

## **A SAVIOR IS BORN**

Part 2: Surprised by Hope  
Isaiah 9:6

Written by Pastor Steve Norman  
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Words of Encouragement Days 113-119



**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:**

**"Isaiah 9:6  
For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 113

*"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 11:3*

### A CELESTIAL 360

**YOU** may feel as though you are sitting still right now, but it's an illusion of miraculous proportions. Planet Earth is spinning around on its axis at a speed of 1,000 miles per hour. Every 24 hours, planet Earth pulls off a celestial 360. We're also hurtling through space at an average velocity of 67,108 miles per hour. That's not just faster than a speeding bullet, it's 87 times faster than the speed of sound. So even on a day when you feel like you didn't get much done, don't forget that you did travel 1,599,793 miles through space! To top it off, the Milky Way is spinning like a galactic pinwheel at the dizzying rate of 483,000 mph.

If that isn't miraculous, I don't know what is. Yet when was the last time you thanked God for keeping us in orbit? I'm guessing never! "Lord, I wasn't sure we'd make the full rotation today, but You did it again!" We just don't pray that way. And that is the ultimate irony. We already believe God for the big miracles like they're no big deal. The trick is trusting Him for the little ones like healing an incurable illness, finding Ms. Right, opening a deadbolt door of opportunity, or getting us out of what seems like insurmountable debt.

Compared to keeping the planets in orbit, how big is your biggest dream? How bad is your worst problem? How difficult is your greatest challenge?

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, You are immensely bigger than anything existing or that can even be imagined. You are a BIG God not contained by space, and according to 1 Kings 8:27, even "the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain" you. You fill your entire creation, your creation cannot contain you. Lord, help me to focus on this truth about how infinitely vast and immense you are. I ask you, Holy Spirit, to help me to consciously put the brakes on my busy life and take time to dwell on this wonderful truth about you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 114

*"Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28*

### WHO'S NUMBER ONE?

**THINK** about whether you'd like to become a leader someday like Ms. Rachel. Ms. Rachel is a businessperson with an important position at the top of her company. She looks down on anyone she considers to be less important than her—which is basically everyone. When her assistant enters her office, Ms. Rachel barks her usual orders. "Get that stupid jerk Patterson in here. And tell Allison to—" She stops in mid-sentence, alarmed by the pained expression on her assistant's face.

The secretary says, "Your baby-sitter called. Danielle disappeared."

Ms. Rachel grabs her cell phone, dials the sitter, and fires questions as she races out of the office. She flings herself into her BMW, squeals onto the street, and speeds toward the sitter's house. If anything happens to Danielle, I'll die. She runs a red light. What if I don't find her? The thought terrifies her.

Near the sitter's house, she spots a crossing guard in the intersection just in time to slam on her brakes. Her fury erupts like a volcano. Mr. Richter, the old crossing guard, has been helping children cross the street for years, and Ms. Rachel has always looked down on him as an unimportant old man. And now, by forcing her to stop, he's wasted precious seconds.

Ms. Rachel opens her mouth to yell at him, then notices a child in his arms—Danielle! The old crossing guard had found Danielle at the park and was bringing her back to the sitter. Ms. Rachel swings open the door and runs hysterically to the man. She sweeps her three-year-old into her arms and hugs her, crying tears of joy and thankfulness. Ms. Rachel, the powerful executive, suddenly feels very small. And Mr. Richter, the old man she once looked down on, is very important.

Ms. Rachel is an "egoist," a person who sees herself as the center of the universe. She puts her interests before those of everyone else thinking, Forget everybody else. As long as I get what I want out of life, I'll be happy. But life doesn't work that way. Following that strategy can make people wealthy or powerful, but it also leaves them bitter and lonely.

Jesus taught that you and every other human being are immensely and equally important to God. Realizing the worth of everyone around you doesn't get in the way of your happiness. It makes happiness happen.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for modelling what it means to serve others. When those around me do something that brings me down, help me to keep my natural human tendencies in check and not to retaliate back. Instead, help me to recognize the hurts and issues in their lives and how I can be of help to them. Quietly remind me each day that my true worth and value are found in you, and give me comfort in knowing that you are leading me on a better path. Grant me strength to continue pursuing your path for my life, and clear my heart of any issues that will hinder me from praying for those around me as I follow that path. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 115

*“Then, on the right side of the incense table, an angel of the Lord came and stood before Zechariah. When he saw the angel, Zechariah was confused and frightened. But the angel said to him, “Zechariah, don’t be afraid. Your prayer has been heard by God. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a son. You will name him John. You will be very happy. Many people will be happy because of his birth. John will be a great man for the Lord. He will never drink wine or beer. Even at the time John is born, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will help many people of Israel return to the Lord their God. He himself will go first before the Lord. John will be powerful in spirit like Elijah. He will make peace between fathers and their children. He will bring those who are not obeying God back to the right way of thinking. He will make people ready for the coming of the Lord.”*  
Luke 1:11-17

### THE BEST LIST

**LISTS.** That’s usually how I start Christmas prep. Gift lists, party guest lists, menu lists, baking lists. I love pen and paper and checking off the to-do’s (any other prehistoric, pre-app folk with me on that one?). But there’s another kind of Christmas prep. The heart kind. The hard kind. (Is there a difference, really?) Backtrack from the Nativity, and you’ll read a birth announcement for a baby boy. Not Jesus, but his cousin, John - Zechariah and Elizabeth’s unexpected blessing. John, meaning “God is Gracious.” John, whose main calling was to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:17).

This Advent let’s take a “John” moment. Let’s be a people prepared for the coming of the Messiah. Let’s clear the clutter for Christ. Sure, we can still make those lists. But let’s also take a moment to listen, because when we listen intentionally and expectantly to our Creator, we give Him an opportunity to change us.

Many of us must confess to being a Christmas-o-holic. We love our Christmas cookies, carols, and crafts. We love the garland, gifts, and gatherings. This Christmas, however, I am praying for Christmas to be more than that. Much more than that. This Christmas, I am praying we all take time to stop and consider how to prepare ourselves. As a result of that pause in action, may our focus on Christ make Christmas all the sweeter this year.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, Advent is a wonderful time, but it can also be a challenging time, especially as we add in so many extra things to do. This Advent season, I want to come before you with an open heart. I want to set aside some time to be with you. I long to hear from you. I long to behold Christ in all His beauty. Help me to find time to shut out the distractions so I can be fully devoted to You and hear what you wish to say to me this Christmas. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 116

*"He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'" Luke 3:3-6*

## MAKING SPACE FOR CHRIST - PART 1

"LET every heart prepare Him room."(Or, more precisely, roo-oo-oom.) That's a familiar line from the Christmas hymn, 'Joy to the World'. It's as if Isaac Watts, who wrote the song back in 1719, knew that almost three centuries down the road, we would face the crisis of a Christ-less Christmas. He probably had an inkling that in the midst of our celebrating, we would forget the Guest of Honor. Mr. Watts had stumbled upon one of the greatest ironies: we get so wrapped up in our gifts, we forget to unwrap the Greatest Gift of all.

I recently heard a pastor mention that the antithesis to fearing God is forgetting God. Not denying Him. Not offending Him. Just omitting Him. However, Issac Watts reminds us that Advent is a time of *anticipating* the arrival of the King. It is like preparing your guest room for the arrival of house guests. Hosting another family in your home requires a huge time commitment. It requires clearing your schedule to make sure they're comfortable, entertained, and have clean towels. Some guest rooms also double as a home office, a playroom, and the room where one parent crashes when they need to take a nap, and schedules have to be re-visited to ensure everyone has a place to do what needs to be done. Contingent plans have to be drawn up and ideas shared with other family

members, and depending upon how often guests stay with you, it can be a really big deal!

This Advent, stop for a moment and take inventory. What makes up your Christmas celebration? What extras have you added to your days that really don't need to be a part of your celebration and instead hinder you from truly celebrating Christmas? Focus on ridding your schedule of the unnecessary. Learn to say "no" to one more commitment. Learn to say "yes" where it counts. De-cluttering Christmas may be just what your soul needs.

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Each year, I spend the end of the year celebrating Christmas. I've added and added to my preparations things I've experienced, or read about, or seen, or heard about until, like Christmas decorations, my preparations can seem to overflow my days. This Christmas, I echo the words of the Psalmist David: "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple..." As I seek time with you this year, help me to de-clutter and focus on what matters most this season - You! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 117

*“Don’t worry and say, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ All the people who don’t know God keep trying to get these things. And your Father in heaven knows that you need them. The thing you should want most is God’s kingdom and doing what God wants. Then all these other things you need will be given to you. So don’t worry about tomorrow. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Tomorrow will have its own worries.” Mark 6:31-34*

## MAKING SPACE FOR CHRIST - Part 2

**YESTERDAY**, we took a look at an analogy of preparing the guest room for visitors. Today, we will imagine that our spare room gets a mini-makeover. It's like the HGTV crew comes in - on a very, very low budget. Our sofa bed magically transforms into a queen bed, we re-arrange furniture, empty shelves of toys, and display accent pieces that have nothing to do with Lego Star Wars. Just to indulge our imagination, we will even envision buying new curtains and flowers. Those little changes will make our guests feel at home.

Sometimes like the little changes in our guest room, **we** need little tweaks to nudge us closer to Christ. So **how can we rethink, re-arrange and refocus so Christ has room in our lives this Christmas?** All we have to do is take a short inventory of our current celebration and see what little changes could be made. For instance, I love our family tradition of singing 'Happy Birthday, Dear Jesus' on Christmas and having the kids cut a cake. It's a simple idea. It's not original, and the kids will probably balk at it in a few years, but for now, it puts the focus on Christ. And everyone gets cake. No matter how perfectly arranged the spare room is, though, if we don't have a heart of love for our guests, it will soon become obvious. I don't want to do what I'm

doing to prepare for guests because I *have* to. I want to do what I'm doing as a response to our friendship. In the same way, we can't force ourselves to make room for Christ. We will want to do it in response to **the Sovereign One who gave up His majesty for a manger, who traded in His Kingship for a Cross.**

So, before Christmas gets much closer this year, ask yourself this: Is there room for Him in your heart this Christmas? Or, like the innkeeper almost did, will you unwittingly turn Him away because your life is too cluttered to accommodate the One who gave up everything for you?

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, The pace of life can often sweep me up into a series of doing and preparing without taking time to prepare the one thing that really matters - my heart. This year, this day, help me re-prioritize so that I make room for you, the Christ of Christmas. Help me to make time for time with you and enable me to do so as a response to your amazing, unconditional love. Thank you for sending Jesus – the One who poured out His life for me. What a wonderful gift to think about this Christmas! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 118

*“The angel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. The baby will be holy. He will be called the Son of God. Now listen! Elizabeth, your relative, is very old. But she is also pregnant with a son. Everyone thought she could not have a baby, but she has been pregnant for six months. God can do everything!” Mary said, “I am the servant girl of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!” Then the angel went away.” Luke 1:35-38*

### JUST BELIEVE

"**JUST** Believe." We see that tagline plastered everywhere this time of the year. It's often accompanied by delicate snowflakes, the tinkling of bells, and a dash of glitter. It's the feel-good message in Christmas movies and cards: Just Believe in the magic of the season.

When we look back to the very first Christmas, we find an example of someone who “just believed”- Mary, the mother of Jesus. She received God's promise that *her* son – the son of an unwed teenager – would be the Savior of the world. She probably went through an array of emotions. But in the end, **Mary simply took God at His Word**. She didn't make back-up, “just in case” plans. She didn't try to pray the situation away.

Instead, she poured out her heart in praise of God. What an amazing example of trusting God when we don't have our ducks in a row, of praising Him through the unknown. Her cousin Elizabeth recognized Mary's heart of obedience when she said, “Blessed is she who believes what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.”

Can you and I simply take God at his Word? Can we challenge ourselves to bank our everything on him?

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Sometimes I fool myself into thinking I'm in control of my own life. However, the only real way I can come to You is in complete humility, recognizing you have the ultimate authority over all that I do. I cannot live each day in my own strength. To quote the worship chorus, "I need You, oh, I need You, every hour I need You." Thank You for the gift of grace sent by You that first Christmas. Help me to “just believe” in you and your promises. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

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## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 119

*"In the past we were foolish people, too. We did not obey, we were wrong, and we were slaves to many things our bodies wanted and enjoyed. We lived doing evil and being jealous. People hated us and we hated each other. But then the kindness and love of God our Savior was shown. He saved us because of his mercy, not because of good deeds we did to be right with God. He saved us through the washing that made us new people. He saved us by making us new through the Holy Spirit. God poured out to us that Holy Spirit fully through Jesus Christ our Savior. We were made right with God by His grace. And God gave us the Spirit so that we could receive the life that never ends. That is what we hope for." Titus 3:3-7*

### FREEDOM IN CHRIST

"**AT** one time we, too, were foolish.... enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures...But when the kindness and love of God our Father appeared, he saved us..."

Jesus saves. Bumper stickers proclaim it. Preachers preach it. Kids sing it. The Bible says it. At what point in time did He give us that gift of salvation? Today's passage tells us that it was when we were plain old foolish people. He did it when we didn't have our act together, when we brought nothing, absolutely nothing, to the table – except for our sin and guilt. That's when He chose to enter this world. The Bible says that at one time, we were "enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures." It is those passions and pleasures that the world sees as "freedom", but eventually, we are ensnared by those same passions and pleasures which can never fully satisfy, pleasures that come up short and leave us empty.

This Christmas, let's refuse to be enslaved in the traps of the enemy. Instead, let us pray that our hearts will be completely captivated by Christ's love.

## TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, The world and the people who live in the world's ways promise freedom to all who follow after their ways, but in the end, the promises of the world are empty and the pleasures of the world are traps set to turn my attention away from you. Help me to recognize the truth according to Your Word so my attention is firmly fixed on You. This Advent, help me to wait on You so I am captured by Your Love, a Love that never fails, a Love that sent Your only Son into the world so I could have an abundant life now and forever. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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