

A SAVIOR IS BORN

Part 1: Time to Share the Good News
Luke 2:8-20

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 106-112



Hope is a powerful force in the human heart. In fact, **Hope** is *THE* essential ingredient for an abundant life, the kind of life that Jesus promised us. It's essential. We need **HOPE** and the good news is **THERE IS HOPE!**

The first Christmas gift brought the greatest **HOPE** of all — a Savior - to people who needed it most. Everyone could use more **HOPE** - You, me, family, neighbors, friends, those you know slightly and those you haven't even met yet. Need some **HOPE** this Christmas? Do you want to know how to share a word of **HOPE** with those around you? Join us online each Sunday to discover how to open God's gift of **HOPE** this Christmas.

This Week's Memory Verse:

***"When they had seen him,
they spread the word concerning what had been
told them about this child, . . ."***

Luke 2:17

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 106

“Preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn’t do it!” 1 Corinthians 9:16 (NLT)

MISSIONARY IN THE MIRROR

NORA thought that missionaries were always out-of-style and out-of-touch—that is until she met Dan Barker. One Sunday morning during a fall missions festival at church, Dan fired up the engine of his classic Harley-Davidson motorcycle. He roared his Hog up the center aisle of church to announce an interesting sermon that Sunday night. That evening, decked out in leather from head to toe, Dan told what it was like to talk about Jesus with bikers from Alaska to Argentina. Nora suddenly realized that missionaries could be mighty cool.

Missionaries are ordinary people, and they understand Christ’s command to his followers to “go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). Now here's an interesting fact. You also became a missionary as soon as you trusted Christ to be your Savior. That doesn’t mean you have to jump on the next flight to some place like “Ukarumpa”, although some people feel called to do that. What being a missionary really means is that wherever you go and whatever you do, you use your words and actions to help people to understand in a better way who Jesus is. It’s understandable that you might have a tough time seeing yourself as a missionary, and perhaps you wonder if you’re good, smart, or spiritual enough, however, but if you find yourself thinking that way, consider this:

- God gives you the power to do what he commands you to do. The Holy Spirit lives inside you, so you have everything you need to do the task.

- God doesn’t expect you to be perfect. You are useful to God in spite of your faults and failures.

- God doesn’t give you the job of being a missionary all by yourself. God plunked you down as just one part of a world of believers he’s called to share his good news. The job belongs to all of us.

- God brings the results. It’s not up to you to change anybody’s heart or force anyone to trust in Christ. You share his message through your words and actions, and he takes responsibility for the results in people’s lives. You are sent by God to share the Good News of Jesus Christ wherever you go. And you are his chosen representative to your next-door neighbors, your classmates, and to people all over the world. What an awesome privilege!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for making me your representative, your ambassador to share the Good News of Jesus. Thank you that you don’t expect perfection when I try, and you don’t give up on me when I fail. Instead, you give me the strength to do and say what is right and the results are up to YOU, NOT ME. Thank you for choosing me to be a part of the people you have sent with your message into the world. Help me to always believe that I am up to the challenge! In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 107

"Do not desire to possess anything that belongs to another person . . . or anything else." Exodus 20:17 (CEV)

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

SHANE has a professional-grade skateboard. Betsy has a rare show dog. Yoko has her own TV and phone. Francisco has a sound system loud enough to bust windows on a whole block. And Travis? He wants it all.

The crisis of wanting what everyone else has isn't new. In fact, God knew all about overheated wants way back when he first gave the Ten Commandments, and he thought that dealing with desire was a topic big enough for its own commandment. It happens to be number ten.

All of the other nine commandments deal with *actions* toward God and people. The one dealing with desire gets at our *attitude*—the desire we have toward the stuff we want. In the tenth commandment, God tells us not to “covet.” That’s a strange little word in today’s vocabulary, but it means having a big desire to possess something that belongs to somebody else. Coveting isn’t just about liking something. It’s being miserable because you don’t have it and being willing to do just about anything to get it.

In laying out his commandment, God recognized the many things that would drive us wild with desire—things we would covet. He listed houses and spouses, servants and animals, and the catch-all “anything else your neighbor owns.” You might not want a friend’s house (well, maybe you do—the one with the swimming pool), but your friends may have many little things you want. It doesn’t matter

whether the goods belong to your next-door neighbor or to Mr. Walmart or Mr. Best Buy. If you’re miserable with desire, you’re coveting.

There’s only one known cure for coveting. It’s *contentment*. It’s growing an attitude of gratitude for what you already have—whether that’s a little or a lot. Does that sound impossible? It’s not. Listen to how Paul managed to be happy no matter how much or how little he had. He wrote, “I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little” (Philippians 4:11-12). That’s contentment.

Having many material possessions might or might not be God’s will for you, but being thankful is *always* God’s plan when you belong to Christ Jesus (see 1 Thessalonians 5:18). Do you have an attitude of gratitude?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I sometimes, perhaps even often, desire many things I don't have. Help me to be content and grateful for what I have and not to desire the material things that others have. Thank you for providing so much for me - food, clothing, and a warm home to name just a few. Open my eyes so I clearly see all of the blessings you have given me, and give me a heart of contentment and a desire, Lord, for the things you want for me and have provided for me—in your way and in your timing. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 108

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things. . . . And the God of peace will be with you." Philippians 4:8-9

CAN THE GARBAGE

BORIS, a big black horsefly, was starving. He buzzed around the outside of the house, banging up against the window and looking for a hole that would get him inside. He wanted to get inside so he could feast on scraps and crumbs lying around in the kitchen, but the house was locked up tight, and the famished horsefly was getting desperate.

As Boris circled the house again, he spied the garbage can in the backyard. Flying closer, his eyes bugged out with delight. On the grass next to the garbage can was a big hunk of moldy lunch meat that had been thrown away earlier in the day. Boris swooped down and started eating. It was delicious, so he stuffed himself. Even when he felt as if he couldn't eat any more, he still kept munching away.

When Boris tried to fly away, he was too bloated to get off the ground. He cranked his wings up to full speed, but he was still too heavy to get airborne. He needed some kind of a head start to launch him into the air. Looking around the yard, he spotted a lawn mower sitting on the sidewalk. He dragged himself heavily to the lawn mower and started climbing up the wheel to the engine. He trudged heavily up the long arm of the mower to the handle. Once there He thought, *Now I can jump off and my wings can take over and fly me home.*

Boris got his wings buzzing as fast as he could and then stepped off into space. But he was still too heavy, and the chubby horsefly plummeted to the cement and exploded with

a splat. Boris's final thought before impact was, *I should never fly off the handle when I'm full of baloney.*

Whoops.

As Boris proved, nothing good ever comes from filling up on garbage. That's especially true of some of the garbage you might be tempted to put in your head. It's not wrong to watch television, listen to hit music, or watch videos, but God wants you to be wise about what you put into your mind through those media. There's a lot of garbage served up by the TV programs, videos, and music popular in our culture and, like Boris, those who feed on trash are likely to crash.

You know which media are no better for your mind than rotten meat or moldy bread is for your stomach. You wouldn't dine on a plate of garbage, so think about how important it is to be just as picky about what you watch and listen to!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Please help me to discern the lies of the enemy so that I do not give any credence to thoughts that are not in alignment with Your truth. Help me to examine my thoughts in light of Your Word at all times. In Psalm 26:2, we are instructed to ask, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my mind and my heart." Please try my mind and my heart and enable me to purify my thoughts and actions so that evil will not get a hold within me. Overflow my mind and heart, Lord, with Your love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 109

“All of you together are Christ’s body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NLT)

DON'T OVERDO IT - OR UNDERDO IT

SUPPOSE you and your family wander out to Billy Bob’s Bovine Steak and Burger Barn for the Friday night all-you-can-eat special. Exactly how do you feel after you’ve bellied up to the buffet? Vote for your choice:

(a) I go home stuffed because I edge my way to the front of the line — and then I inhale every last bit of vittles I can find.

(b) I go home hungry because I take itty-bitty spoonfuls — even of my favorite foods. I’m scared to take more than a mouthful for fear that someone else might miss out.

(c) I go home comfortably full — and there’s still plenty of food left for everyone else to eat when they saunter through later that night.

Did you know that you face the same three choices when it comes to showing yourself love? Think about it:

(a) You can love yourself so much that you leave nothing for anyone else in your world.

(b) You can skimp on loving yourself until you wither away.

(c) You can learn to rightly love your neighbor as you love yourself.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul said that as Christians we have something to share with each other that’s even more vital than food. He explained that the Holy Spirit has given each

of us gifts to serve others. Not only that, but God has equipped each of us with exactly the gifts he wants us to have. He’s made us like a body, and each person is like a body part. Whether we have the abilities of an eye, an ear, or a foot, our goal is to appreciate, develop, and put into action all of the abilities God has given us for the good of the rest of the body — the rest of our church family.

Can you see how that kind of self-love isn’t selfish? If you love yourself too much, you’ll keep your gift to yourself. If you love yourself too little, you won’t believe you can be of any help to anyone. But when you love yourself rightly, you think enough of yourself to put your one-of-a-kind assortment of gifts to work for the good of others!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for giving me gifts that I can use to help others, especially those in the body of Christ. Help me love myself just right so that I may use my gifts for the good of others! Place people in my life who encourage me to use the gifts you've given me and give me the opportunity to use them. When someone asks me to help and it involves using my gifts, help me to be ready to say, "Yes!" Then, Lord, as only you can do, use me to touch someone's life in your name. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 110

“I know that it is important to love him [God] with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbors as myself.”

Mark 12:33

LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE

TRUE or **FALSE:** At the start of all airplane flights, a cabin attendant:

- True False tells you where the plane is headed
- True False points to the exits
- True False explains how to buckle your seat belt
- True False instructs you that “in the unlikely event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, you should help your neighbor put on his or her oxygen mask—before you put on your own.”

If you marked that last choice false, then you’re a brilliant airplane passenger. Here’s the rule: If the inside of the airplane suddenly runs short on air, your first job is to put on your own oxygen mask. Then you can help the people sitting around you. After all, if you’re wheezing, you’re not much good to anyone. Including yourself.

Self-love works the same way. Jesus told us to love others as we love ourselves (see Matthew 22:39), because the right kind of self-love equips us to love others.

- **Physically:** You buckle up in the car, refuse to abuse substances, and get enough sleep so you don’t get grouchy.

- **Mentally:** You guard your mind by turning off negative TV programs, videos, music, and movies.

- **Socially:** You stay out of groups where you know you may give in to doing wrong.

- **Spiritually:** You fill your heart with Scripture, make yourself accountable to others, and stand against Satan’s attempts to discourage you.

Self-love means investing time and effort in our own growth so we are prepared to minister to others—because we can’t give what we don’t have. Only as we love and care for ourselves are we equipped to love and care for others as Christ commanded us. If we do anything less than cautiously, wisely care for ourselves, we hurt both ourselves and others. Instead, we cheat ourselves out of the healthy love God expects us to show ourselves, and then we won’t have what it takes to serve others in the way he intends for us to serve and bless them. God loves us too much to let us miss that great opportunity.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for your great love for me. Not only did you send your only Son to live and show me how to love, but You gave Your life for me and were resurrected on that third day so that I could also be with you in eternity! Lord, the capacity of your love for me is humbling. I am an imperfect human attempting to live each day in a way that is worthy of the calling you have for me. I need your guidance and direction. No matter where my heart is at, you are always reaching out to love me unconditionally! You are the ultimate example of love, and I am so grateful for that! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 111

“No one hates his own body but lovingly cares for it, just as Christ cares for his body, which is the church.” Ephesians 5:29

LOVING THE PERSON IN THE MIRROR

ALYSSIA is so wrapped up in herself that the rest of the world can slide by right under her nose, totally unnoticed. Take today, for example. As Alyssa crosses the street to school, she steps into traffic without looking. Horns blare. Tires squeal. Multiple cars crash and bang and pile up on top of each other. Did I hear something? Alyssa asks herself. As Alyssa charges through the front door of school, she knocks down an elderly school lunch lady. She stomps all over Mrs. Fudgebottom as she presses on to homeroom. “Those custodians really need to sweep better,” she mumbles. And as Alyssa fiddles with her hair at a mirror in her desk, her whole school is suddenly ablaze. Alarms wail. Students shriek. Only when a firefighter tosses Alyssa over his shoulder does she realize something might be amiss—with her hair, that is. “Put me down!” she yells. “I’m not finished!”

It’s clear that Alyssa loves herself in a big way, but this might surprise you: Did you know that Jesus commands you to love yourself? In Matthew 22:39, Jesus said you should “love your neighbor as yourself.” He meant that you should model your love for others after your love for yourself. Wait a minute! you might be thinking. I’m not supposed to love myself. Jesus said I should deny myself. Loving myself is bad. But that’s confusing a good thing (taking care of yourself) with a bad thing (being stuck on yourself).

As Christians our most basic job is to care for ourselves—to feed ourselves and guard ourselves from harm. We should look after ourselves mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially, and that loving respect we show for ourselves will teach us how we should love others. Jesus didn’t say, “Love others instead of loving yourself.” Jesus is saying something like this: “You already love yourself, and doing that in the right way is good. Now love others just like that.” God declares that you are lovable just because he made you. If you are his creation, you deserve care and respect. If God says you are lovable, then it’s right to love yourself. Don’t trash what God says is a treasure!

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, Thank you for loving me. Each day, I ask you to train me to see others as you see them, and help me to use your truth as a light to guide me and your grace as a hand to hold the weary. I ask you to forgive me for the times I have failed to show grace to my neighbor. Help me to walk each and every day as your disciple and to continually refine the gifts that you have given me. Give me new opportunities to use them to bless others, and help me, most of all, to speak with your voice. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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MEETING WITH GOD – Day 112

*"But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't make decisions the way you do! People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at a person's thoughts and intentions."
1 Samuel 16:7*

CHECK INSIDE

CATHERINE is beautiful enough to grace the cover of a fashion magazine. She looks as comfortable decked out in diamonds and a black evening gown as the rest of us look grubbed out in a sweatshirt and jeans. Her elegance and charm fit right in at the parties of the rich and famous. So why is she crawling around in a sewer?

In the old television series *Beauty and the Beast*, Catherine hangs out underground with Vincent, the man-beast. It's an old story in a new setting, and the whole show revolves around one gigantic question: What does she see in him? A gorgeous woman in love with a half-man, half-lion who lives in abandoned subway tunnels—what's up with that? So how can a beauty love a beast? Catherine is attracted to Vincent not because of how he looks, but in spite of it. She loves the guy under the lion's mane. She likes him for his kindness . . . and maybe for his marvelous voice, too.

Many people buy into the idea that looks are everything. Television, magazines, movies, and videos all tell us that people who lack the looks of supermodels are ugly and need improvement. That, however, is ridiculous. People can be happy just as they are without looking like a girl in a skin-cleanser commercial or a guy selling a bodybuilding machine.

In fact, there is far more to beauty than clear skin and bulging biceps. Indeed, the greatest beauty more often comes from the inside. This is highlighted in today's verse, where we find that God chose David to be king of Israel not because of his looks or the bulk of his muscles, but because of the upright attitude of his heart.

Beauty, as the world defines it, often isn't a blessing. Being stunning on the outside is no guarantee you won't be filled with loneliness, insecurity, and unhappiness on the inside. The truth is, if you think that the color of your hair or the brand of your clothes will bring you happiness, you are sure to be disappointed. Clothes can be cool, but styles change and the clothes you wear today will fade away over time. And clothes are not as important as what remains unseen in the mirror. God is thrilled with how he made you on the outside, but he is even more thrilled to see your inner qualities shine.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I thank You that You can heal broken hearts, difficult memories, and damaged self-esteem. Thank You that patterns can be broken and reversed, and thank You that You turn nobody's into somebody's. Thank You for loving me and sending Jesus Christ to die for me so I could be forgiven. Jesus, today I accept Your love and forgiveness. I want to learn to trust You. Today, help me to see myself the way You see me and to care more about what You think of me than what other people think of me. Because of you, Jesus, I am acceptable and I am valuable and I am lovable and I am forgivable and I am capable. Jesus, help me to see myself through Your eyes of love, and may the truth set me free. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

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