



*Words of Hope
A Six Week Devotional Journey*

*by the People of
Living Hope Church*

*We are grateful to Whitewater Crossing (Cleves, OH) for sharing their
worship and small group resources as we enter our own hope campaign.*

Fear is the anticipation of evil.

Hope is the anticipation of good.

*For the next six weeks, Living Hope Church is going to hold a **HOPE CAMPAIGN**.*

We are not trying to raise money or votes or market shares.

Our goal is to use the next 6 weeks to raise hope –

in individual lives, in this church, and in our community . . .

Because we believe that hope is essential for life: it is a necessity, not a luxury.

Join us in The Hope Campaign and discover how we can nurture our Hope through scriptures, “Words of Hope” from others in our community, within our small groups and through Worshiping corporately together.

Try to read a devotion every day; don’t save up until Saturday and knock it all out at once. The format is simple - a person from our Living Hope Community has submitted some thoughts based on scripture.

Meditate on the Scripture/Devotion

Journal and/or ***share*** with others what God is impressing upon you in this area of Hope!

Pray into it – for our individual lives, for this church, and for our community

Together Let’s Look for Ways to Build Hope and Share Hope!

Week 1: Sunday Reading

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Hebrews 6:19

When our daughter Jess went away to school, she attended Hope College. One of their traditions during freshman drop-off was to take a picture by the huge blue anchor on campus. A campus representative stood there with a box of tissues to mop up the tears parents typically had as reality hit home that they would be walking away leaving their child to navigate this next season of life on their own. In reality, as long as they had an anchor to steady them, they would not be alone. The same is true for all of us. What is your anchor?

Christine Caine recently posted this thought:

Jesus is the anchor for our souls. Easy to remember, yet it's often hard to live like we believe it. Despite all the pressures we feel in our lives, we don't have to drift. When the currents of life are swirling around us, forcefully trying to move us, Jesus is our anchor. He is faithful to help us resist the drift and stay on track, no matter what comes our way.

This seems particularly appropriate as we start this devotional journey on Hope. Where do you find your Hope? Are you anchored in Christ or are you drifting, being tossed around by any storm that comes your way? I encourage you to take the time during the next six weeks to anchor yourself in scriptures of Hope!

By Sharon Early

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Hebrews 6:19* -

Week 1: Monday Reading

*Remember your word to your servant,
for you have given me hope.
My comfort in my suffering is this:
Your promise preserves my life.*
Psalm 119:49-50 (NIV)

HOPE fills the verses of Psalm 119! Take a moment to read verses 43, 49, 74, 81, 114, and 147. Where does the writer find hope? In the promise of health? Wealth? A trouble-free life? No, he finds hope in God's Word – *every time*. Whether the psalmist is experiencing health or sickness, wealth or poverty, a trouble-free life or a trouble-filled life, the one constant that grounds him is God's Word. The psalmist chooses to hold onto God's promises of unfailing love, salvation, and faithfulness, no matter what he is facing.

Verse 49 says, "*Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope.*" Do you think the psalmist feels like he has to remind God of his promises, as if God could forget? Or is he saying this aloud to remind himself of God's promises?

Remembering God's promises gives us hope and comfort:

"Lord, remember that in your mercy, you promised to forgive me when I sin" (1 John 1:9).

"Lord, remember that you promised to be my refuge, my strength, and my ever-present help in trouble, when all around me the waters are roaring and the mountains are shaking" (Psalm 46).

"Lord, remember that you promised to give me wisdom when I ask for it. (James 1:5).

God doesn't forget his promises, but I think God delights when we come to him and trusting like little children, say: "Lord, remember your Word. It is my hope!"

By Jan Devine

Personal Reflections -

Prayer -

Lord God, I know that my hope is not found in my circumstances. You alone are my Savior, my Redeemer, and my Rescuer. My hope is in your Word, because it is what sustains me in the midst of whatever is happening around me. *Remember your word to your servant:* I am praying these words so that I will remember, *for you have given me hope*. Thank you for this reminder. Amen.

Week 1: Tuesday Reading

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for
and assurance about what we do not see.
And without faith it is impossible to please God,
because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists
and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*
Hebrews 11:1, 6

When you were a child, do you remember the excitement of anticipating Christmas morning and the gifts you'd been hoping for all those weeks before? And if the long-awaited favorite gift did not appear, did you stop believing in Christmas? Of course not! That is what it's like with our hope in the name of Christ Jesus. There are many times when we wait and wait and pray for things to happen. It is then that we must rely on our faith and trust that God, in His time, will answer. We must truly believe that our God keeps His promises, and we must never stop believing.

By Janet Cook

Personal Reflections -

Prayer -

Holy God, you know our needs and hopes, and we ask that you give us the patience and trust that we need to await your Word. Thank you for your endless love as you have called us to be your children. Amen

Week 1: Wednesday Reading

Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. John 5:3-9

The man at the pool of Bethesda had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. He had been crippled for so long that he had given up hope. Jesus saw him there and asked him: “Do you want to get well?” Because he felt hopeless, he didn’t directly answer Jesus’ question. Instead, he complained that he couldn’t get into the pool quickly enough to be healed when the water was stirred.

Do you feel hopeless about some situation in your life? Are you crippled with worry, anger or unforgiveness? Whatever you’re struggling with, Jesus asks you the same question: “Do you want to get well? Do you want to be set free to live the abundant life I promised?”

Whatever our situation, Jesus has the power to make us well. Just as he healed the invalid at the pool of Bethesda, he can heal us. Sometimes the healing is immediate, as it was for the man at the pool. Several years ago, Jesus took away an alcoholic friend’s craving for alcohol in an instant. Other times healing is a process. When I was 50, Jesus used this passage to ask me, “Do you want to get well? Do you want to be free of the worry that has crippled you since childhood?” In a two steps forward, one step back process over the next few years He taught me to trust him and turn my worries into prayers (Philippians 4:6-7.) Healing begins when we tell Jesus, “Yes Lord, I want to get well.”

By Jean Jenkins

Personal Reflections -

Prayer –

Lord Jesus Christ, you heal the sick and restore the broken. I bring you everything that stands in the way of the abundant life you promised. Could you make me well?

Week 1: Thursday Reading

*Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.*

Psalm 43:5

God's word and promises are forever true even on the days that we are discouraged and restless. Our Father, our Savior, gives us hope eternal and is always worthy of our praise. And praising him through all of our days delights and honors Him and turns our doubts to hope.

By Missy Goetz

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Psalm 43:5* -

Week 1: Friday Reading

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you. Joshua 1:9, 23:10

Years ago when our boys were young and summer vacation Bible schools were a regular occurrence, our former church held a summer Bible school program based on Joshua 1:9. My wife helped organize the teaching materials and logistics for this event, which meant that everyone in our house became too familiar with the title song that went with this verse. Songs are a great way to help us learn scripture, but what probably did not sink in at the time was the magnitude of hope, one might call "blind faith", that is proclaimed in this verse. Speaking as one who is not particularly strong or courageous, this passage comes across more as wishful thinking rather than the command and promise of God to his servant Joshua, poised and ready to enter the land that God had promised the people of Israel. What is even more of a challenge to the weak and timid, is that verse 23:10 promises that the strength of just one who is faithful to the Lord will put to flight a thousand others. How can this be? Not because of anything that we can do solely by ourselves, but because of what God can do through us. My prayer this day is that we all consider what gifts we have, place our trust in the Lord our God who fights for us, and see how God can multiply a thousand-fold what strength and courage we can bring to confront the challenges we face in our lives and in our community.

By Dave Jenkins

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Joshua 1:9, 23:10* -

Week 1: Saturday Reading

*Like a slave longing for the evening shadows,
or a hired laborer waiting to be paid,
so I have been allotted months of futility,
and nights of misery have been assigned to me.
When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?'
The night drags on, and I toss and turn until dawn.*

*I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth. Job 7:2-4, 19:25*

Job's immediate response to his awful situation is to praise God. This suggests that Job already had a habit to praise God. Because he had learned to praise God in the good times, he was ready to praise Him in the bad times.

How many times I have neglected to praise God during trying times whether it be death, personal illness, conflict...the list can go on. The older I get and the stronger my faith grows, I do try to praise God and look for the good, even when it seems difficult. You know what? There is always good to be found because, like Job, God is also with us, walking with us, even when the devil tries to take control. I tell the devil **NOT TODAY, GO TO THE FOOT OF THE CROSS!** Our redeemer does live, and yes, He WILL come again! Amen 🙏

By Deb Eiche

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Job 7:2-4, 19:25* -

Week 2: Sunday Reading – Hope in Prolonged Suffering (Part 1)

*To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in You I trust, Do not let me be ashamed;
Do not let my enemies exult over me... Make me know Your ways, O Lord;
Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation; **For You I wait all the day.***

Psalm 25: 1-2, 4-5

Life can throw curve balls at us that are gamechangers. Tragedies come out of nowhere and upend everything we know. Whether it's the loss of someone we love; an accident that causes a permanent disability; a life threatening illness; a divorce; a devastating issue with a child or _____ fill in the blank _____; the suffering that is produced can be excruciating and unrelenting. It can be isolating if circumstances require confidentiality and prevent us from being able to share what's going on with others. We may have to lay aside doing things we love to be able to tend to our new circumstances. It can be lonely.

Our God understands such suffering. He knows what it does to us. Jesus knows what it means to be human, to live in a fallen world among people who suffer. He knows what it is like to be in such agony that He sweat blood at the prospect of being crucified and being forsaken by His Father as He became sin on our behalf so we could become the righteousness of God in Him. He obeyed and overcame and saved us through His Resurrection. He is our faithful High Priest who intercedes for us.

By Nancy Rounds

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Psalm 25: 1-2, 4-5* -

Week 2: Monday Reading - Hope in Prolonged Suffering (Part 2)

*Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.
Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind,
therefore I have hope. The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His
compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.
**"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."
The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.
It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord.***

Lamentations 3: 19-26

The last few years have been a season of suffering. It has also been a season of taking hold of my faith in a way I have never known. It has been a time of beginning to learn to know Jesus in the fellowship of His sufferings, learning to love Him, to press into His grace and cling to Him for dear life. Suffering is difficult, but there is no other place I would rather be because it is producing so many good things that would not otherwise happen.

Psalm 25 and Lamentations 3 talk about waiting on God "all the day long" and "waiting in silence for His salvation" and having God be our portion. I have been trying to practice this each day and to ask God for His strength, His love for others that He would grow His character in my life. I can say that I am discovering joy in the waiting because God is in it. I am learning that when we put our confidence in God, the outcome doesn't matter. We can come to know Him deeper than we ever thought possible and learn He is faithful even if our circumstances don't change or our prayer for deliverance is left on the table.

By Nancy Rounds

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Lamentations 3: 19-26* -

Week 2: Tuesday Reading - Hope in Prolonged Suffering (Part 3)

*After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace,
who called you to His eternal glory in Christ,
will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. 1 Peter 5:10*

I am learning from others who have gone before me and have been living in a place where the pain never stops, but they have found such joy and intimacy with Jesus. Joni Eareckson-Tada and Michael Easley are examples of people who live with unrelenting chronic pain, but they transcend their circumstances by trusting in God and believing what He says is true in His Word even if it doesn't feel true. They know that their personal experience does not define who God is. His Word defines who He is and how He is. The Joy of the Lord is truly their strength and their confidence and Hope are in God, not their circumstances. They are faithful servants in their ministries.

He can use us to help others from this place even when we can't share the specifics of our circumstances. Joni often uses 1 Peter 5:10 when she talks about her 53 years of being a quadriplegic, living with chronic pain and going through two rounds of cancer. **"After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you."** She speaks of God's faithfulness through the years and how now, looking back, it really does seem like her time of suffering has only been "a little while". That is such an encouragement to me. It is the Hope of our salvation through Jesus that I cling to every hour of every day.

By Nancy Rounds

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on 1 Peter 5:10 -

Week 2: Wednesday Reading - All My Eggs in One Basket

*Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.*
Habakkuk 3:17-19

Mental illness is such a difficult struggle. There's no blood test to show exactly what's wrong. There's no way to know which medications or treatments might bring about relief or healing. Like other "invisible" or chronic illnesses, much of the time people don't really know you're sick. And often there's not an endpoint. As human beings we all want there to be a time of treatment and then healing, the battle won, the struggle over. But sadly, that's not usually the case, it's ups and downs, and ins and outs, and treatments can take so long before you can even tell if it's helping or not. My struggle with several areas of mental illness has been life long, and without help and strength from God I truly don't think I'd be here today. But He's always been there, to offer strength or comfort or just to hold my hand and suffer with me.

About 6 years ago I finally found significant relief from daily depression due to a doctor who just wouldn't give up! I'm so thankful to God for him! After years and years of tries with various medications and therapy, we finally found the right combination to help me have more good moments than bad, and to want to live to see the next day. I don't know why God doesn't take these struggles away but I trust in His goodness and wisdom and know that someday I'll understand. So even "*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*" Because of Jesus, I can put all my eggs in one basket and never be sorry that I did.

By Norma Santacrose

Personal Reflections and Prayer -

Week 2: Thursday Reading

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Galatians 5:4-6

Paul begins the 5th chapter of Galatians by clearly stating that by grace we will be saved through faith alone. This gift comes from God and is the only way we will stand before Him and be declared righteous. There is no amount of works or good deeds we can do to earn our way into heaven. Good works are things we were supposed to be doing anyways and have been prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. There are no bonus points awarded for your salvation. Think of it this way: If you stood before a judge for stealing from a store, but you came to the judge and pleaded with him that you pay your taxes on time and you drive the speed limit. He would probably look at you confused and say, "what does this have anything to do with your charges against you? You are supposed to pay your taxes and go the speed limit. These things don't get you out of this." We have all sinned, so we all are guilty. **BUT GOD MADE A WAY!** He sent His Son Jesus to be a perfect sacrifice to cover our sin even when we were dead in our trespasses because of the great love with which He loved us. **THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS IS OUR HOPE.** That is the hope that I cling to.

By Chris Campbell

Personal Reflections -

Prayer –

God, I am thankful that I have to come to you for my salvation. I am sinful. I bring nothing to the table and yet you say that through faith in your son Jesus, you wish to raise us up with him and seat us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages you might show immeasurable riches of your grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. I praise your name for this gift. My hope is in you God. Amen.

Week 2: Friday Reading – Better Days are Coming

All honor to God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; for it is his boundless mercy that has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God's own family. Now we live in the hope of eternal life because Christ rose again from the dead. And God has reserved for his children the priceless gift of eternal life; it is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will make sure that you get there safely to receive it because you are trusting him. It will be yours in that coming last day for all to see. So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here.

1 Peter 1:3-6 (The Living Bible)

Do you ever just have a really bad day? A day where stress levels are high, your expectations for the day are just not panning out? Things seem to be going from bad to worse. Life isn't easy. That is for sure. I have a childhood friend whose mom used to say to her when she was having a rough time (back in our teenage days) "Oh Susan...better days are coming." When I read this passage in the Bible, it makes me remember that better days are coming! In these verses, God is reminding us that we can live into hope even through the difficult times of life because Jesus Christ rose from the dead to give us eternal life! A glimpse of Heaven and the idea of one day having "eternal" life, can encourage us to keep persevering in this life.

God, our gracious, heavenly Father, invites us to have the opportunity, the "privilege" to become a part of His own family! He gives us this priceless gift, not because we deserve it... and not through any way of earning it. We can't do anything to be worthy of or to earn God's forgiveness. He just freely gives it to us through His love and His mercy that has no limits!

Think about that for a moment...Almighty God wants you, His precious son, His treasured daughter, to live with Him forever! So much in fact, that He sent Jesus down from heaven to look for you! And through Christ's forgiveness and His great mercy, God is guarding that special gift for you, because you trust in Him. He is keeping it safely away from anything that would change, diminish or ruin it until the day comes that you will receive it in full, through Him.

So, keep trusting God. Live into hope. Keep believing. Take a hold of joy. God will give you the strength you need to get through the difficult days of this life. And hold fast to the wonderful gift He has promised to give you on that "last day", the gift of living forever in Heaven...together with Him!

By Wendy Buffington

Personal Reflections & Prayer -

Week 2: Saturday Reading

*many are saying to me,
"There is no help for you in God."*

*But you, O Lord, are a shield around me,
my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.
I cry aloud to the Lord,
and he answers me from his holy hill.*

*I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, for the Lord sustains me.
I am not afraid of ten thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all around.*

Psalm 3:2-6 (NRSV)

David was experiencing criticism and doubt about his worthiness to be a part of eternal life with God. Has anyone ever doubted your faith? Or your worthiness to be claiming the promise of eternity with God? If so, have you declared your assurance of God's eternal love and promise of eternity with Him? In this Psalm David is not threatened by the negativity of others, but boldly proclaims his faith and trust in God: "A shield around me", "Bestows glory around me", "The Lord sustains me", "I will not fear the tens of thousands against me". We are all invited to call on and believe that God is likewise eager to be our Savior. We must call on Him. He is waiting for us!

By Missy Goetz

Personal Reflections -

Prayer -

Week 3: Sunday Reading - I Am Making Everything New! (Part 1)

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

Every human being on this planet, at some point in their lives, longs for things to be different. The acknowledgment of the depth of this longing can depend on each person's experiences; some merely want current circumstances to change, while other's longing goes deeper to a completely different world. C.S. Lewis wrote, "*If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.*" The bible tells us in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God has set eternity in the heart of mankind. We look around at the world that we are a part of and we see disease, alienation, death and destruction and we know in our deepest being that this should not be. We also know that it is not merely the removal of these things that we long for, but to thrive in life and love; to be fully known and to know fully. *(to be continued but today reflect on what you are longing/hoping for)*

By Jane Kamper

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on Ecclesiastes 3:11 -

Week 3: Monday Reading - I Am Making Everything New! (Part 2)

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

Revelation 21:1-6

This longing (see previous day) is described in the bible as a hunger and a thirst that no earthly source can satisfy. Some people who do long for a completely different world, do not allow themselves to hope because they do not believe that things could ever really change. Others put their hope in humanity, that we will evolve and reach higher levels of consciousness, creating a utopia on earth. But Jesus says this in John 6:35 *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."* And in John 7:37-38, He says, *"Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" Isn't it so amazing that in this world full of death and decay, a world that is groaning for things to be made new, that those who are in Christ Jesus can already start experiencing new life! We can experience the deep joy and peace of having our spiritual hunger and thirst satisfied through Jesus. Sometimes we just need to ask the Holy Spirit to blow our minds with how amazing this is!*

By Jane Kamper

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Revelation 21:1-6* -

Week 3: Tuesday Reading - I Am Making Everything New! (Part 3)

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12

And yet in this world we still only know in part (1 Corinthians 13:12). There is so much more to come and I yearn for the promise that is yet to be fulfilled. I yearn to look upon the beauty of God's creation without the marring of sin and shadow of death present. I yearn to finally be able to have a conversation with my non-verbal autistic son, to fully know and understand him. I yearn to be with my loved ones and brothers and sisters in Christ, never being parted again. I yearn to never hear another news story about cruelty, suffering and death. I yearn to see God and to dwell with Him with a perfect new body and in perfect relationship forever. What do you yearn for? Take hold of God's promise, He is making everything new through the reconciliation of the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only one worthy, in heaven, on earth or under the earth, through which this glorious promise will finally be fulfilled.

By Jane Kamper

Personal Reflections -

Prayer (Our prayer is taken from Revelation 5. I encourage you to read that passage in its entirety before praying and listen to the song, "Is He Worthy" by Andrew Peterson in private worship today.) -

Father God, thank you for the hope that we have in your promise. Thank you that we have new life now in the Spirit, because you gave your Son, Jesus to the world in perfect love. Thank you that we look forward to a time when all things will be made new; completely healed and whole forever. Lord Jesus Christ, You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise! To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! Amen.

Week 3: Wednesday Reading – A New Creation (Part 1)

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
he is a new creation.
The old has passed away;
behold, the new has come.
2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)*

I love a good “Before and After!!” You know those TV shows and magazines that take run down, unattractive homes and transform them top to bottom? The contrast between “before” and “after” are amazing!! A whole house reno feels a little overwhelming but I’ve done quite a few “before and afters” of furniture. I’ve been known to stop on the side of the road if I see a cast-off piece of furniture and throw into the back of my van. (The best are the ones with a big FREE sign on them!). I usually start by asking some questions to help me determine the process of restoration:

- What are the strengths of this piece? (Is it an especially or just a strong, sturdy piece?)
- What was its intended function or purpose?
- What needs to be gotten rid of? (toxic, lead paint)
- What can I add to it? (new hardware or paint)
- Does it need to be re-purposed for another use than originally intended?
- Does it need to be strengthened for durability?

One day while driving down the road, I spotted an old dresser on the curb with a big FREE sign on it. It was old, dirty and was missing its knobs. But, I could see it had potential! Once home I realized it was in way worse shape than I thought. One of the inside drawers had no bottom and the legs were barely hanging on. A good part of the top veneer had been peeled away from what appeared to be water damage. She looked like her best days were behind her. Even a little defeated. But as I said earlier, I love the inspiration of a good “Before and After”! So into the back of my van she went!

The first thing was to remove layers and layers of dirt and grime. With each rinse of my rag, I could see more and more of the original wood grain, but unfortunately could also see more of the scratches and water marks. Next, with the aid of some wood glue and a furniture screw, I securely attached the loose legs. I then called on my carpenter friend to rebuild the bottom and sides of the missing drawer. Then I had to figure out the missing veneer. Years of neglect and exposure to the elements had caused the veneer to bubble and crack. “Too much to patch” I thought, so instead, decided to remove the veneer all together. It was a slow, pain-taking process combining heat and water, which loosened the glue underneath and allowed it to be peeled away. If not done gently, with the right amount of heat and pressure, the veneer would not loosen and would damage the plywood beneath, leaving a rough and marred surface. After a long and tedious process, the old veneer was gone and I was able to sand the entire piece. As hard as I sanded, stubborn imperfections remained.

Week 3: Wednesday Reading – A New Creation (Part 1 Continued)

Thinking perhaps a coat of paint would help, I began to apply a layer of soft, blue paint. As it covered the dresser, I began to see a beautiful transformation take place. The unsightly, damaged dresser, now stood firmly on four, securely attached legs. With the layers of dirt cleaned away, it no longer smelled musty. The missing drawer now was fully functioning and could be used as it was intended. And the addition of shiny new knobs provided function and beauty. Since I didn't really need a bedroom dresser, I decided a new purpose awaited this cast-off piece of furniture. I placed it in the entry way to greet family and guests, providing a place for hats, gloves, car keys, etc... The old dresser was now useful and beautiful even with imperfections showing through. It was truly a new creation!

And then it occurred to me, "Is this what God can do in us when we choose to trust Him!"

By Kristy Mansfield

Personal Reflections –

Personal Prayer based on *2 Corinthians 5:17* -

Week 3: Thursday Reading – A New Creation (Part 2)

*“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the dessert”*
Isaiah 43:19 (ESV)

Maybe you’ve wondered how you can start anew. Maybe your journey has been difficult. Maybe some choices in your life have not been the best. Or perhaps life has just thrown some stuff your way that has left you feeling cast-off, like a piece of old furniture on the side of the road. And you’ve lost hope. But God is a God of Hope because He is the God of Restoration!

He has promised to do a good work in us and bring it to completion. It might involve *sanding away* attitudes or behaviors that are not healthy. Or *washing us clean* of shame and guilt with His loving hands. Maybe God will *ask us to give up things* that keep us stuck in anger, or bitterness. Like a piece of furniture, we require a steady, firm foundation to live the abundant life we were created for. God has promised to strengthen us with His Spirit and give us a new purpose that leads to life! And He can do that by using everything about us; our strengths and weaknesses, our imperfections, and all our broken, unsteady parts. God, and only God, brings wholeness, purpose and beauty.

*“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the dessert”*

What NEW thing is God doing in your life?

How will you respond to what may be uncomfortable and require some work on your part?

What might God be asking you to give up?

What might God want to add to strengthen you?

By Kristy Mansfield

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Isaiah 43:19* -

Week 3: Friday Reading – Paul: Apostle of Hope (Part 1)

*For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all.
Who hopes for what they already have? Romans 8:24*

On his way to Damascus to arrest and extradite Christians back to Jerusalem, Saul was confronted by Jesus, the very One whom he was persecuting. He was blinded and had to be held by the hand to get to Damascus, where he remained blind for three days. Thereafter, what followed was one of the most dramatic conversions in church history. Saul was renamed and became the apostle, Paul. His education and background as a Pharisee, including his Roman citizenship, all contributed to his successful ministry that followed.

Most recognizable are the numerous letters he wrote to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and others. Focusing on the great triad of Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. In his letters, Paul often used the word *'elpizo'* when referring to hope. In its Hebrew translation it can mean 'to hope,' 'to trust,' or 'to endure,'

Paul's encouragement and expressions of hope for believers are infused throughout all his writings. Such as Romans, where the believer, hope becomes a distinctive Christian virtue related to faith. Where hope, like faith is based on belief in the yet unseen promises of God. (8:24) *"For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?"* Therefore, hope provides strength for the believer facing present difficulties.

By Dave Beers

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Romans 8:24* -

Week 3: Saturday Reading – Paul: Apostle of Hope (Part 2)

*“while we wait for the blessed hope—
the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”
Titus 2:13*

In Titus, hope plays a role in Paul’s understanding of the end of the age. (2:13) Where he referred to Christ’s return as “the blessed hope.” Where he wrote that creation and believers would be gloriously transformed upon His return. Writing further in (Rom. 2-21) that *“the creation was subjected to futility, in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption.”*

Paul also wrote about how hope, at times, can disappoint if placed on an unreliable source. Then emphasizing the importance that hope is only effective if placed in the Lord.

Furthermore, he also focused on the future blessings that believers obtain by faith in Christ and His love for us in salvation. Writing to believers who had experienced persecution or challenged by suffering various hardships such as health issues or loss of a loved one. Then, encouraging them to maintain hope that rejoices despite their suffering as in (Rom. 12:12) *“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*

Therefore, in hope we can endure hardship as long as we keep our eyes fixed on God. As such, I will end in prayer using Paul’s own words in (2 Thess. 2: 16-17) *“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”* Amen

By Dave Beers

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer -

Week 4: Sunday Reading – When You Have No Words

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*
Psalm 121: 1,2

There's a beautiful mountain (more like a big hill!) at the end of my backyard that I can see from my bedroom. Whenever I'm facing a challenge, I sit on the edge of my bed, gaze at that mountain, pray and meditate on this verse.

When my daughter, Sarah, passed away, my despair was so profound that I didn't have the words to pray. So I would just sit and stare at my mountain and somehow that was enough. I felt close to God and words didn't seem necessary. I could sense His power and majesty through that mountain, and that's all I needed.

Sometimes in life, we don't have the words to pray and that's okay. God doesn't need long, flowery prayers but simply "help me, Lord". He sees our shattered hearts and profuse tears, and will draw close to us in those dark moments. He loves us no matter what we can or can't do, can or can't say, and that gives me hope.

By Beth McKeown

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Psalm 121: 1,2* -

Week 4: Monday Reading – Hope in the Power of God

Based upon Scripture from 1 Samuel 4-6

Israel was in despair, the Ark of the Covenant had been in battle captured by the Philistines and God's Glory had departed (1 Samuel 4). But God had another plan...

The Philistines put the ark in the temple of their god Dagon...

Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained. 1 Samuel 5:2-4

So for two nights the Philistine idol "fell" down next to the ark (broken on the second night). The people were afflicted by tumors (possibly similar to bubonic plague) in two different cities (1 Samuel 5:6-12).

Finally the Philistines had enough and returned the ark to Israel along with solid gold tumors and rats (not exactly appealing but solid gold is solid gold) using an unmanned cow cart (1 Samuel 6).

So the power of God overwhelmed the Dagon idol and the Philistines. Israel got her ark back with a valuable (albeit gross) offering. We must never underestimate the power of God.

By Steve McKeown

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on 1 Samuel 4-6 -

Week 4: Tuesday Reading – God is With Me

*Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,
for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”
... One of you routs a thousand,
because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised.
Josh 1:9, 23:10*

Did I hope to have cancer? Not in a million years. Do I have hope that I can beat this? Of course I do as I know God is with me. I have hope that God will use this experience for good. I am very blessed and I know the day after tomorrow is waiting for me.

By Brian Dean

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Josh 1:9, 23:10* -

Week 4: Wednesday Reading – Training for God’s Race

*For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things,
holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

1 Timothy 4:8

One of my hobbies is to do triathlons (swim, bike, run). Over the past decade I have trained for many types of races. Some races I have done well preparing for and others I have missed the mark on my training. The ones that I had not properly trained for, turned out to be painful races. Life is very similar to these races.

Many times our life consists of different events at the same time just like a triathlon. Whether it is struggling with our children, dealing with problems at work, relationship struggles, dealing with addiction, or health issues. The list goes on and on. All of these struggles are part of life’s triathlon. But how do you keep your hope? Just like preparing for a triathlon, we have to train and look to the word of God to give us the answers we need. Training helps our faith get stronger and brings us into closer fellowship with our Lord. The stronger our faith the easier it will be to finish the race. If you do not properly train, life can be very painful. Always put your hope in God.

By Chris Galli

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on 1 Timothy 4:8 -

Week 4: Thursday Reading – An Absolute in This Life

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Psalm 23

I guess if one was to set his or her sight on an absolute in this life it would be *The Lord is my Shepherd!* With this established, then all else would fall in place in His will. He is with us throughout our daily walk down the path of life. He protects us from our enemies, by preparing with His presence, our daily walk. With a comfort only He can provide, all our tomorrows go before Him today. Trust and obey our Shepherd Jesus and you will dwell with Him all the days of your life with a peace that surpasses all understanding.

There are absolutes in life. This is one of them. May God Bless your life!

By Gordie Pollard

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Psalm 23* -

Week 4: Friday Reading – Purpose and Meaning in Life (Part 1)

*May the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace as you trust in Him,
so that you may overflow with Hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 15:13

Victor Frankl, a holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, wrote a book called "Man's Search For Meaning". He noted that "Hope" was the key factor in those who survived the Nazi concentration camps and it was his life's work to share this truth with the world.

He wrote, "A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life, I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth — that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love."

What is the opposite of Hope? Yes, perhaps hopeless is the first thought that comes to mind. But what other words are connected to hopelessness? What keeps us from being a hopeful people, in large part, is faith. Or should we say a lack of faith. And what stops many from having faith is the inability to reconcile how a good God, can allow such pain and suffering in life. It is the age-old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

So can we start with a question? Do you "believe" that if there was less pain and suffering in the world, you would be more likely to believe in God? Would you then be more willing to know and follow him/her? If your answer is yes, I might ask you the question, "Why then are those who have found success with limited struggle, not more faith filled? What we often see is the opposite of that; those who have had the "blessed life" seem to struggle and deny the existent or relevance of God.

Conversely, many of those who have endured hardship and pain have deep conviction and faith in our God. You may say, "Yes, here is where the crutch of faith shows up. People need to believe in something to help them get through hardship and pain." So, which is it? I believe they are both false. Faith and hope are not related to your life circumstance but rather to your belief that there is purpose and meaning in life. And this belief comes from the knowledge we are deeply loved.

By J. Todd Mansfield

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Romans 15:13* -

Week 4: Saturday Reading – Purpose and Meaning in Life (Part 2)

*However, I consider my life worth nothing to me;
my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—
the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. Acts 20:24*

I can only testify to my personal experience with God. Since a young age I have had a desire to know and understand the meaning of life. Why am I here and what is my purpose? In the book, "The Jesus I never Knew", The author dives deeper into the stories of Jesus that we are most familiar with, uncovering connections and truths that might be missed as casual readers of scripture. As I read the book, it was as if someone had just shared with me the inside, secrets of life and how to play to win! I began to read my Bible daily with a new set of eyes, learning new insights each day. I have never read the Bible as if it was a "rule book" but rather the ultimate "play book". I am playing the game of life with the author of the game as my coach! I am getting instructions each day on how to navigate the game from a player-coach perspective. My coach and Lord Jesus, while He was playing, looked as if he was going to lose big!! But at the buzzer, He made the ultimate move so for the rest of time, all His players could live a life of filled with Hope.

I have found in my life and in my coaching career, struggle and adversity are the fertile ground for growth and maturity. My Hope comes from knowing that the suffering and pain will pass and the by-product is an abundant life of meaning, peace and love. Let me encourage you to open up the Bible and let our Coach begin to teach you how to play and succeed in this amazing game of life!!

By J. Todd Mansfield

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on Acts 20:24 -

Week 5: Sunday Reading

*“Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
But a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”*
Proverbs 13:12

I like definitions of words. The definition of deferred is “put off (an action or event) to a later time: postpone.” This action of putting something off can make one feel as if we are never going to get to the goal and thus, it makes our heart sick. This is a theme that I think we can all relate to at different points in our lives. Maybe it’s a struggle to find the right career, to get married, or to have children. There are many ways that deferment can make our heart sick.

Throughout all of my life deferments, I have always known two things. God was in control and life revolves around His timing not mine. Then we have the second half of the verse. The word desire stuck out to me. It means “a strong feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen.” When the Lord answers our prayers and fulfills our desires He also refills our hope. The saying “good things come to those who wait” can be true, but only if we wait upon the Lord’s timing. Psalm 61 teaches us to lean on the Lord in the hard times and make Him our refuge. Once we allow God take control and work in our lives we will finally be able to have our hopes in life fulfilled. It might not be what we expect. God is not a genie that we call upon to do whatever we want. He is so much better. He is our tree of life and our hope.

By Jesse Galli

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Proverbs 13:12* -

Week 5: Monday Reading

Before God, we are confident of this through Christ: not that we are qualified in ourselves to claim anything as our own work; all our qualifications come from God. He is the one who has given us the qualifications to be the administrators of this new covenant, which is not a covenant of written letters but of the Spirit: the written letters bring death, but the Spirit gives life. Having this hope, we can be quite confident.

2 Corinthians 3:4-6,12 (JB)

Throughout my career at IBM, my coworkers and I were called upon to produce various works of software to solve certain problems or fill particular needs. What I produced myself, I could put my name on without reservation. If it solved the problem, filled the need, and worked properly, it essentially recommended me to my peers and leaders. They could see that I had a proper grasp of the problem and the skills to solve it. If it failed in some way and had to be fixed (especially if someone else had to fix it), that "recommendation" would be more or less tarnished, depending on the amount of disruption to the work or to the customer. The thing was, my work reflected on me, and it was up to me to produce what I was called upon to do. Whether I succeeded or failed, I got the praise or blame.

How different it is working in the realm of God's kingdom. Not that we don't work: we do our best for Jesus' sake, and we are not working to create services or devices, but ultimately to affect hearts and minds. I have to keep reminding myself all the time, though, that the work that I do in God's service is not to get recognition for myself, not to create a "recommendation" for myself, but rather to glorify God. The work is not "all me", it is God's Spirit working through me. The recommendation, the qualification, and the competence for the work are of God and for God. Our confidence, our hope, comes from realizing that it is not "all us", but that God supplies all that we need for the work and produces the result through the Holy Spirit.

By Steve Sweeney

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on 2 Corinthians 3:4-6,12 -

Week 5: Tuesday Reading

But now, this is what the LORD says – he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior... Isaiah 43: 1 -3a

This passage in Isaiah gives us hope that no matter what happens to us God will always be with us!

This passage reminds me of a story from the book of Daniel, in chapter 3, where Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar made a 90 foot golden image that he commanded everyone to bow down and worship. There were 3 captives from Judah, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who refused to worship this golden idol even though the King threatened to throw them into a fiery furnace if they didn't. They told King Nebuchadnezzar "... the God we serve is able to save us from it (*the furnace*), and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." The king did throw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace but there was a fourth person with them in that furnace that protected them. They came out of that furnace without even the smell of smoke on their clothing!

There are many times in our life that we may be "passing through the waters" or "walking through the fire" and we can have hope and comfort that God walks through them with us and keeps us from being overwhelmed.

By Carol Sweeney

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Isaiah 43: 1 -3a* -

Week 5: Wednesday Reading – No More Tears

*After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God. They sang, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows." Then he said to me, "These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white. "That is why they stand in front of God's throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter. They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun. For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. **And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.**" Revelation 7:9-17*

Recently, Jan and I have had the privilege of taking care of all of our grandchildren, here in Endicott and in San Antonio. One of the responsibilities is to make sure each child takes their bath. We make sure we grab the right bottle of shampoo- the one that says – "No more tears!"

"No more tears" has served as the slogan for one of America's most successful consumer products – baby shampoo. Those three little words on a baby shampoo bottle have promised peace of mind to millions of parents as they help little ones out of their clothes and into the bathtub. You can understand why the slogan has been so effective. What kind of parents want a child to cry?

If only we could all go through life with no more tears, no more heartache, and no more grief! But we all know that isn't the way life here on earth works. Too many children in this world are forced to grow up with tears in their eyes – not from shampoo - but tears of hunger, of abandonment, of abuse. There is no guarantee as adults that we will be free from tears, either.

One thing that helps us hold onto hope in the midst of so much soul-numbing bad news and tears all around us is the privilege of coming before God in the company of others who share the hope that in the fullness of time God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. As we gather, we remember the words of **Revelation 7:9-17**, which describes a day when we will be gathered together in God's presence.

O God, what a gift that we can live as people of hope. What peace that we can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this Earth is not our final home. We long for the day when we will live a life of **No More Tears** and spend eternity with you. In the meantime, seal your promise that gives hope in our hearts. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

By Tim Devine

Personal Reflections & Prayer -

Week 5: Thursday Reading

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21: 1-5

I had an atheist friend who, when seeing a tragedy or a hardship on the news or in someone else's life, would turn to me and smugly say something like, "So, Jamie, where is your good God now, huh?"

To him, the formula was simple. Bad world = absent God. Others may equate it as bad world = bad God. And although it's completely wrong, it's understandable, isn't it? Even devout Christians find themselves often saying to what feels like a void, "Where are you, God?" when faced with our deepest trials.

But the truth of the Bible tells us that a world full of sin and brokenness is not at all an indicator of some flaw in God's character or a gap in His presence. It tells us that what God had in mind for us was the garden of Eden, a perfect creation in which His perfect creations would live with each other and with Him.

When we chose that first sin and fell from that place, we also fell from the way God wanted it to be for us. I believe it's why it says "Jesus wept." in John 11:35 when He hears of the death of His friend Lazarus. Jesus didn't want pain or death or crying or mourning for us. How heartbreaking it must've been for our all-knowing, all-loving, triune God to watch His children reject all that He had in store for us and be left in such despair.

And yet, the story isn't over.

We're in a rocky middle ground here in this life. No question about that. It's hard and it's long and it feels wrong...well, because it is. It's not how our Creator drew it up.

But Revelation 21 gives us HOPE for what is still to come, HOPE that our God is still in the creation business. He reassures His people again that He will make everything new. He did it once and -- hallelujah! -- He will do it again.

Can you picture the scene? No more crying, no more death, no more mourning, no more pain. Everything that is of this world washing away and everything that is of God staying in place. That's what we have to look forward to at the end of this life.

If ever we doubt that, may we read that verse 5 again and again until it sinks in: He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!....These words are trustworthy and true!"

So, as I've been asked, "Where is my good God now?" He's right here next to me, waiting with me for the brighter days ahead.

By Jamie Jacobs

Personal Reflections & Prayer -

Week 5: Friday Reading – . . . But, God . . . (Part 1)

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3: 4-7

In order to really understand what these verses are saying, we need some context. In the verses immediately preceding this Paul says,

“Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”

WOW. Paul never sugar-coats our natural inclinations and, really, our heart position towards God and all that is good apart from Him. He could have summarized and said, “For we ourselves were once...evil.” I think we need to let that sink in. We were enemies of God, and children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2). We had turned aside, and together become worthless. Our throats were an open grave. Not one was righteous, not one seeking God (Romans 3).

Dwelling on this may feel like the antithesis of hope. And it would be, if that was the end of the story. But we know it’s not. Because with our God, there is always a

“...but, God...”

Oh Hallelujah for these words: “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, **but according to his own mercy...**”

There was nothing righteous about us to cause God to love us. PRAISE GOD! If we didn’t earn the Father with our works, then we can’t lose the Father by our works!

When we actually believe in the Truth that Jesus (God, himself) has chosen to submit to the will of the Father, by bearing the punishment and wrath of Himself reserved for *us* because of our sin—and that he did this because:

- IT PLEASES HIM TO SHOW MERCY to the ones he created and loves
- It puts on display his perfect holiness and justice that sin would not be glossed over, but that it would be righteously punished

Then, we can have hope. Why? Because none of this was up to us to accomplish. God did ALL the work. In His loving kindness, he chose to show us our depravity and fate apart from him. In His loving kindness, he chose to be our rescuer. And then, in his loving kindness, he “gave us new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life” (NLT Titus 3: 5-7).

By Karli Campbell

Personal Reflections & Prayer -

Week 5: Saturday Reading – . . . But, God . . . (Part 2)

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:13b-14

In Ephesians 1 it says, “When you believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the *guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it*, to the praise of his glory.”

There it is, in black and white. Those words are HIS words. And now his character is on the line to keep that promise. And if God does not keep his promises, then he would cease to be God. But, he is the same yesterday, today and forever, so our God ALWAYS keeps his word.

We did nothing to earn our adoption into Gods family, and in fact, we were “obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world (NLT Ephesians 2).” Yet, in his loving kindness, while we were still sinners, he accomplished our salvation. And then “poured [his spirit] out richly upon us.” And the spirit is not just our seal, but the one who “leads us into all the truth (John 16).” And Gods word (THE truth), says that God will never forsake us. He will never leave us. He is the God who put flesh on and dwelt among us. He is the God who said “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11).”

In Dane Ortlunds book “Gentle and Lowly,” he explains that the greek word translated “gentle” here means “meek, humble, gentle.” He says, “Jesus is not trigger-happy. Not harsh, reactionary, easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms.”

And now, let that sink in. His most natural inclination is to draw us in with open arms. That is our God. When the world is quite literally falling apart, and despair feels like all that is left. When evil seems to be winning and we have absolutely nothing to offer. He is the God who awakened us, rescued us, gave us his spirit so we may be led into all the truth, and responds to us all our days with willing, understanding, open arms. For those who believe in him, He is the safest place to be. And just like we needed God to act on our behalf for salvation, we need and can depend on Him to sustain us. We are never too far gone. There is nothing in all the world that can tear us from the grip of his love.

And not only that, but that same Spirit will take every ounce of our joy, and grief, our happiness and sorrow, and use it to conform us to the image of Christ. He does not leave us how he finds us. He patiently, and tenderly molds his beloved to look like Himself. He is so good.

By Karli Campbell

Personal Reflections & Prayer –

Week 6: Sunday Reading – Who Will Sound the Call? (Part 1)

Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?
1 Corinthians 14:8

In the past week it has become clear to me that there is a battle going on for the hearts and minds and most importantly the souls of many in our country. Literally four friends have either attempted suicide or contemplated it along with several of their family members. I hear from myself and many others a deafening silence on what is the only answer to such despair and hopelessness. The world and all of its explanations along personal options on life's meaning and purpose have left us in misery, confusion, and despair. This is not the way life has to be. You are not here by accident. You are not a product of "star stuff" as some great scholars espouse. You do not originate from primordial soup in a non-directed and random chance. Rather you were created by a Divine Being with special skills and talents. You are deeply loved.... and the creator of this universe has allowed us to know Him, see Him and be in relationship with Him. When we come to know the Creator, it changes everything in our lives. It gives us Hope for now and for a future.

By Todd Mansfield

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Scripture Reference* -

Week 6: Monday Reading – Who Will Sound the Call? (Part 2)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

Look at creation. Look at the order, majesty and grandeur of the universe. Consider one small change in creation in any direction and life as we know it completely changes. We hear about this daily in regards to global warming and our environment - small subtle changes in a molecule as simple as carbon may have a life altering consequence.

Then we consider the special revelation of Jesus. Remember that this one person and his life and teachings has changed the course of history. Today our time is based on his life. BC and AD. More poetry, books, songs and buildings are based on this single life than any other in world history. So, Jesus and His teaching matter. We in America today give little to no attention to Jesus and His relevance to life in 2021. The cultural pressure to embrace or at least remain silent on the progressive social changes that are occurring almost daily around us is real. The explanation for the increase in mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, hate, lying, and the breakdown of the nuclear family somehow has become a political issue of blame.

Today I say to my friends who want to hear the Truth as I understand it. God is real. You can know Him. He came in the form of a man 2000 years ago. He lived for 33 years and gave us an example of what a complete and whole life should look like. He was kind, caring compassionate and he loved deeply. He came with purpose and meaning in His life. He was His Father's willing sacrifice to show His love and care for all of His creation. After he died for Humanity, He rose from the grave to break the hopeless bondage of death for all time. Jesus ascended to His Father but left us with the "Holy Spirit." As real as hopelessness and despair are in people's life, so is the presence of the Holy Spirit when he enters our life. This spirit is the one that can take all the hurt, pain, anger, shame, and confusion and give you a clarity to work through it. It is this Spirit that allows us to forgive and be forgiven. It is this Spirit that stirs your soul to realize you are loved and you can love others. It is this Spirit that you can talk to and lean on when life gets really hard and very lonely. It is through this Spiritual lens that you can look at all situations and circumstance and move with confidence and hope that you are following the will of your maker.

By Todd Mansfield

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Scripture Reference* -

Week 6: Tuesday Reading – Who Will Sound the Call? (Part 3)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made;
without him nothing was made that has been made.
In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*
John 1:1-4

If God made us all for a purpose and reason, there is no better place to go to than Him. For He knows how you can maximize the use of our life. I continue to be amazed when I read my Bible about how much I admire and want to be like Jesus. He had an ability to deeply love and care for the spirit and soul of all those he came in contact with. Many years ago, I said yes Jesus I want to know you better.

I began reading His book, the number 1 best selling book of all time, the Bible. It is not hard to read. Go to the book of John and start there. Just read what it says and ask God to speak to you as you read it. I believe He will speak to you if you are willing to listen. What does it say? John 1:1 - 4 *In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made: without him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life is the light of all mankind.* For some of you this might be your first Bible lesson.

It says that God was in the beginning and that He alone is responsibility for creating everything. It also says that God was not alone in the beginning but He was with the Word - then it goes on to say that the Word was God... confusing but interesting. We find several sentences down in our reading that it will say "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, speaking of Jesus. Jesus and the Word are the same! To finish it says God gives us life and light - both of which will be explained and explored further as we read... If we can read the Bible from the perspective that the author and the creator of this game called life wrote it, we will learn pearls of wisdom and knowledge that will forever change our journey and our lasting legacy... and it will give us a Hope for today and our future that no one else can give. Say yes to Jesus and follow Him!!!

By Todd Mansfield

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Scripture Reference* -

Week 6: Wednesday Reading

*“Look, I am coming soon!
Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”
Revelation 22:7*

Maybe it is because I am beginning to get old that it appears to me we are in a great race to the bottom. Crime, drugs, street violence, unnatural sexual relationships are common, corruption in government at all levels, enormous national debt, and deep divisions seem to be growing every day in our country. Romans 1:28 – 32 pretty much describes our conditions today. The old testament is a history of many cycles of humanity out of control and God’s interaction to restore order and righteous Godliness. We are in a copy of those cycles.

We are heading at flank speed for Gods promised great restoration, the second coming of Jesus Christ. The highest hope of every believing Christian, the hope of eternal life when God will walk among his people. “I will live with them and walk among them and I will be their God and they will be my people” 2 Corinthians 6:16. What a wonderful hope for the future.

Meanwhile one of our prime jobs as Christians is to bring the message of the hope of our salvation and God’s plan to all we can because the time is truly getting short. **“Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”** The very words of Jesus Christ in Revelations 22:7. **“Yes, I am coming soon”** Revelations 22:20.

That message has been around for two thousand years. God does not wish that anyone should perish, 2 Peter 3:9, a little further on Peter reminds us that God keeps his promises and in the last days scoffers and false teachers will come. The time is truly short for our unbelieving friends and relatives. We need to develop a real sense of urgency to reach them.

Our hope is true.

By Ede Sornberger

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Revelation 22:7* -

Week 6: Thursday Reading – Grow Where You are Planted (Part 1)

*“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.
Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.
Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”*

Jeremiah 29: 5, 7

Jeremiah chapter 29 is a letter to the exiles in Babylon from the prophet Jeremiah providing hope to the people while in captivity for many generations under King Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah calls on the people to essentially buckle in and live life, because it is going to get worse before it gets better. Jeremiah proceeds to prescribe radical ways to exiles to have hope in the midst of hardship. This was radical for that time and even more radical in today's society where we are falsely told we are always to be happy and life is easy. These lies set us up for failure. As Jeremiah reminded the exiles, hope can be found through the Lord, verses 11-14. True for the exiles, even more true for us today.

I have experienced this hope to grow where planted in my life. Nearly 36 years ago, Sharon and I had a hard decision to make, where to plant after earning our college degrees. The economy in Michigan in the mid 80's was not good. Michigan is where we both grew up with our families and friends; however, jobs where we could be together were not available in Michigan. We had job offers from GE and IBM in the Triple Cities and off we went. We fully engaged in the area, enjoying the beauty and began to establish roots – making friends, buying a home, finding FPC:E (now Living Hope Church), starting a family – we were growing where planted.

Then changes in the area began causing friends to move away; the area transitioned from booming to depressed; and eventually IBM told Sharon her job would be in Minnesota. We chose to stay even though things would look very different. Uncertainties of moving from two incomes to one along with GE being on its third corporate owner did not make this an easy choice to stay; but we buckled in and continued to grow where we were planted.

Even though not what society would tell us to do, but through examples of godly friends at FPC:E, we stayed. God had earlier guided us to FPC:E and there we learned to trust in the Lord and we did. Our faith has grown through these hard decisions and we are thankful for the decisions that brought us here and kept us here in challenging times. By Bryan Early

Personal Reflections & Prayer -

Lord, continue to work on me to find Hope in you when I have been challenged by where I am planted. Like the image of the tree growing in rock, with God we can grow where we are planted. Let me remember to turn to you more and remember you are with me, no matter what planted challenge is in front me.



Week 6: Friday Reading – Grow Where You are Planted (Part 2)

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart I will be found by you,” declares the Lord. Jeremiah 11-14a (NIV)

As I become less young and my body continues to change in ways I don't care for, I fall on the example I have had though my Dad. Dad has been challenged through physical changes he has had to go through. He has provided a rock-solid example of what it looks like to grow where planted in the midst of physical changes that nobody should ever incur.

When I was in 6th grade, Dad worked at the local grain elevator. He was doing normal activities and for some reason the lift that carried people and equipment from the basement to the top of the grain bins stopped moving. Unknown to him, the cable system continued to run unwinding the lift cables. When he released the brakes to allow the lift to move, the lift fell all the way to the basement since the cables were not taut. The fall resulted in his heels being crushed, forced into his ankles, a severely broken leg and major compression damage to his back. He was told he was not likely to walk again at 31. Through countless surgeries and his fortitude, he regained his ability to walk but has dealt with constant pain since then. In spite of the injuries and initial surgeries he continued to grow where he was now planted.

Dad went to college for the first time since he had entered the Air Force directly out of High School. He lived life as normal as possible including continue to coach and support us through it all. Coaching my baseball teams was done on crutches for several seasons. When in high school, he was in a walking cast and while pitching batting practice, took a line drive to his cast that left a deep imprint of the ball in the cast. He really couldn't hide that he was doing more than doctor's orders. The surgeon was not too happy that he was pitching but Dad was driven to not let injuries define him.

Like Jeremiah challenging the exiles, Dad buckled in and grew where he was now planted, allowing those around him to see there are better ways to deal with what we have been given. It has been a long time since high school, but when I have run into former teammates, they bring up the example Dad set.

Since his initial injury and surgeries, more health challenges came. He has had two open heart surgeries, the first one at 41 due to associated family genetic heart issues, along with more surgeries on his feet and back to help with pain and mobility. He does not ever complain about what he has been given but chooses to overcome his physical situation.

I'm thankful for Dad's example, even though I would never, ever want what he has overcome on anyone. Dad has given me a living example of Jeremiah's radical challenge to the exiles and proof through God that bad situations are better with Him.

By Bryan Early

Personal Reflections & Prayer -

Week 6: Saturday Reading

*but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31*

Isaiah 40:31 always inspires me. Plus, I've never felt closer to God then when I'm standing on the sand by the ocean. I see and feel the endlessness of the ocean, the depth and power of His love. Both of these things give me a strong Faith and Hope.

By Bev Conklin

Personal Reflections -

Personal Prayer based on *Isaiah 40:31* -

And that's a wrap!

We're glad that you've taken this journey with us. Our goal as a church is to help people find hope in Jesus, hope for our community and a home in his church. Our prayer is that this six week devotional adventure has helped you find hope in Scripture and from people's sharing of where they find their hope. Here are some potential next steps:

1. Keep up your practice of daily quiet time. It takes about six weeks to establish a new habit. Guess what... you've been doing this for six week! Don't lose your momentum now. Set aside a few minutes every day to read, reflect, journal, and pray. You'll be stunned at what a difference it makes in your day.
2. Most of all, keep looking for ways to build hope and to share hope. You know people who need the same hope that you have. Don't be afraid to share it with them!

Thanks for being a part of The Hope Campaign! We can't wait to see what God does next.

The Team at Living Hope Church