

Dependence Day

July 5, 2020

Hey everyone, let's pray together.

As Shannon said, yesterday was Independence Day, the day on which our founders declared (244 years ago) our independence from Great Britain.

And, *today*, at least here at North Heartland, is *Dependence Day*.

Obviously, there's no such holiday on the calendar, at least, not that I'm aware of. But the reason we're calling it that is because ...

As important as it is that we, as citizens, remember our *in*-dependence from tyranny,

it's just as important that we who are Christians remember our *de*-pendence on God.

Because if you don't remember – if you forget those things – all kinds of problems eventually follow.

When a nation forgets *why* it declared its independence; forgets *the vision* that compelled it to take such a drastic step, it's very easy to begin sliding back into tyranny and oppression without even realizing it.

And when Christians – believers in and followers of Jesus – forget their dependence on God, everyday life also becomes tyrannical and oppressive.

- It's very easy for us to start thinking that "it's all up to me."

- It's very easy to become overly worried and stressed when things don't go as we had hoped.
- It's very easy to become proud and self-centered.
- And very easy to miss out on the blessing of seeing God do things for you ... and in you ... and through you.

And that's no way to live.

So, part of God does in our lives is allow us to go through experiences that reveal to us that we *can't* do it all by ourselves; challenges that require us to turn to Him to guide or to provide in some way that goes beyond "ourselves" and what we can bear and what we can do on our own.

The Apostle Paul once wrote about a time in

his life where that happened to him.

In one of his letters, he put it like this:

In order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Now, Paul never defines exactly what the thorn was.

If he was speaking literally, it could have been a physical illness or difficulty. If he was speaking figuratively, it might have been an emotional burden or even an individual who was hard to deal with.

Whatever it was, what he writes next is fascinating.

Check this out.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

“Lord, I thought you said you wanted me to have an abundant life and this doesn’t seem like that. So, would you please take it away?”

“Lord, have you thought about what it looks like to the world to see one of your followers suffering like this? So, please, Lord, remove it from my life.”

“Lord, you know to do everything you want me to do with this going on in my life is very difficult. So, can you please do something about it?”

“Three times I begged God to take it away ...”

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians

12:7-9 (NIV)

"Paul, My power is made perfect when you have to depend on Me.

"And really, Paul, what the world needs more of isn't *your* power and *your* ability and *your* intellect. What the world needs more of is *My* power working for you ... and in you ... and through you.

"So, Paul, trust Me. Depend on Me. I will accomplish my will in you in spite of the thorn."

And what I want to do today is to illustrate what that looks like in real life.

So, we invited nine individuals who are part of North Heartland to sit in front of a camera

and tell us about a time in their life where it became clear that they needed to lean into God in a way they hadn't before.

Some of these folks you'll recognize because they lead ministry here, and some will be new to you.

But the cool thing about what you're going to see and hear is the variety of ways and situations where the person felt God saying "Turn to Me. Rest in Me. Depend on Me."

- For some it happened in an immediate fashion.
- For some it happened over a longer period of time.
- Some were at a point of desperation.
- Some simply came to a point of

realization.

And I like that because that's how it works in real life, and because I suspect that all of us will see ourselves in at least one of these stories.

One more thing I want to point out before we get into it.

There is something that all of these folks have in common in their background. In fact, several of them use almost the exact same wording to describe it.

I'll tell you what it is later but, just a heads up that you might be looking for it.

So, here we go.

Beyond Me

The first two NHCCers we're going to hear from both went through experiences where "life" simply became more than what they could handle in and of themselves.

Check it out.

Lots of good stuff in that but I think it's interesting that ...

- a) Courtenay's experience as a teenager continues to reoccur in her life.

The Lord puts her in situations outside of her comfort zone that require her to choose the identity Christ has given her instead of what others want her to be.

- b) That she *recognizes* that is the pattern God is using in her life.

Because that's how it works for many of us.

God repeatedly takes us through the same kinds of experiences to get His point across.

Ok, let's check out the next story.

Not a very long story but it's typical of what happens to many, many Christians.

We grow up in a Christian home, we go to church and we believe in Jesus. And everything goes along smoothly with very little drama.

But then, there's a crisis where the fact that we live in a sin-cursed world becomes personal and we have to choose. Are we going to turn to God or away *from* God?

And people go both ways.

In Erin and Mike's case, they chose to turn to God and depend on Him. And things worked

out as they hoped.

Losing Everything

But sometimes it doesn't, which is what our next two stories are about.

Let's watch.

One of the things I've seen so often as a pastor is someone falling into a "ditch" of some kind or going through a trial of some kind and they say, "I'm OK, I can handle it."

And sometimes that's true. Sometimes we can handle it.

But too many times we fall into a ditch and can't get out, and then we *refuse to let others help us* because we think we're supposed to be strong.

And that's really sad because Jason is right: being willing to let other people help you is part of what it means to depend on God, because they are his hands and feet.

Ok, let's look at another brief story about things not working out as hoped.

Let's watch.

Sometimes it takes losing something and maybe even everything – at least everything you've been living for, everything you think makes life "life" – to make you realize that God really is THE option.

Andrew experienced that through his injury, and a lot of *us* have experienced it, too, through this coronavirus deal. So much of what mattered to us has been taken away and it's been hard.

And we can look at that experience as “God letting us down” ... or, as Jason and Andrew both discovered, God inviting us to lean into Him in a way we never have before.

Serving God

Now in the stories we’ve seen so far, no one really *wanted* what happened to them. If they had been given a choice concerning what they were going to go through, very likely they would have said “no thanks.”

But in these next two stories, both individuals *chose* the situation.

Let’s watch.

I love both of those stories because they illustrate so well the fact that you can’t do something *for* God without God.

Now, obviously, “doing something for God” might be a “ministry thing” like it was for Richard and for Kristi.

But it might also be something you feel God has called you to do like start a family or start a business or invest in someone’s life – and the list could go on and on.

You can’t do that *for* God without God ...

... which is what the Apostle Paul was getting at when he wrote:

That’s why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ’s mighty power that works within me.

Colossians 1:29 (NLT)

What he’s saying is that it’s a team effort.

- You do as much as you can, you work as hard as you can ... and then, instead of

worrying or scheming or cheating or whatever you think you need to do to “make it happen” ...

- You trust that God is working through your efforts to bring about whatever results He wants.

That’s what depending on God looks like.

Something Missing

Now, our seventh and eighth stories aren’t about something bad or challenging that happened. And they’re not about a choice to do something for God.

Instead, they’re about a growing awareness that something was missing in life.

Let’s watch.

One of the things I love about working with Hannah is that she's a straight shooter.

"What are you doing? Why are you trying to live your life without God?"

Anyway, let's check out the next story.

Wow, there's so much wisdom in what Kingsley said, but I especially love the part about dependence on God not being a one-time decision. It's a choice you have to make every day.

And I also love the way he ended it with a personal challenge.

"Today is the day. You've heard who Jesus is. Don't wait any longer."

Getting Personal

... which is a great transition to the final story I want to share with you.

And, I have to tell you that, as much as I love all the stories we've heard, I am a little biased towards this one because ...

- I remember when this guy started coming to NHCC.
- And I knew he was something of a skeptic, at least as far as "church" was concerned.
- And I was there the day he made his decision to stop keeping Jesus at arm's length.

Oh, and the girl he mentions in the story has been his wife for about 20 years. I did their wedding.

Let's watch.

So many things could be said about that, but what struck me most was Tim coming to realize that "I have all these people around me, but I myself haven't committed to Christ."

Conclusion

And I that's such a profound insight because that's what happens to a lot of us.

We grow up in a Christian home – which, by the way, was the common background of all of these folks ...

We grow up knowing *about* Jesus and we may even come to believe in Jesus as our savior.

But we don't *know* Jesus. We don't have a personal relationship with Him.

And, instead of depending on *Him* for everything, trusting *Him* to be the Guider and Provider and Director over our lives, we're actually depending on someone else's faith.

But there comes a point where that won't cut it anymore. You have to make it your own.

And I wonder today if that's maybe where you are.

With all that's going on in the world right now, you're feeling like you're being pushed beyond yourself and what you can bear.

- Maybe you're facing a difficult challenge you didn't ask for.
- Maybe you're losing or have lost something you think makes life "life."

- Maybe you're trying to serve God in some way, and it feels like you're running in quicksand.
- Or maybe none of that's going on but you're just feeling an emptiness in your heart.

Whatever the situation is, God has not only allowed you to be there, He has also allowed you to hear this message so you would understand *why* you are there.

- He wanted you to hear from Courtenay and Erin and Jason and Andrew.
- He wanted you to hear from Kristi and Richard.
- He wanted you to hear Hannah say, "What are you doing? Why are you trying to live your life without Me?"

- He wanted you to hear Kingsley say, "Today is the day. You've heard who Jesus is. Don't wait any longer."
- He wanted you to hear Tim say, "this is about you and me. It's not about you and someone else, or someone else and Me."

And, as we close this part of the service, I want to give you an opportunity to say "yes" to Him in whatever way He is speaking to you right now and in whatever situation you're in.

- We're going to have silence for a few seconds so you can have some space to talk to God.
- Then we're going to sing a song together which is kind of a "declaration of

dependence.”

And I’m going to ask you not to leave or tune out during this part because I have some exciting things to share with you about our church before we leave.

Ok, let’s stand and be silent and then we’ll sing.

Lots of stuff going on right now at NHCC – lots of NEW stuff ... which is a good thing because it means we’re coming back as a church, we’re moving forward.

Let’s take these in order.

1. Virtual Grief Workshop on Tuesday at 7 pm (register by 6 pm Tuesday to get the Zoom Link)

2. Food Truck Fest on Wednesday 6-8 pm (if possible please register so we have a basic headcount)

Includes 4 trucks and a cover band featuring 70s/80s music. Bring your own chair, blanket, optional bring your own beverage, \$\$ for the food trucks, outdoor games, tailgate canopies, etc)

3. Next Sunday...new series “Rooted: Foundations of an unshakable life.”

Over the past four months, our world has been rocked in ways that no one could have envisioned. With so much turmoil, we desperately need something that holds us steady and secure.

That's the focus of the series so I hope you'll be here or watching online and that you'll invite someone else.

Also, next Sunday ... and this is the really big deal.

4. By reservation only Adventureland both hours (limited); Middle school ministry at 11 am

Will share all the details on why and how we're going to do this in a special video this week so make sure you're connected with our social media outlets – Facebook, Instagram, etc.

One thing I will say right now is that the videos we saw today highlight the absolute importance of ministry to the next generation. Every person we heard from said something to the effect of "I grew up in a Christian home."

So, it matters what we do for our kids here at NHCC. And let's just be honest – livestream ain't doing it for our kids, so we're getting back to that as fast as responsibly possible.

Again, more info later this week.

Finally ...

- We appreciate your financial support and want to remind you that you can contribute online to our Ministry and Ops fund which allows us to do week to week ministry here.
- Also, you can contribute to our Cool & Dry Summer Challenge which will help us fix the roof and upgrade our HVAC system to something that is much more functional and dependable.
- But if you or someone in your circle of influence needs help financially, please let us know. Do not do not do this on your own.

Endnotes