



# HOPE STARTS HERE

May 11-16, 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. Open by reading the Bible passage(s) for each day, then read the devotional text. Take a few moments to reflect, 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 us as we seek his face together!*

**May 11—Found People Find People**

Pastor Rich Bennett

## **GOD LOVES USING OUR WEAKNESSES**

[2 Corinthians 12:1-10](#)

“For the sake of Christ... I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities.” This statement from Paul is curious and powerful. How many of us in the body of Christ are willing to declare contentment for the stuff that happens to us in the midst of life? What is fascinating about Paul’s list is that he is describing what naturally comes as a result of following Jesus and living life. These are experiences in life apart from sin that can lead us into our own poor choices.

At the heart of Paul’s statement are the words “for the sake of Christ.” These words put all of life into perspective for those who love and follow Jesus. Every breath we breathe, every action we make ought to be “for the sake of Christ.” When our life is aligned with this principle, we also are able to hear Jesus say to us, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Why is this so important?

We live in a world that was broken and hurting even before this pandemic. When we are able to be content in the midst of life’s challenges and difficulties and know the sufficiency of Christ’s grace, we have a testimony that our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends, our communities need to hear in their time of need.

Let us declare today, “For the sake of Christ, I am content even though \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Prayer prompt:** Lord Jesus, make your grace sufficient for me. Strengthen me so that everything I do may be done for your sake.

**SERVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY**

[Ephesians 6:7-8; 1 Peter 5:5-6; Matthew 25:34-40](#)

In our first passage, Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus, to those who have accepted Christ, so that they may be encouraged to live in such a way that God's love is shown through them. Paul's words remain true and relevant for believers today.

I love what he says in verse 7: serve *wholeheartedly*, not as if we are serving people but as if we are serving God. I think he words it this way because when we serve people there are usually biases involved. It is possible that we don't think they *deserve* our service. Maybe we think they don't *need* our service. Perhaps we even feel that we are above them and should not have to serve them.

So what does God's word tell us about these things? We are to humble ourselves. "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5b). We are to serve wholeheartedly. And how we treat others is how we are treating God. "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

As you go about your day today, pay attention to what God is doing around you. Look for opportunities to serve others. Find at least one person in your life to serve in some way each day. Be a blessing; be a light.

**Prayer prompt:** Heavenly Father, I thank you for opportunities to serve. I thank you for those who have served me over the years, and I ask that you show me when, whom and how you would like me to serve. Then, Lord, give me your courage and your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit to do so, and to do so wholeheartedly.

**WITH HIM FOREVER**

[1 Thessalonians 5:9-11](#)

One day, unless the Lord comes in the clouds, Pastor Geoff Schultz is going to die. I've thought more about my own mortality in the last few weeks than perhaps ever before. Knowing full well that relatively healthy individuals have succumbed to COVID-19 has caused me to think about my own death.

I suspect others have done the same. To think about our demise is not necessarily morbid. In fact, it can be a healthy exercise to consider questions of preparedness: Am I prepared to take my last breath? On what basis do I expect God to allow me into heaven? Am I just hoping that I am better than other people and that God will grade on the curve?

When I was young, I decided to ask Jesus Christ to save me from my sins. Today, my hope is in God, who proclaims in his Word that I am destined to obtain salvation whether I am awake or asleep—that is, whether I live or die, I am alive with God.

I have never lived a day of my life—not one—without falling short of God's standards of love and holiness. So how can I know that I will be alive with God forever and ever?

Paul gives the answer before the question is fully asked. The answer is Jesus Christ. Jesus alone. Because of his death, there will be no wrath toward me. Not because of my perfection; my sins, my guilt and my punishment fell on my Savior, Jesus Christ. He died for us—that's what God's Word says.

Therefore, I am free from guilt, free from punishment, secure in God's merciful favor. "Live or die," God says, "you will be with me."

**Prayer prompt:** Jesus, help me to place my trust in you alone. Enable me with confidence to lead others to your cross and to build up my brothers and sisters in your truth and grace.

**PROMISED**

[John 16:16-33; 2 Timothy 2:8-13](#)

I think it's in our nature—I know it's in mine—to focus on things such as grace, steadfast love, mercy and salvation when prompted to reflect on God's promises. But John 16:33 reminds us of a promise that often we forget: "In this world, you will have trouble and suffering." There's no wiggle room here. It's not as if we can work hard enough or pray loud enough to avoid hardship. Even Jesus had to endure more pain than we can imagine.

Dr. Thomas Constable writes, "The tension that the victory of Christ and the opposition of the world pose for the Christian is not one that we can escape in this life. Notwithstanding, it is possible for us to be more peaceful than distressed as we realize and believe that Jesus has already won the victory."

The rest of John 16:33 shows us that hope: "Take heart! I have overcome the world."

But take note, not all of our hardship will be because of the direct effects of sin in this world. Some trials come because we are called to live a life set apart. 2 Timothy 2:11 calls us to die with Christ, for it is there that we will find life. In your death to Christ, you will find true life. That is good news worth rejoicing over.

The Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr seems to be a fitting reflection on these passages; his original version is below. If you want to go a little further, the Skit Guys have a skit entitled ["The Serenity Prayer,"](#) and I would suggest that to you as well.

**Prayer prompt:** Father, give us courage to change what must be altered, serenity to accept what cannot be helped, and the insight to know the one from the other.

## THE GREATEST INVESTMENT

[Ecclesiastes 11:1-2](#)

I enjoy reading The Message version of the Bible sometimes because of the language it uses. Specifically, this passage in Ecclesiastes says, “Be generous: Invest in acts of charity. Charity yields high returns. Don’t hoard your goods; spread them around. Be a blessing to others.”

In the Message, this passage is titled, “Invest in Many Ventures.” The reason I love this version is because the wording, to me, makes it clear that we are talking about more than just money. The greatest investment we can make is in people, and as Christians we are called to serve and be charitable. Charity is much more than just giving donations; it’s giving of yourself to a cause for the sake of others.

As we enter into this season of re-opening, it’s important to begin to think through where God can use you. Whom does he want you to invest in when the time comes? What talents has he gifted you with so as to give back and serve others? Personally, I’m never going to turn someone down who has a heart to invest in our kids!

**Prayer prompt:** Father, reveal to me the gifts I may have ignored, and burden my heart with the people you want me to serve.

**NOT THE SAME**

[Ezra 3:10-13](#)

Church has looked a bit different for the past few weeks—you might have noticed. I know that has been hard for most of us. It's not the same. And even as things open back up, and we are able to gather in the Sanctuary again, it still won't be the same. We'll still have social distancing measures in place, and those who are at a higher risk from this virus will still be worshipping from home.

When Ginger and I served in China, our team of five met each Saturday evening for worship and dinner. We listened to audio files of sermons we'd downloaded (in the times our internet connection was fast enough), and we had a few old hymnals. Our acapella attempts at four-part harmonies were far from beautiful, but they were joyful.

Then, during Chinese New Year, we would gather in Thailand with teachers from across Asia for meetings, fellowship and worship. After months of worshipping as just a "family" of five, with recorded sermons and rusty harmonies, we joined with more than 500 brothers and sisters to lift up our voices in praise. I wept for joy through the first three songs—and I only knew two of them.

Yet after the conference, it was a surprising blessing to once again gather in a living room as just our team: flat notes, faceless pastor and all.

Maybe that whole experience has made this unusual season easier for me. In some ways, I have been here before, and I have learned that whether the group is small or large, God's steadfast love endures forever, and he is still worthy of our praise.

It will be a little while yet before we gather again. When we do so, some of us will shout for joy. Some of us may feel a lingering sadness that it isn't the same. Whatever you feel, and even as we wait for that day, lift up your eyes and your voice to the Lord, "for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." Let our honest outpouring to God in worship blend together in a sound that is heard far away.

**Prayer prompt:** Holy Spirit, whether we are in our living room or in our church building, remind us that you are still present. Remind us that you are good, and your steadfast love endures forever.

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

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