

HOPE
"Expectations"
April 26, 215

"THINGS WILL NEVER CHANGE."
Vs.
"ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE ...with God."

"The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord handed them over to the Midianites for seven years... Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders... would attack Israel... destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, ...and they stayed until the land was stripped bare. So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help."

Judges 6:1-6 (NLT)

How to raise God-honoring Expectations:

1. See yourself the way God sees you (I-identity vs. God-identity)

"The angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah... Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!" "Sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? ...the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites."

Judges 6:11-13 (NLT)

"Mighty Hero" vs. "Great-big Zero."

2. Do the next right thing (even if you don't feel ready)

"Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

Judges 6:14 (NLT)

"God is waiting for us to walk forward in obedience
so He can open the door for us to serve Him." - Brother Andrew

"Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you." Psalm 37:5 (NLT)

"The Lord said to Gideon, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old... Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."

Judges 6:25, 26 (NLT)

3. Get rid of "Plan B" (Shoot the bull!)

God says: You need a commitment strategy, not an exit strategy.

"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 (NIV)

Leadership Tip!

When asking your group a question, make sure they are simple and repeatable. Example: “What area in your life are you holding back from God?” Not: “Based on what we have read in the previous five scriptures, this theologian states that we are creatures who withhold our lives to the detriment of our own fulfillment and the advancement of God’s kingdom. Do you think he is correct? What scriptural backing do you have for your viewpoint? Do you think there are other scriptures that prove or disprove your standing?”

Additionally, remember that your quiet members are probably internal processors. Give time (more than you think), to allow them to process your question so they can respond. Hold back the external processors (the loud bunch) from answering until you have given sufficient time for others to think.

HOPE - Expectations**STARTER QUESTIONS:**

When you were younger (age 5, 10, 20, 30?), what did you want to be when you “grew up?”

When you see the difference between where you thought you’d be and where you are, do you find the comparison encouraging or discouraging and why?

MAIN IDEA:

God has designed us each differently with different gifts, experiences, and desires. If we let Him, God will put on our hearts big bold dreams. These are dreams he will use to advance his Kingdom if we let him. But He won’t make us be a part of His plan; we must choose to follow boldly in the steps of Christ. What are our big bold God dreams, and how are we making steps toward those dreams?

Heb 12:1-2 NIV

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This passage (Hebrews 12:1-2) gives specific commands about how we pursue God’s plans for us while we’re here on earth. Let’s break it into pieces.

To get context, start by reading Chapter 11.

1) Who are the “great cloud of witnesses,” and why are they important?

We are given examples from scripture of all of those who pursued God in faith. They were given bold dreams or bold commands from God and they followed. Focus in on Vs 13-16: 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Who are the “witnesses” (in Scripture or not), who have encouraged you to boldly seek God and His plans for you?

2) “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...”

On Sunday, Pastor Hank reminded us to be honest about our circumstances. What in your life gets in the way of you walking in faith or doing what God has asked of you?

Remember, hindrances may not seem sinful at all. But whatever comes between us and God is an idol. (Houses, jobs, family responsibility, etc.)

Jonah 2:8

Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.

Mat 10:37-39 NIV

"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

3) “...Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...”

Runners this week ran the Boston Marathon. But they would not have succeeded if they did not follow the marked course. How do we know the race we should be running? This is the fun (and scary!) part. We're going to take 10-15 minutes, and without picking up your pen, write every life goal you can think of (small or big). I will walk you through some categories that may help you brainstorm. When you're writing your goals, be as specific as you can. Example: instead of “raise my kids well” maybe say something like, “See my kids come to know Christ and challenge them to seek God daily.”

But first, let's pray for God to give us the courage to write big dreams.

Some categories for goal writing (again, these are optional, but may help people think):

1) Family 2) Career 3) Experiential 4) Influential 5) Physical 6) Creative 7) Financial ... others?

Take a few minutes and share some of these goals with a few people around you.

Now, look back at your list. Are any of these dreams beyond what you see as currently possible? Do you NEED GOD to accomplish any of these? If not, you're probably thinking too small.

Eph 3:20-21 NIV

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Which dream (or dreams) rely on God doing “immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine”? Anyone feeling brave enough to share theirs?

All of our dreams will not, and should not, be the same. Let's go back to the Boston Marathon. The winner of the men's marathon was Lelisa Desisa of Ethiopia in 2:09:17. (This is a pace of 4.9 minutes per mile!). In contrast, Maickel Melamed, a Venezuelan man with muscular dystrophy, was the last person to finish the race. It took him nearly 20 hours (a pace of 45.8 minutes per mile).

He was interviewed after the race:

"I know that people see me walking, but to me, it's running to my maximum potential," he said.

He and his team of volunteers endured torrential downpours, thunderstorms, biting wind and cold before being greeted at the Boylston Street finish line by dozens of cheering friends and supporters.

"It was real tough," Melamed said. "Especially around mile 24. But my physical trainers came up with an amazing way to keep going. I'd rest 10 seconds, then (take) four to six steps. It was a real exciting way to finish."

[Excerpt from WCVB Boston 5 article]

We cannot run a race without taking the first step. We cannot lose 50 pounds without lacing up some tennis shoes. We cannot write a book without writing an opening sentence. We cannot adopt a child without finding an adoption agency.

For one or two of your dreams, write down one or two action steps that you can take (maybe even this week) to advance these dreams.

So how will we do all of this?

4) By “*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*”

What does it mean to “fix our eyes on Jesus”? How do we do that daily?

This goes back to our discussion of idols. We can't seek God's plans while we're still holding on to our idols (the stuff of this world). If the dream is something that God wants to use to advance His kingdom, then we will only succeed by letting go of what we know and relying on Him.

(Consider doing these in smaller groups or couples if you have more than 4-6 people in your group)

ACTION STEPS:

- 1) Take home your list of goals. Pray over them, rewrite them, add to them, be brave and expand them.**
- 2) Say your biggest dream to someone – remember, it should feel well beyond your own capacity, because if not, we don't leave space to need God.**
- 3) Take at least one action step toward a dream.**

FINAL THOUGHTS:

God does not promise that he will give us everything we ask for. He knows best what we need. But just as all the witnesses did in Chapter 11, we should be hoping and praying with expectation that God will do great things in and around our lives.

Let's close by praying specifically for one of your dreams, or for God to reveal a big dream for you.

FAMILY FOCUS:

In this lesson, we will discover how Gideon responds to God's call. Kids will learn that it is important to obey God and trust Him to help us do what He calls us to do.

Today our question is how should we respond to God's calling?

We should obey God and trust Him to help us. He is always our plan "A". We do not need a plan "B".

Use Pastor Hank's analogy from the movie "A Bug's Life": (Remember... The ants grew their crops every year and every year about the same time those grasshoppers would fly in and ruin everything. Remember? It's the same idea in the story of Gideon. Who is Gideon? Gideon is the one little ant that's been called to overthrow the grasshopper oppression.)

For seven years the Midianites made things very difficult for God's people. God's people hid in caves. When they planted crops for food to eat, the Midianites would come in and destroy the crops and kill their sheep, cattle and donkeys. The Midianites were so numerous that they looked like swarms of locusts in the land.

The Israelites were so hungry and poor that they cried out to God. God heard His peoples' cries and sent them a prophet with His message to them. Let's read what God's message through the prophet was in Judges 6:8-10.

Despite the Israelites continued disobedience to God, He was faithful to His promise to Abraham that out of his descendants the Savior would be born. Each time God's people sinned and turned back to Him, He delivered them from their enemies.

A man named Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press to keep it from being taken away by the Midianites. While he was threshing his wheat a visitor came and sat under the oak tree near the winepress. Let's read about Gideon's visitor in 6:11-12. This visitor is called the angel of the LORD. In the Old Testament this reference of the angel of the LORD is referring to Jesus before He was born as a baby in Bethlehem.

What words of encouragement did the angel of the LORD speak to Gideon? (The LORD is with you, mighty warrior)

Gideon is somewhat confused with this greeting. He responds by saying if the LORD is with us, then why are they facing such difficult times? Read verse 13.

It is interesting that Gideon's perspective is that God abandoned His people. Actually the reverse was true. God's people had abandoned Him and they were being punished for their disobedience.

The Lord calls Gideon and tells him that he will be the one who rescues the Israelites from the Midianites. (Judges 6:14)

(Judges 6:15) Gideon's response reveals his perspective about himself. How does he respond to God's call? (How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest... and I am the least in my family.)

The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together. (Verse 16)— Remind the kids that God sees our best. We need to look at ourselves like God looks at us. We can do what he calls us to do. But we will ALWAYS need his help.

The LORD told Gideon to go to his father's house and destroy the altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole. These items were visual evidence that God's people had abandoned Him and were worshiping false gods.

Gideon responded to the LORD's command by obeying. He was afraid of his family and the people of the town so he went and destroyed the altar and pole at night and built a proper altar for the LORD.

(Judges 6:33-39) Gideon needs reassurance (do the next thing, even if you are not ready).

Read 6:33-35. God had promised that He would be with Gideon. God's Spirit came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet that signaled fighting men to come to meet with him. Many men gathered to fight with Gideon.

Gideon wanted to be sure he was doing what God wanted him to do and asked for a sign. He asked if God would make the piece of wool wet with dew and the ground dry. God answered Gideon's request and the piece of wool was wet and the ground was dry. Gideon still needing assurance that God would be with Him asked if God would do the opposite this time by allowing the wool to remain dry and the ground wet with dew. God answered Gideon's request and the wool was dry and the ground wet.

(Judges 7-8) Gideon defeats Midianites

The next morning when Gideon woke up God told him that he had too many men in his army. Let's read 7:2. God's goal is always to show His glory. Why did he say that Gideon had too many men? (Israel would boast and say it was her own strength that saved her)

God told Gideon to send home all the men who were afraid. 22,000 men went home leaving only 10,000 men. That was a lot of men to lose from the army. God said there still too many men. God told Gideon to separate the men who drank at the river. Those who got on their knees and put their mouths in the water to drink would be separated from those who cupped their hands full of water and lapped like dogs. 300 men cupped their hands full of water. God told Gideon that he was to send the other group of men home.

Read 7:7-8. Who was going to save the Israelites from the Midianites (the LORD)?

During the night God told Gideon to go down against the Midianites because He was going to give them into his hands. He said, "If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp and listen to what they are saying."

Gideon and his servant quietly went down and overheard a conversation between two friends. One man dreamed that a round loaf of barley bread came rolling down over the hill and crashed into the tents and caused them to collapse. Let's read the friend's response in verse 14.

When Gideon heard the interpretation of the dream he worshiped God. He went back to the camp and told his 300 men to get up because the LORD has given the Midianites into their hands. He divided the 300 men into 3 groups of 100. He gave them each a trumpet and empty jars with torches inside.

Gideon led his 300 men out and told them to follow his instructions. When he and his men blew their trumpets then the other men were to blow theirs and shout, "For the LORD and for Gideon."

When Gideon and his group of 300 men reached the edge of the Midianite camp they blew their trumpets and broke the jars. In their left hand they held the torches and in their right hand they held their trumpets. They blew their trumpets and shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

The 300 men held their position and the Midianites ran crying out as they ran away. When all 300 trumpets sounded the LORD caused the Midianites to turn on each other with their swords.

Gideon and his army chased after those who ran away and defeated them. God called Gideon to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites. Even though his faith was weak and he needed assurances from God, Gideon trusted Him and allowed God to use Him to destroy Israel's enemies.

After the battle was over the Israelites asked Gideon to rule over them. Let's read his response in Judges 8:23. Gideon did not want to rule over the Israelites he knew that God was their only Ruler to lead them. Gideon was only an instrument for God to show His glory.

As we explored these chapters in Judges we saw God call Gideon to do His Work. Gideon felt inadequate to do God's Work but he trusted God to help him. As a result God used Gideon to show His glory and defeat the Midianites.

When we become followers of Christ by putting our faith in Jesus God has called us to serve Him.

Here are a few verses from the New Testament (Choose volunteers to look up these verses):

John 15:16; Acts 9:15 (Why God chooses); 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (Who and why-weak, foolish, lowly & despised; so no one can boast before God.)

When God chooses to use a person to do His work, it is always to show His glory.

When God calls followers of Christ to serve Him we trust Him to enable us to do what He has asked through the power of His Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts.

As we prepare to pray let's talk about how we can respond to what we have learned from God's word. Maybe you are like Gideon and are uncertain that God could use you. If you are a follower of Christ you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13) If God is asking you to do something He will give you everything you need to do that work. If you are not a follower of Christ you are separated from Him and are His enemy (Colossians 1:21). You don't have to stay in that condition. Jesus has come to the earth just as God promised and gave His life so that all who believe in Him can be forgiven of their sins and live for eternity with God. You can believe in Jesus today and be rescued from your sins. Whatever your need is as we close in prayer I will give you a few minutes of silence so you can talk to God about what's on your heart.

Close in prayer.