, to the tent of our church building. What is He calling us to do in response?

As a church, we are praying for God’s will to be revealed in regards to New Hope’s future. God is increasing our numbers. He is drawing people to New Hope. How does He want us to respond and participate with Him in this work? Do we add on to the existing building and parking lot? Add services? “Lengthen our cords and strengthen our stakes”? Is this enough?

While we are waiting on God for direction to the physical space questions, I’m wondering if we also need to seek God’s heart for the role He wants us to play in welcoming those He is drawing. Do our lives and hearts have enough space and margin in them that we can and will open our arms to new people? Are we uncomfortable enough with the idea that some people don’t yet know Jesus, and we are the ones He has

charged with the privilege and responsibility to share the Good News? Are our hearts tender enough, unselfish enough, and reliant enough to lean on God as He does the work of calling people to Himself? Do we remember the freshness and desperation of salvation? Will we embrace, do life with, evangelize, baptize, disciple, and teach the people who come? Will I? Will you?

To merely enlarge our capacity to accommodate people into a building, and not invite others into our lives, into the shelter of our friendships, into our row during the service, into our small groups, into our discussion tables, and into community will miss the point. How are we doing with enlarging the tent of our hearts?

Consider the following “one another” verses:

- **“Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Romans 15:7**
- **“Love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” 1 Peter 1:22**
- **“Through love serve one another.” Galatians 5:13**
- **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Colossians 3:16**
- **“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.” 1 Peter 5:5**
- **“Encourage one another.” Hebrews 10:24-25**

God is the One who is drawing people unto Himself and the ministry of New Hope Church. **God is the One** who will provide the faith and financial resources to steward what He wants done to enlarge the place of our tent. **God is the One** who does the spiritual work of enlarging, stretching, lengthening, and strengthening the tent of our hearts and lives so we can care for the people He is bringing.

Prayer: *Lord, help us to “not hold back.” In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

What do you want to say to God in response to this?

Discerning God's Will

Day 24

Proverbs 11:14; James 1:5; Romans 15:14

Someone once said, "Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting a tomato in a fruit salad." We can know a lot of facts about a situation yet still lack discernment about it. Are you weighing two equally good options for a business venture or facing a tough decision about your dating life? Are you unsure of how to respond to a spouse's suspicious behavior? In times like these, you need a healthy dose of divine wisdom. Let's look at some practical, biblically sound ways to discern God's will.

The term "God's will" is just a fancy way of reminding ourselves that God is involved in the particulars of our lives. Because God cares about something as small as how you dress or what you watch on TV, He provides a vast storehouse of wisdom for you to tap into while making decisions. James 1:5 says, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all..."** The first step is to pray and ask for God's wisdom directly for your situation.

While praying is foundational, sometimes we need to seek God's will from more than one source because we can easily miss it or need confirmation. Let's look at three other tools for discerning God's will.

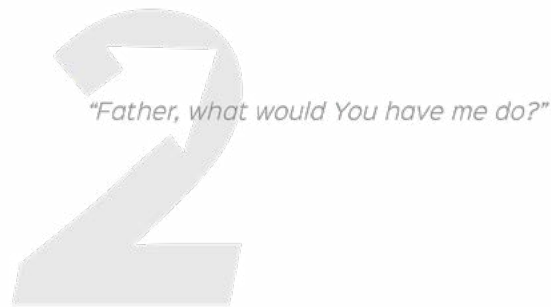
First, ask mature, Christian friends whom you respect for advice. Proverbs 11:14 says, **"Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory."** Try asking other believers their thoughts from every age group and in every walk of life to avoid group-think or generational bias.

Second, read your Bible. It may seem obvious, but the Word of God contains a written record of hundreds of years of man's history and his dealings with God. Since God never changes, it's a good bet that someone in the Bible faced a similar

situation to what you're going through, and God's wisdom on the matter has been recorded and preserved for us. Romans 15:4 reminds us **"whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."**

Finally, do something to cut out the noise in your life so you can think more clearly. Fasting works for some people. Try a "technology fast" where you stop staring at all those screens in your life. Jesus liked to get away to mountaintops and quiet wildernesses and gardens to seek God and pray. The mountains are hard to find living around here, but you get the point, quiet the noise and activity in your life regularly, so you can focus on God's leading and guidance.

Let's seek to discern God's will for our individual lives through prayer, advice gathering, reading our Bibles, and taking time to be quiet before God. How is God leading you in this *Phase 2* initiative? How is God moving in your heart?



What's God Doing Next?

Day 25

Job 42:2; Mark 16:15; 2 Peter 3:9

Wayne Gretzky said, "I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been." As believers we must be strategically positioned to maximize our effectiveness not just for the here and now but for what God is doing next. Henry Blackaby said, "Find out where God is working and join Him there." Here's your task: figure out where the spiritual "puck" is going to be in your world...and meet God there.

A bit of background information may be helpful at this point. The goal of the Church Age (the present age) is to see as many people as possible place their faith in Christ. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "**The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**" As a global Church, we're collectively holding our breath as we wait for the completion of God's Church, His bride. The completion of the Church will mark the end of the Church Age and trigger the next step in God's plan.

Understanding that, here's the cool part: you and I get the awesome privilege of taking part in the building of God's Church here in Greater Lansing and around the world. We're literally witnessing the completion of the Church taking place all around us - God's work coming to fruition in our generation. Are you tuned in? Or do you find yourself a bit disconnected, distant from God's plan, and confused about what He may want to do next in and through you?

The truth is, of course, that God's plan is unstoppable. Job told God, "**I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted,**" (Job 42:2). But you don't want God doing things in spite of you. Life works so much better when you live in harmony and in agreement with God's purpose and plan for your life.

You play a key role in what God has planned for our community and for our church. He has wired you in a specific way, with specific talents and abilities that He can use to build His church. Plug in! Learn! Love! Worship! Pray! Join God in what He is doing and planning at New Hope in “Advancing the Kingdom.”



2

“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”

2nd Grade Wisdom

Day 26

Genesis 1:27; Revelations 4:11; Matthew 5:14-16

I've learned a lot working with kids. They tend to blurt out the first thing that comes into their minds. They are unashamedly honest. And when you see them rolling around on the floor, you wonder if they're paying attention. But sometimes God uses kids just like that to teach us something important...actually, something quite profound.

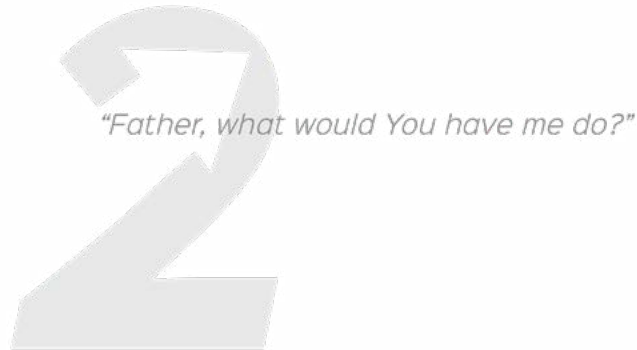
A few years back, I was leading a group of elementary children through a series of Bible lessons on Creation. After welcoming the class, we engaged in a short discussion focusing on our "Big Picture Question," kind of a summary of what we want kids to take away from our time together. That week the question was, "Why did God create everything?" And the answer we learned was, "God created everything for His glory and our good." As we discussed this further, I posed the question, "How do you think a rock or a tree gives God glory? Is that even possible?" Now, it was mid-October, the peak of color season here in Michigan, and I was thinking of the trees with all their beautiful colors, when a little 2nd grade student started waving his hand.

The answer this kid shared pretty much left me speechless. What was his answer? Well, in a very sincere voice he explained, "Trees give God glory when they do what God created them to do." In other words, trees not doing anything we might call "special" or "outstanding," but just growing, providing shade or shelter, and swaying in the wind...give God glory, just being trees; just doing what God created them to do.

That was a moment, I'll never forget! God spoke to me through that little boy. He reminded me that I don't have to do anything "special" or "outstanding" to bring Him glory. I just need to do what He created me to do. God created me **"in His**

image” – Genesis 1:27. God created me as His “image-bearer.” God created me to reflect His goodness, love, patience, kindness, mercy, etc....to the world around me. And He created me to do this in the everyday moments. So, when I wake up in the morning and thank Him for another day, when I submit my will to His, when I look to Him to guide my path, when I see everyone and everything that comes my way as something He has allowed for His good purposes, this is how I give God glory. Oh, some days it’s not so easy, but ultimately, I know I don’t have to achieve some self-prescribed level of greatness to give Him the glory He desires. In the end, if I do what God created me to do, that’s enough.

At New Hope, we’ve committed ourselves to being a light in the darkness, to bring hope to those who are lonely or lost, and to give God the glory in the process. As we continue to grow, it’s important to remember the words of that little 2nd grade boy and ask ourselves “Are we doing what God created us to do?” Because that’s how we give God glory! That’s why we’re here.



Advancing the Kingdom, One Cup at a Time

Day 27

Matthew 10:1, 6, 7, 42

In Matthew 10:1, **“(Jesus) called His twelve disciples to Himself and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.”** Jesus instructed them to **“go to the lost sheep of Israel,”** and proclaim **“the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”** He also instructed them of coming persecution.

The last instruction that Jesus gave to His disciples before sending them out is from Matthew 10:42: **“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”** This instruction reveals that God values even the smallest act of kindness done out of love for Him.

We know that water is significant throughout the Bible. God created water and it’s a staple for life! Water was also a basic part of Eastern hospitality. In Jesus’ day, a cup of cold water might be all that a person could offer, and if a person could do no more than that, it was accepted. Jesus put great value on this act of compassion, kindness and love, and continues to today.

As followers of Jesus, as we give a “cup of cold water” to another person, we’re representing Him! Any act of kindness or service, no matter how small, done in His name, points others to Jesus. The value of this kind of act is not determined according to the cost of the gift but by the love and affection shown by the heart of the giver toward Christ. What is the “cup of cold water” you can give to others in His name? It will differ according to the situation, the person, and the need of the moment. Jesus is trying to teach us how much He values any act of kindness or service done to others in His name.

I encourage and challenge you during these final *Pray 30* days for *Phase 2* to have

your spiritual antennas up. Be looking for opportunities to give a **“cup of cold water”** to someone you encounter. It might be opening a door for someone, reaching for an item at the grocery store for someone who can’t quite reach it, locking eyes and smiling with someone who seems to be down or is struggling, or offering your help or a word of encouragement. Perhaps, it’s offering to pray with someone you know is hurting, or saying a kind word to a family member.

We can’t meet every need we come in contact with, but what if we prayed at the beginning of each day, asking God to show us what kind of cup of cold water to give, who to give it to, and when. He will honor that prayer. There are all kinds of people around you that are parched and just waiting to receive kindness from you. Who knows, that cup of cold water may be the avenue through which God allows you to invite someone to New Hope or share the Gospel.



2

“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”

A Lasting Legacy

Day 28

Joshua 4:21-22; 1 Timothy 4:7

The Bible has a lot to say about the legacy we each leave. As the Apostle Paul considered the end of his life he wrote, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith,”** (1 Timothy 4:7). Compare Paul’s statement to that of a selfish businessman at the end of his life, “I have saved every dime I made, I have grown filthy rich, I have built a vast business empire.” Paul’s legacy of following God and putting Him first lives on through his words and example. The businessman’s claims seem somehow hollow and meaningless considering the fact his business was ultimately acquired, merged, dismantled, and forgotten by history.

When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, it marked the end of an incredible journey. God’s hand alone sustained them through dry deserts, over mountain passes, and in spite of many enemies that came against them. As they finally arrived in Palestine, God instructed them to erect monuments of stone to remind their descendants what God had accomplished on behalf of the nation. Joshua 4:21-22 says, **And he (Joshua) said to the people of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’”**

What monuments to God’s work can you point to in your family’s history? Try to think of five “Jordan moments” this week and put them in writing. These don’t have to be as spectacular as walking across a river on dry ground. Perhaps God provided a job when your economic situation was dire. Perhaps it was how God led your family to New Hope. Do you sense God showing up in the midst of a busy day? Recognizing, celebrating, and remembering these events is a good way to remind ourselves of God’s active involvement in our lives. As believers our legacy isn’t about what we’ve done, but about what God has done for us and through us.

It's about what God has accomplished on our behalf.

It's a good idea to unwind at the end of each day by thinking about the times God showed up during your daily schedule. Reflect on these "Jordan moments." What do you want your legacy to look like at the end of your life?



2

"What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?"

The Obscurity Principle

Day 29

Mark 10:35; the book of Jonah; Genesis 37-56

Jethro gave wise, timely advice to one of the greatest leaders in history, Ehud freed an entire people group, Deborah led men into one of the greatest battles in the ancient world, Jael, another heroine, killed a renowned military leader by driving a tent peg through his skull, Adino the Eznite killed 800 men, and Jabez prayed one of the greatest prayers ever recorded. These men and women (and many others) in the Bible served God faithfully, but their stories are seldom told and their names are mostly lost to world history.

One of the crucial lessons we will learn as God matures us is that much of the activity we do on His behalf will be done inconspicuously and at a disadvantage to ourselves as we are serving. Jesus Christ, the very Son of God modeled this servant-leader perspective. Scripture records in Mark 10:45, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”** Jesus tenaciously lived out God’s agenda with the quiet, unassuming attitude of a common house servant.

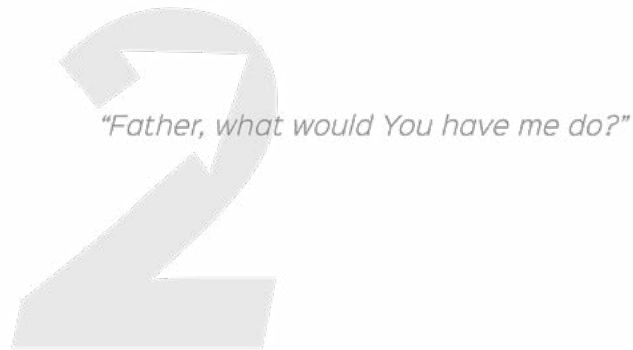
Because of our fallen, human state, we are born with the desire to selfishly seek glory for ourselves and be recognized for things that God is accomplishing. God uses the quiet places of toilsome anonymity to teach us many important lessons. Bible characters we know and love learned the following lessons in obscurity.

- Jonah had to die to himself. During the entire book, Jonah was trying to impose his will on God. God ordered him to Ninevah and he ran the other way. Even after spending three punishing days in the belly of a whale, Jonah continued to detest the Ninevites even while God was loving them. At the end of the book, Jonah was profoundly disappointed that the inhabitants of the city repented and God didn’t destroy them. Instead of God exalting Jonah’s plan, Jonah had to learn

to lay self aside and conform his thinking to God's instead of conforming God to his thinking.

- Joseph was cruelly sold into Egypt by his jealous brothers and eventually landed in jail. He lost his freedom, dignity, culture, and family heritage. After being stripped of his humanity, he learned adaptability and flexibility while quietly living life as an unassuming servant behind bars. God redeemed the brokenness he was experiencing in obscurity and leveraged it for good publicly.

Much of the work we do on God's behalf is accomplished in obscurity. Moses watched sheep for 40 years, King David lived in caves, and John the Baptist spent a large portion of his adult life in the wilderness. Scholars refer to this as the Obscurity Principle. As humans, we enjoy the accolades and affirmation of others, but when partnering with God these can be missing. God will teach us dependence, humility, and faithfulness far from the cheering crowds as we serve in the capacity and place He calls us to. How will you obscurely partner with God in "Advancing the Kingdom"?



Surrender to God's Will

Day 30

Luke 22:41-42; Romans 12:1

A mom and dad asked their 3-year-old boy to pray before Thanksgiving dinner. First the boy thanked God for all his friends one at a time. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, his baby sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and his auntie and uncle. Then he began to thank God for the food. He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the Cool Whip. Suddenly the boy stopped praying and got a pained expression on his face. The family waited patiently for him to finish. After a long silence, the boy opened one eye and asked his mother, "If I thank God for the broccoli, won't He know that I'm lying?"

Jesus, in His famous prayer recorded in Luke 22:41-42, said, "**Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.**" If only the boy had remembered to pray this way about the broccoli! Perhaps his mother would have been so surprised and tickled, she would have granted his unspoken request to not eat broccoli! Jesus requested a way out of His difficult and agonizing situation, but He still prayed for God's will to be accomplished. He remembered to pray according to God's will.

Praying according to God's will is an important key to an effective prayer life. God knows your heart, your needs, and your desires better than you do. God also has a plan and a purpose for your life that may not make sense right now, but often becomes clear as you surrender your life to His purposes.

Romans 12:1 urges believers to offer their lives to God as a "**living sacrifice.**" In the Old Testament a "sacrifice" was a helpless lamb. The lamb had no idea why it was being led away until it was placed on the altar. Does your prayer life reflect lamb-like surrender to God's will above your own? Does sacrificial surrender characterize your relationship with God?



2

“What role will God have me personally play in His ongoing work?”

Pray 30 - Advancing the Kingdom Together

Every page of Scripture reveals that God's great desire for us is that we would chase after Him and His will, first and foremost, in all things. Jesus modeled that very essence in the final hours of His life when He cried out from the garden of Gethsemane, **"Father, not My will, but Yours be done"** (Matthew 26:39). It is also His clear instruction in the Lord's model prayer - **"Pray then in this way...Your Kingdom come. Your will be done..."** (Matthew 6:10). Asking God to reveal His will is paramount in every action we take, but also, asking God for the strength to act on those convictions is crucial. For these reasons, it is our desire that these daily prayer guides have been helpful to you in pursuing God's will for such a significant decision as committing to the *Phase 2* building expansion. From my vantage point, I can see that this proposed expansion is about far more than adding on bricks and mortar to a building, it is truly about the expansion of the Kingdom of Jesus. Working together, we can continue to move in a direction that will allow many more individuals the life-changing opportunity to hear and understand the Gospel of our Lord. And equally, the privilege to grow in their walk with Christ. While your decision to commit to the expansion is very personal, it is also a decision that has ramifications for many other people whom you have not yet met. Our investment of prayer and resources is an investment in their eternal future.

God's blessings on you as you seek His will.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pastor Mark".

Pastor Mark

Acknowledgements

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