



# HOPE STARTS HERE

March 30–April 4, 2020

*As we face this challenging time of social distancing, we want to join in daily devotionals, structured around our church's Core Values, to encourage us in our walk with God. We invite you to open by reading the Bible passage(s) for each day, then read the devotional text. Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture and the text. Then close in prayer, including the prompt for each day but adding the praises and prayers that are on your own heart. May God bless his people through this time as we seek his face together!*

**March 30—Found People Find People**

Pastor Rich Bennett

## **BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING**

[Genesis 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6](#)

God is at work in the midst of this pandemic. Daily God is choosing to work in us and through us because he loves us. This isn't new; Abram's life completely changed when the Lord declared to him, "Go... and I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing."

Elizabeth and I took a trip to Iceland in 2011. Iceland is full of waterfalls. It seems like almost everyone who lives outside the city has a waterfall in their backyard. I remember walking up to and actually behind one particular waterfall. With immense power, the water descended over the rocks and into a large pool. Just 50 yards away flowed a gentle stream only a few feet wide—whose source was that same roaring waterfall. One moment the water was rushing and powerful; a short time later it was a quiet brook.

God said to me in that moment, "This is what my Holy Spirit and my blessings are like." He is powerful yet gentle. In Christ, God has richly and powerfully blessed us with his promises and the incomparable blessings of his presence in love—not so that we can store them up and say, "Look what I have!" but so that with love and gentleness we may pass them on to others.

What can you do to bless others? Let your neighbors know you're praying for them. Let the clerks in stores know you appreciate them. Remember, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully." While you practice social distancing, ask God how you can be a bountiful blessing, especially to those who are lost, distant from the knowledge of his powerful and gentle presence.

**Prayer prompt:** Holy Spirit, strengthen us in your gentle power so that we may become a blessing to those who don't know you yet.

**A SERVICE-FILLED HOME**

[Galatians 5:13-18](#)

During this season, “Saved People Serve People” can seem like a bit of a paradox: How can I serve someone while maintaining social distance?

Right off the bat, social distancing during this time is 100 percent a form of loving service to one another. But there are plenty of other ways you can do your part in this season. Let’s not forget this passage in Galatians that warns us against falling to the flesh, and instead encourages us to live in loving service to one another.

When speaking of service with our kids, I often encourage them to think of creative ways to serve their families in the home. It’s something we often forget as adults. The following are some practical ways to serve one another in this season:

- Parents, instead of setting an example of complaining about our current situation, lead your kids in conversations about how best to serve one another in the home, and pray for those in need.
- If someone is working from home, instead of letting the kids run rampant or losing your temper, talk together about how to serve that family member by creating a good work environment or helping with extra chores.
- Instead of spending all of your time streaming movies or playing games, volunteer for one of the “Washing Feet” service opportunities. Something as simple as being a gentle voice for a shut-in can make all the difference.

Dare to think outside of the box. Take some time, alone or as a family, to think through how you can serve others during this time. This can not only help to improve the morale of others, but also the morale in your very own home. The Christian walk is not about me, it’s about us.

**Prayer prompt:** Jesus, help us to have hearts of service, and let it begin within our own homes.

**HARDSHIP TO GLORY**

[2 Corinthians 4:16-18](#)

Whether your hardship is an effect of COVID-19 or part of your everyday life, God can use it for greater and better things than we can see right now.

I know this concept isn't new; we're taught very early on that God can use anything for his glory. But how does God's ability to move in this world become a reality to you in a time when everything is changing so rapidly? What does it look like to grow deeper with Christ through a time that provides little stability?

If I could encourage you for a moment—press into the hardships and trust that God will do great things with our surrender. He is shaping our hearts to reflect his Son and is able to use anything to accomplish that. Ask him to show you how he wants to deepen your faith. Look for the ways he can change your heart.

**Prayer prompt:**

Jesus, I need to give myself up. I am not strong enough to love you and walk with you on my own. I can't do it, and I need you. I need you deeply and desperately. I believe you are worth it, that you are better than anything else I could have in this life or the next. I want you. And when I don't, I want to want you. Be all in me. Take all of me. Have your way with me. Amen.

— *Crazy Love*, Francis Chan

## SOCIAL DISTANCE

[2 Timothy 4:6-22](#)

When I read Paul's letters, I'll admit I often gloss over these concluding verses. Paul has just finished a letter of powerful exhortation, and he turns to obscure names and housekeeping: "Bring me my winter coat, Timothy, and my books and papers."

But these final verses speak quietly to Paul's need—and ours—for companionship. "All deserted me," he writes. As we continue in this time of social distancing, many of us may be echoing him. Our usual routines are disrupted, and we miss a conversation over coffee, the hug of a friend.

But we also see in Paul's words the blessing of genuine relationships. He is grateful for Luke. He hints at reconciliation with Mark after the events of Acts 15. He reflects on his friendship with Priscilla and Aquila, and especially with Timothy himself.

We have the challenge of using this time to the utmost. Do we withdraw, or do we take time to reconnect with family, neighbors and friends? Even as we are physically separated, this season has potential for us to draw closer than we have in a long time.

And in our own separation, we can be encouraged by Paul's confidence: "The Lord stood by me and strengthened me," he writes, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom."

May we all be aware of God's presence with us this day. And may we be Jesus' hands and feet to ensure that no one feels alone.

**Prayer prompt:** God, remind us that you are always with us. Enable us to strengthen our relationships in love.

**FIRSTFRUITS**

[Romans 8:18-25](#)

One of my temptations, and I'm sure I'm not alone, is to give God my leftovers. I want to find my security in what I have, and I will then gladly be generous with the excess.

But that is not how God defines generosity. Or obedience. Ancient Israel followed the practice of “firstfruits.” Before they ate even one loaf of bread from the grain harvest, they were to present a portion to God. This was to remind them that God was the one who gave them the land, the rain to grow the wheat, and the harvest. They gave God the first, trusting him to provide the whole.

In the middle of this section of Romans, Paul says that we have “the firstfruits of the Spirit.” God has not asked his people to do any more than he himself has done. He has given us his Holy Spirit in anticipation of our future glory, when we will be made completely new.

That harvest is only possible because of Jesus' own sacrifice, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). God gave us the way, the truth and the life. He has given us the first, and we trust him to make us whole.

So while there is a temptation, especially in uncertain times, to give God our leftovers, he calls us to the exact opposite. I need to trust him with the first, because the whole harvest is his.

**Prayer prompt:** Father, grant us the faith to give you our first and best, remembering that for us, you did all that and more.

## JOIN TOGETHER IN THE BAND

### [Psalm 150](#)

King David had many talents. Among them, he was an accomplished musician and prodigious songwriter. I picture David on his throne, or sitting cross-legged on the palace floor, gently plucking his lute or lyre and singing his most heartfelt praises to God. I can also imagine others surrounding him and listening in awe and quiet appreciation of his musical gifts. The Lord, also, was assuredly pleased with David's worship.

But David wasn't content with only worshipping as a soloist. He loved playing with a band. His Psalms frequently exhort others to join in, whatever the location or circumstance. Read Psalm 150 again and count the number of instruments listed. Even the best one-man band couldn't handle all of those!

Despite his ability to worship individually, David implored others to join in loud, clangorous, uproarious, joyful explosions of communal praise to God.

I admit to an affection for "loud-sounding cymbals," but I'm certain God has no preference relative to numbers or types of instruments or voices, or the volume of the worship. That is especially important to consider in our present, unique circumstances. God deserves our praise. We, who are truly alive in Jesus, are called upon to worship him. And he is pleased with our heartfelt worship no matter if we are "in his sanctuary" or "in his mighty expanse" --- or in our living room.

Praising God at home during our online live streaming Sunday services is worship. Continuing to financially and prayerfully support the ministries and administration of the church is worship. Performing acts of kindness to others is worship. As we each do these things, in Jesus' name, regardless of location or circumstances, we are still worshipping communally.

In this hopefully brief circumstance of "social distancing," we can all still join together in the band!

**Prayer prompt:** Holy Spirit, remind us throughout the day, every day, to worship God in our words, thoughts and deeds.

Join us for our live-streamed service at 10 a.m. Sunday!

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