



Ridge Point Community Church

# JOURNEY

February 8 – March 5, 2010

## WEEK 1 – February 13 & 14

Title – Faith

Text - John 4:43-45; James 2:14-26

MONDAY, February 8, 2010

### Seeing Things

Suppose you are walking through the woods and you spot a nest in the low-hanging branches of a tree. You inch quietly closer and peer through the twigs to see three baby-blue eggs lying in the bottom. You leave the eggs alone, for you know that a robin made the nest, takes care of it and the babies about to be born, and will soon return to the nest. You do not need to see the robin to know this is true.

In the same way, everywhere we look around us we see evidence of the God who made the world and us. The order of the universe and the beauty of nature point to the love and care of God. In the book of Hebrews, we learn this definition of faith:

***“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see... By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”*** Hebrews 11:1,3\*

We cannot perceive God with our senses. Yet we see evidence that God exists and so put our trust in Him. We have faith that God will take care of our needs, but we need to trust them into His capable hands. When we put our trust in God, we are ***“sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”***\*

### QUESTIONS

1. Where do you see the evidence of God and His care for the world?
2. For what needs can you put your trust in Him?

### PRAYER

*Lord, thank You for the way You show Yourself to us and provide for our needs. Help us to trust You for our needs and to walk by faith, even when we cannot see the outcome. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\*Hebrews 11:1,3. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

TUESDAY, February 9, 2010

## True Peace

When I was younger, we used to sing the song “I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart.” One of the verses of this song went, “I’ve got the peace that passes understanding down in my heart.” At that age, I didn’t know what I was singing; I just thought it was a fun tongue-twister.

Now that I’m a little older, I have a little better idea of what that song meant. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, we read,

***“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”***- Romans 5:1-2\*

When we decide to follow Jesus and live a life of faith, the result is peace with God. Faith is more than just knowing *what* we believe, it is a sense of assurance and security. We have peace and comfort with God because of our faith. This is a peace that passes understanding – it is a deep-rooted sense of assurance. We can trust God that our sins have been forgiven, we have been made right with Him, and we have received salvation.

### QUESTION

1. Do you live with the peace that passes understanding?

### PRAYER

*Lord, give us Your peace in our hearts. Help us to live our lives in the comfort of knowing that our sins have been forgiven and that we have received the gift of grace. Thank You for the work of your Spirit, who assures us of our salvation. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\*Romans 5:1-2. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEDNESDAY, February 10, 2010

### Fixing It

Imagine your car breaks down and you take it to your local mechanic. The mechanic looks at the car and tells you what's wrong. You ask him how much it will cost to fix, but he says "Well, I know how to fix it, but I don't want to do it." You probably won't go back to this mechanic for your next repairs, right?

Sometimes, we do the same thing in our lives. We say that we believe in Jesus and follow Him, but our deeds don't match our actions. We know that we ought to think, love, serve and live like Jesus, but we decide we don't want to. James wrote,

***"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."***

James 2:14-17\*

Our faith ought to have a radical impact on the way we treat others. A living faith will express itself in loving actions towards others. To say, "I have faith" is to declare that this faith has impacted your life. Like the mechanic who knows how to fix the car but then uses that knowledge for good, we learn how to show Christ-like love to others and then do so.

### QUESTIONS

1. If someone looked at your actions this past week, would they see a life that reflects your faith?
2. To whom can you show Christ-like love this week?

### PRAYER

*Lord, help us to live more like You and to show Your love to those around us. Help our faith to be a living faith, overflowing in good works. Give us opportunities to live out our faith, for Your honor and glory. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\*James 2:14-17. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

THURSDAY, February 11, 2010

## Labels

We are a society of labels. We tend to classify everyone we meet, whether based on skin color, gender, socio-economic status, or even belief. Families split and friendships end when people can't set aside their labels. Sometimes, we let our labels get in the way of expressing the love of Jesus Christ.

Paul tells us that we shouldn't let our labels dictate our actions or attitudes. The church in Galatia was arguing over whether or not someone needed to be circumcised to be a Christian. Paul tells them this is unimportant:

***“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”***- Galatians 5:6\*

Circumcised and uncircumcised don't matter to Jesus. All of the labels we come up with in our society simply do not matter in the eyes of God. The only thing that matters is faith demonstrated through Christ-like love to the person underneath the label.

## QUESTIONS

1. When you look at other people what do you see? A label or a human being?
2. How can you show Christ's love to those with whom you come into contact?

## PRAYER

*Lord, help us to set aside the labels we use to keep ourselves away from others. Help us to remember that the only thing that matters in Your eyes is faith living and loving like Christ. Amen.*

## REFERENCE

\*Galatians 5:6. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

FRIDAY, February 12, 2010

## Knowing Him

Do you know the President? Certainly many of us know about him. We can give his name, significant details about his life, some of his political positions, our thoughts on his presidency, and statistics about his family, but most of us certainly do not know the president personally. Instead, we simply know about him.

We can ask the same question about Jesus. We can certainly know many things about Jesus – His life, His death, that He was raised from the dead, some of His miracles and teachings, etc. – but this is not the same as knowing Jesus. Jesus once said,

***“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”***- John 17:3\*

Knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus. To have faith in Jesus means more than simply knowing about Him. To live a life of faith, we need to enter into a relationship with Jesus and welcome Him into our hearts. We need to take time to get to know Him and spend time in conversation with Him. The best part is, when we know Jesus, we begin to experience eternal life.

### QUESTIONS

1. Do you know Jesus? Or simply know about Him?
2. How can you get to know Jesus better?

### PRAYER

*Lord, help us to know You. Help us to enter into a relationship with You and to get to know You better. Thank You for the chance to experience eternal life here on earth when we know You better. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\*John 17:3. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

## WEEK 2 – FEBRUARY 20 & 21

Title – Compassion

Text - John 4:46-47; James 2:14-26

MONDAY, February 15, 2010

### Fathers and Their Sons

There is a movie currently playing in theatres entitled “Extraordinary Measures.” The trailer describes a man who is becoming successful in the corporate world, when two of his children are diagnosed with a fatal disease. The man begs for the help of a brilliant but rather testy scientist who may be able to develop a life-saving drug. The man puts all of his resources and even money he hasn’t raised yet into the battle for his children’s lives. There is a Biblical example of this type of dedication as well:

***When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.***

***“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”***

***“The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus replied, “You may go. Your son will live.” The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.” Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed.” - John 4:48-53\****

Most parents can relate to the concept of risking everything to protect and save their children. The father in the text above had most likely sought every other possible treatment for his son prior to approaching Jesus and still it appeared that all hope was gone. Jesus’ initial response did not seem overtly positive, but the official was not dissuaded. His son’s well-being was foremost on his mind. It seems he hardly heard Jesus’ comment about only wanting to see “signs and wonders.” Jesus recognized the father’s tremendous love for his son and in an act of compassion, healed the son instantly. While the official did not know of the immediate restoration his son had experienced, he knew that Jesus could be trusted at his word and he returned to his home, finding not only a healthy son, but a relationship of eternal health and wholeness with the Savior of the world.

### QUESTIONS

1. What situations have you been in where all hope seemed lost?
2. At what point did you turn to Jesus and implore Him to help?

### REFLECTION AND PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love and compassion toward us and for the good gifts you give to us every day. Help us to seek more in our relationship with You than just momentary miracles and quick fixes to our problems. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\*John 4:48-53. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

TUESDAY, February 16, 2010

## Sons and Their Fathers

In John 4, we read about the royal official begging Jesus to save his son; a father was pleading for the life of his son. Consider the paradox in these verses where a son is pleading for his life from his father:

***“(Jesus) withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond (his disciples), knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.”*** - Luke 39:43\*

The gospels recount numerous acts of Jesus’ love and compassion, but the main purpose for His earthly ministry was now looming just hours before Him. Dread of the incredible pain and suffering He was about to experience overwhelmed Him. We cannot begin to imagine the weight of the sin of the world pressing upon us, but Jesus was feeling it coming to rest upon His shoulders. He cried out to His father for relief, while surrendering and obedient to God the Father’s will. The same Jesus who healed the official’s son and restored him to his father (John 4: 52) was now facing His own father’s rejection as the moment of His crucifixion and death drew near; ***“God demonstrate(d) his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** - Romans 5:8\*

Ironically, in order for the royal official’s son to live, Jesus had to die. Yet even in the passage above, Jesus’ most desperate hours, God demonstrates compassion toward His son by sending an angel to strengthen Him for the task that lay ahead.

### QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to you that Jesus had to die so that you can live?
2. Have you ever received supernatural strengthening for a difficult task?

### PRAYER PROMPT

*Father God, there is no greater compassion than that shown by sending Your only Son to the cross to die for us, even though we were and sometimes still are lost in our sin. Thank You for loving us so much. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\*Luke 39:43 and Romans 5:8. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

WEDNESDAY, February 17, 2010

## Compassion in the Hard Times

Over a month has passed since the devastating earthquake struck Haiti. The images of pain and destruction are still very clear in our minds. In the midst of all of the chaos in Haiti, many stories of perseverance have emerged. One such story is that of Dan Woolley, a Compassion International employee. He was found alive three days later in an elevator shaft of a hotel the earthquake had destroyed. He had used his shirt to bandage his leg, and tied his belt around the wound. To stop the bleeding on his head, he firmly pressed a sock to it. Concerned he might have been experiencing shock, Woolley looked up a first aid application on his cell phone. It warned him not to sleep. So he set his phone alarm to go off every 20 minutes. As time crept slowly by, the realization that he might not get out alive caused him to write a note to his family in his journal. It read, "I was in a big accident, an earthquake. Don't be upset at God. He always provides for His children even in hard times. I'm still praying that God will get me out, but He may not. But even so He will always take care of you." The journal is stained with his blood.

Dan Woolley waited 60 hours before being pulled from the rubble. A coworker who was in the same building is still unaccounted for at the time of this writing. As the verse below reminds us, we may not be the ones to see what the Lord finally brings about, but in his love and compassion, to quote Dan Woolley's journal, "He always provides for His children even in hard times." He lived out the words James wrote in his letter to the early church:

***"Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."*** - James 5:10-11\*

It can be hard to believe that anything good could come out of such suffering and we sometimes question God's whereabouts when tragedy strikes on such a grand scale. The Biblical prophets often suffered great persecution but they also modeled great perseverance and as a result saw a great deal of what God eventually did for His people – they remembered that God answered His people in the past and trusted that He would act again.

### QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever wondered what the Lord would "finally bring about" from difficult circumstances you have been in?
2. When have you most deeply experienced God's compassion and mercy? Have any hard times in your life ever led to blessings later?

### PRAYER PROMPT

Consider the words of this hymn and make them your prayer today:

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.*

*Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see.  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!  
(Lyrics: Thomas Chiselm; 1923. Composer: William Runyan)*

### REFERENCE

\*James 5:10-11. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

THURSDAY, February 18, 2010

## Compassion – A Noun or a Verb?

I have noticed that a lot of words that I thought were nouns are now used commonly as verbs. When my son was a baby, his sitter would tell me how many times she had “bottled” and “diapered” him. Recently at work, my supervisor “tasked” and “visioned” me (which sounds kind of painful when I see it in writing! It was a good thing – really!).

In Webster’s dictionary, compassion is identified as a noun and defined as “deep sympathy or pity.” But compassion is much more of an “action verb” than that short definition indicates. It is more than just feeling badly for someone in dire circumstances. It is being moved to actions that are helpful and healing.

Whenever the words “Jesus” and “compassion” are found in the Bible together, there is an action that follows. Some examples of this include:

***“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.”*** - Matthew 14:14\*

***“Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.”*** - Matthew 20:34\*

***“Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.”I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”*** – Mark 1:41\*

***“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”*** - Mark 6:34\*

Jesus “compassioned” people in ways that moved them from sickness to health sometimes physically, but more importantly, He did it spiritually. His life, death and resurrection all demonstrate that He viewed compassion as a verb, a loving action which would draw others into a relationship with the living God. Follow His lead and begin “compassioning” with a passion today!

### QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been “compassioned” by someone? How did it change your life experience?
2. Who can you “compassion” today? Make it an action, not just a feeling.

### PRAYER PROMPT

*Lord, please help me to make compassion a verb in my daily life. Help those that I “compassion” to be drawn toward a relationship with You as they experience Your healing words and touch in their lives. In Your precious name, Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\*Matthew 14:14, Matthew 20:34, Mark 1:41 and Mark 6:34. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

FRIDAY, February 19, 2010  
**You're Wearing That?**

Some people have an innate fashion sense and look great no matter what they throw on in the morning. You know who they are just by looking at them. I am not one of those people. A couple of months ago, I went for breakfast at the restaurant where my daughter waitresses. I was wearing a sweater and wind pants. My daughter approached to take my order and said "Nice outfit, Mom." Another waitress took my daughter aside and told her, "Your mom's outfit is killing me right now." When I returned to the restaurant for dinner a few days ago, the cook in the kitchen teased my daughter by asking, "Is your mom wearing her fashion wind pants and sweater tonight?" Apparently wind pants and sweaters should never be worn together. Who knew?

If I am going to be remembered for what I am wearing, then I want to make the characteristics in the following verse staples in my wardrobe collection.

***"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."*** - Colossians 3:12\*

I wonder if anyone will notice. Will they recognize me as a Christian from my appearance and demeanor? If I wear these characteristics for long enough, will they become such a part of me that I will never need to take them off? No one will ever mistake me for a fashion model, but I pray that people will be able to know who I am just by looking at me – a compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient Jesus-follower - who occasionally wears wind pants and sweaters at the same time to public places!

#### REFLECTION

Consider the words of this song recorded by Amy Grant in 1979 that describe the desire to be recognized not for outward appearance but for reflecting Christ-like characteristics:

*I may not be every mother's dream for her little girl,  
And my face may not grace the mind of everyone in the world.  
But that's all right, as long as I can have one wish I pray:  
When people look inside my life, I want to hear them say,*

*She's got her father's eyes,  
Her father's eyes;  
Eyes that find the good in things,  
When good is not around;  
Eyes that find the source of help,  
When help just can't be found;  
Eyes full of compassion,  
Seeing every pain;  
Knowing what you're going through  
And feeling it the same.  
Just like my father's eyes...*

Visit the following website to hear this song in its entirety. You will be blessed!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRB4pL6Xgy8&feature=related>

#### REFERENCE

\*Colossians 3:12. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 1984.

## WEEK 3 – FEBRUARY 27 & 28

Title – Belief

Text - John 4:48-50; James 1:2-18

MONDAY, February 22, 2010

### Magic?

I've never been a big fan of magic. David Copperfield, David Blaine, Criss Angel. When it comes to magic, part of my brain has a tendency to jump in and scream, "I know this is a trick!" And that certainty clangs in the back of my head and drowns out any sort of "wow" I could get. I know. I'm a skeptic. But really, freezing yourself in a block of ice for a month? "Freeing" the Statue of Liberty? Getting blown up by a howitzer and walking away? I just can't relax and trust that it is true.

But what if someone really did do miraculous things? Would we believe it? People in Jesus' time seem to have seen Him as a sort of "miracle celebrity." Some wanted more of a show; proof that He was the guy God chose to free the people of Israel. Others, like the royal official, believed in Him based on what they saw. When the official came to ask for a miracle, Jesus said to him, **"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders...you will never believe."** But the royal official came for more than just another sign. ***The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour."***

***Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.*** - John 4:48-53 \*

People like the royal official were the ones that understood what Jesus was really offering to the people He healed and the masses He fed; life right here, right now. And they acted accordingly. The royal official didn't wait around to see if what Jesus said was true, he acted on it. He left and when he returned home he knew for certain that Jesus was as good as his word. He believed.

### QUESTIONS

1. What ways are you hoping Jesus will fix what is broken in your life?
2. How willing are you to do what Jesus asks in the mean time?

### PRAYER

*Lord, there are times when we get so interested in what we know You can do, that we lose sight of You. Please help us keep our eyes fixed on You, and help us trust You as we wait to see how You are already working in our lives. In Your name we pray. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\* John 4:48-50. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

TUESDAY, February 23, 2010  
**Why He Came**

***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life...”***

Jesus didn't come to condemn the world. I think we sometimes miss that. As Christians, we sometimes hold up John 3:16 at basketball games. We tell people about Christ and explain that they are going to hell without Jesus' help. We point out our desperate need for salvation. And, don't get me wrong: all of these things are true, and arguably, not bad things to share with people. But in doing them we need to make sure we hold onto the rest of the message about Jesus:

***...For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*** - John 3:16-17 \*

Jesus loves us all with such an enormous love that He came to save each and every one of us. He didn't come to put our messed up lives under the microscope. He knew that most of us do a good job of that ourselves. He didn't come to tell us how we could earn our way into God's good graces either. Jesus came so that we could have life, and all He asks of us in return is that we believe in Him.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to believe in Jesus?
2. What does it mean to you that He came to save you out of His love for you?

#### PRAYER

*Lord, thank You for loving us. Thank You for loving the world. We love You, thank You for loving us first. Amen.*

#### REFERENCE

\*John 3:16-17. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEDNESDAY, February 24, 2010

### What Are You Looking For?

*“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”...*

*“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” – John 11:21, 25-26\**

Martha was looking for a miracle. She had hoped Jesus would come quickly and heal her brother before he died. But that hope was gone, at least as far as she could see. When Jesus posed this question to Martha she was in the midst of grieving. She was truly at a place where Jesus' question mattered. He pushed her to examine what she really believed.

She knew that resurrection was possible. But it is one thing to believe that resurrection is possible and another entirely to believe that you, and those you love, will be resurrected. In her heart she doubted it was true. Her brother had just died. So she wept and blamed Jesus for failing to come sooner. But Jesus surprised her. He walked up to the tomb, and cried, “Lazarus, come out,” and Martha's brother came back to life.

Real, true resurrection. Right in front of her eyes.

#### QUESTIONS

1. Are there areas of your life where you feel hope is gone (or diminishing)?
2. Do you believe, really believe, that Jesus can bring resurrection to those things?

#### PRAYER

*Lord, You are more powerful than we often imagine. Help us to trust You even when hope seems impossible. In Your name we pray. Amen.*

#### REFERENCE

\*John 11:21, 25-26. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

THURSDAY, February 25, 2010

## Getting to the Action

"We have a hole in our gospel."\* That's the conclusion Richard Stearns came to as he sat with a young boy orphaned by AIDS who thanked Stearns for caring for him. Stearns, the CEO of World Vision, took a long strange trip to get to where he is today. He started out as an aspiring and gifted fortune 500 CEO. He now spends a great deal of time walking around in mud huts and drumming up money for World Vision's ministry across the world. But first God had to get him to a place where he realized that living out the call to love others was part of what it meant to love God (Matthew 22:37-40 and James 2:17).

Need for refocusing our faith and efforts is nothing new. Jesus warned His disciples about it from the start, that pursuing a relationship with God without putting our faith into action is useless. He gave them this parable to remind them of what was truly important:

***Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'***

***"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'***

***"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*** – Matthew 25:37-40\*

I wish I could give you some great formula for how to address this in your life. Maybe simply re-reading Jesus' parable above will be enough. For me it took signing up for a mission trip because I sensed God telling me to. It took getting involved in a small group because I knew I needed the accountability. It took spending some time praying because I knew that my heart still wasn't in the right place. I had to take the first steps toward trusting God and at the same time give myself enough slack to realize I wasn't going to be perfect at it right out of the gate.

## QUESTIONS

1. How is your faith showing itself in your life right now?
2. What action is God asking you to take?

## PRAYER

*Lord, please help us to live out our faith. Help us see the You in the faces of the people You are asking us to serve. In Your name we pray. Amen.*

## REFERENCE

\*Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009) 15, and Matthew 25:37-40. **Today's New International Version**. International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

FRIDAY, February 26, 2010

### And Action...

I once tried to start a sailing club. As a law student, two friends and I concocted the idea one day over our third cups of coffee in the student center. Never a good way to start. We spent countless ensuing hours thinking about all the people we would meet, the teams we would compete against and the various ways we could recruit donors to support our cause. And it would have been a good idea if: 1) we were anywhere near water, 2) my friends actually knew how to sail, 3) any of us had a sailboat. In short, the sailing club can best be written off as a caffeine and stress induced psychosis that took on a life of its own.

A friend of mine sent me this quote recently, "We do not think ourselves into a new way of living. We live ourselves into a new way of thinking. Without action and lifestyle decisions, without concrete practices, words are dangerous and largely illusory."\* In other words, thinking and talking won't ultimately get us anywhere unless we put things into action.

***"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*** – James 2:14-17\*

I am not recommending that we all hop the next boat to Haiti, or bring every harebrained idea to life, but what I am suggesting is that we begin testing out our faith. Living as if we believe what God says is true – that He loves us and wants us to share that love with the world.

### PRAYER

Spend some time re-reading the passage above and talking to God about what this looks like in your life.

### REFERENCE

\*Richard Rohr.

\*Matthew 25:37-40. **Today's New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

## WEEK 4 – MARCH 6 & 7

Title – Hope

Text - John 4:49-54; James 1:2-18; Titus 2:12-14

MONDAY, March 1, 2010

### What Is Hope Anyway?

Hope. This word is etched into our society. We see it on bumper stickers, tee shirts and jewelry. We name our daughters Hope and we paint it on signs and display it in our homes. Why? Because we all agree we need hope, or at least what we believe hope to mean.

The man in John 4:49 put his confidence in Jesus when he asked for Jesus to heal his dying son, “**“ Sir, come down before my child dies”**” (John 4:49\*). This man was not a Jew nor was he a follower of Jesus. He had heard of what Jesus was able to do and in a moment of desperation reached out to Jesus because he believed Jesus would care and that it was possible for Jesus to do something amazing.

My father left Cuba as a young man. His departure wasn't easy and he knew it would mean he would leave his family behind, not knowing if he was ever to return. Something propelled him to go. It was hope. Hope that he would find greater opportunity to fulfill his calling in the U.S. Hope that it was possible for God to take his humble and meager existence and develop it into something useful and productive. Just like the man who sought Jesus out, my father learned that hope was a two-way partnership. The person in need places his or her confidence in the God, the One who is mighty, compassionate, able to help and is good. This exchange breeds hope.

The result for both the man and my father, led to a life of great fruitfulness. The man's son lived. After the man told his family and workers about Jesus, they all put their faith in Jesus. Lives were saved and changed. My father has been practicing pediatric medicine for many years. He serves the sick and dying children, including serving on several mission opportunities because He believes this is what God has asked him to do with his life. Lives are saved and changed because God's mercy has been poured out on them through the hands of a Cuban doctor.

Compassion has sprung up from the ground that had been seeded with hope.

### QUESTIONS

1. What does hope mean to you?
2. Is there something you are hoping for today? Does your hope lie in God? Why or why not?

### PRAYER

*Father, please help me to see if I have placed my hope in things that are not solid or secure. I want to place my hope in You and You alone. Help me to know You better so that my faith can be built up further and so that my hope can develop more compassion in me. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\* John 4:49. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

**TUESDAY, March 2, 2010**

## **Hope Simplified**

When I was in high school I knew a girl who was mentally handicapped. She was a few years older than I but had the mental capacities of about an 8 or 9 year old. I met her in the youth group I attended. Every week Karen would come up to me and deliver a big hug followed by an awkward silence. Patiently she would stand there not really knowing what to say. I would ask her a few questions about her week while she beamed. She softly answered and then moved on to the next friend she could find to hug. She loved her friends and she loved God.

Karen had my phone number so she would also call me every week just to say, "hi." I would politely ask about how her family was and how her week was going. Her answers were always the same. One day Karen wanted to talk to me about God. It wasn't that she had questions but rather she had something to tell me. She told me that she was fine with the fact that she had a mental handicap. She knew God loved her and would take care of her; that made everything ok. Then she said something I will never forget, she said she wished that all the other kids could accept themselves the way God made them, the way she had been able to. She was so free, so secure.

Her hope was in the fact that, although she didn't have a "normal" life, her foundation and sense of peace were found in God's love for her; a love that transcended time, space, mental limitations and situations. Her hope was so simple and pure.

***"Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God."*** - Psalm 42:5\*

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Do you find it hard to be hopeful at times? What kinds of things cause you to lose hope in God?
2. What things can you do to restore a hope-filled attitude and actions?

### **PRAYER**

*Dear God, I praise You because You are my Savior and God. No matter what I am facing right now I will remember that You are loving and compassionate, You have wisdom and direction for my situation. Your path is the right path to be on so I want to reorient my life, mind and actions to following You today. I have hope that You will reveal Yourself in the midst of my situation so I will wait to see Your hand move in my life. Amen.*

### **REFERENCE**

\* Psalm 42:5. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

WEDNESDAY, March 3, 2010

### Give Hope Away

The apostle Paul endured a lot of hardship as he traveled helping to establish churches and share the news about Jesus. He had periods of freedom and periods of terrible strife and periods of imprisonment. He often wrote to his fellow believers to build them up. No matter what condition his life was in or where he was, his words and encouragement were seasoned with truth and hope in a big God. Read what he wrote to his friend Titus. By this time Paul had already experienced terrible troubles (arrests, beatings, stoning etc.) at this point in his life:

***“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness- a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior, to Titus, my true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” - Titus 1:1-4\****

If it had been me, I don’t think my words would have been so full of encouragement and hope. I don’t know how I would respond if I had to endure what Paul did, but what seems apparent is that Paul’s faith and hope in God had deepened in spite of his troubles, perhaps even because of his troubles? Hope in God and His promises seemed to give Paul the emotional, physical and spiritual fuel he needed to press on. Hope seemed to ignite a fire in Paul to build up his fellow believers. Living with hope propelled Paul to give hope away to someone else who needed it.

### QUESTIONS

1. Re-read the above scripture. What does Paul say that truth leads to? What does he say that godliness is?
2. In what ways is this greeting filled with hope? What do you think he wanted Titus to understand?
3. Do you consider yourself a person who ignites hope in other people? Why or why not?
4. What practical way can you give hope away in your life this week?

### PRAYER

*Father, thank you that I can depend on Your promises for me. Your promise that You have given me truth and all that I need for a life of following You. When I live for You, I find myself more hope-filled. Help me to give hope to someone today who needs it. Amen.*

### REFERENCE

\* Titus 1:1-4. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

THURSDAY, March 4, 2010

## Without Hope

***"...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."*** -

Ephesians 2:12\*

Shari has lived without hope for as long as she can remember. She is a middle aged woman who has made a string of bad decisions resulting in ongoing difficulties. Her decision making is based upon the fact that she has no hope.

Brad is an outwardly successful business man who has earned high achievements in his career. He is married with children and lives in a beautiful home. Brad has a secret. He struggles with addiction. He can't quite figure out how to stop, he's tried for so many years but he is out of hope.

Lanette is a beautiful woman. She has had anything she has wanted. College educated, the love of a husband, financial security, meaningful career and four children. This is not enough for Lanette. She finds herself looking everywhere but to God to fix the way she feels. She has damaged her reputation, disregarded her children and betrayed her husband. She finds herself pregnant with another man's baby. Lanette is hopeless.

These are all somewhat extreme vignettes of real people who have struggled to find hope in their lives. Although you or I may not be experiencing the same things, we all know what it is like to feel like we are without hope.

God's hope has found its way into the lives of these people. God used people to bring His hope.

Shari was befriended by a middle aged woman who has patiently and carefully invested time and love; prayed for her and talked to her about God's love, inviting her for meals, driving her to doctor's appointments. Hope looks like someone who genuinely cares for Shari. She is now beginning to see God differently. Brad's world caved in finally. A local church and Godly counselors stepped in to help him see God's truth and forgiveness and taught him how to apply it to his life. He is thinking and behaving differently now. It is not easy and it has taken time. But Brad feels free and clean for the first time in his life. Hope looks like a counselor and teacher who fervently devoted themselves to Brad's emotional, physical and spiritual health. Lanette is still in crisis but hope is waiting right outside her door. Some friends who have worked hard to befriend her have experienced a similar situation in their own marriage. God brought them hope and now they are praying and waiting to give Lanette God's hope when she is ready.

## QUESTIONS

1. Is there a situation in your life where you feel as if you are out of hope? Do you think God is able to help you? Why or why not?
2. What is keeping you from receiving hope today?

## PRAYER

Take a moment and ask God to renew your hope in Him today.

## REFERENCE

\*Ephesians 2:12. **New International Version.** International Bible Society, copyright 2001.

FRIDAY, March 5, 2010

### Hope-Filled

Winter makes me tired. In the winter, I find myself hoping for sunshine. The gray days of snow and cold can sometimes get to me. But I know scientifically that the sun is always shining. The cloud cover blocks the sunshine but it is there for certain. God gives us a certainty that we can trust His promises and His character, even when the clouds block Him from our view. Knowing this truth gives us hope.

***“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 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 40:28-31\*

### QUESTIONS

1. What makes you weary and tired?
2. Describe the Lord from Isaiah's perspective. What is the most meaningful attribute about God to you? Why?
3. Describe someone whose hope is in the Lord is based on this passage. What do you think it means to hope in the Lord?

### MEDITATION

Let God show you His truths and promises in the following verses. Thank God for them.

***“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him.”*** - Psalm 62:5\*

***“But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in You. Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools.”*** - Psalm 39:7-8\*

***“No one whose hope is in You will ever be put to shame.”*** - Psalm 25:3\*

***“The eyes of the LORD; are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love...”*** - Psalm 33:18\*

***“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I put my hope.”*** - Psalm 130:5\*

***“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.”*** - Jeremiah 29:11\*

### REFERENCE

\*All passages from: **New International Version**. International Bible Society, copyright 2001.