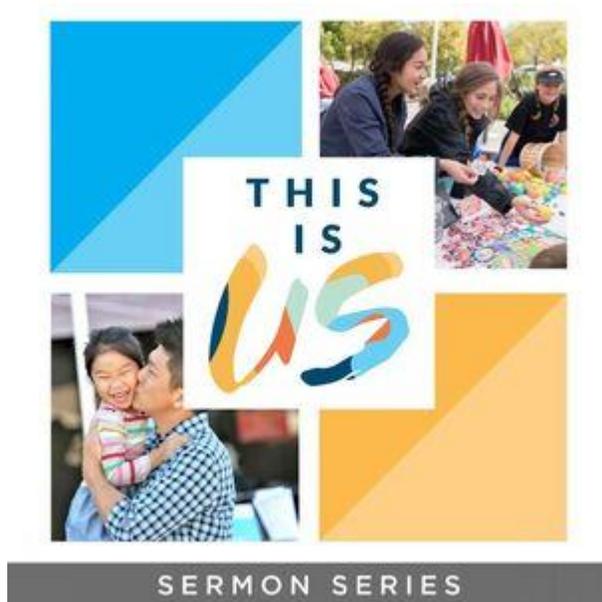


## ***THIS IS US***

Part 1: The Only Family That Will Last Forever  
Matthew 16:18

Written by Pastor Steve Norman  
January 4 – 10, 2021

Words of Encouragement Days 140-146



At different times in our lives, it is good to pause, stop what we are doing, and ask the question 'why'. Why am I doing this? What am I doing? Why am I doing it? The answer to the question 'why' always determines 'how' and 'how long'.

**THIS IS US**, the first series of the brand-new year, will help us pause and ask what is 'church' and why do we do it?

Join us as we investigate 'church' and remind ourselves what church is really all about.

### **This Week's Memory Verse:**

**"I will build my church and all the powers of Hell will not defeat it!" Matthew 16:18b (NLT)**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 140

*“And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:3-5*

### GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS

**AS** believers living our lives founded on the hope given to us by God, faith is our lifeblood. Without faith we have nothing. Without faith, all sense of purpose, value, and joy in present trials and circumstances scatters as dust in the wind. However, with faith we discover a wellspring of life with its origins found in the faithfulness of our Creator God. With faith we experience the effects of promises made to us by our living, loving, active, and trustworthy heavenly Father. With faith the abundant life God desires for us is removed from a shroud of doubt, fear, and hopelessness and becomes our reality. So what is at the heart of this incredible gift of faith? How do we, as children of God, access the life-giving fruits of faith?

Hebrews 11 tells us that faith is simply this: trusting in our God who is completely and altogether faithful. Faith is the natural response to a revelation of God’s faithfulness.

Where do you lack faith today? What areas of your life have you taken into your own hands? Where are you full of fear, anxiety, depression, or hopelessness today? Know that the path to faith in those areas is paved with fresh revelation of God’s faithfulness. II Timothy 2:13 reminds us of this, *“If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.”* Our God

will **always** be faithful to you. You can trust him with any problem you are going through. He longs to work in your favor.

### TODAY'S PRAYER:

Lord, Thank you for being so faithful to me. Psalm 36:5 states that, *“Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.”* As I begin this year, I ask that you cause your faithfulness to wash away any fear or anxiety that I struggle with, and in its place, allow your amazing character to fill me with hope, joy, and peace. Help me to experience the abundant life only faith in you can bring. Thank you for keeping all of your promises. Great is your faithfulness! In Jesus Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 141

*“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Romans 10:17*

### STRENGTHEN YOUR FAITH

**TODAY’S** scripture verse states, *“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”* Scripture, you see, offers us every truth we need to live a lifestyle of faith. Within its pages are descriptions of incredible moments when God’s people responded to his faithfulness with faith and were greatly rewarded. People like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Joshua quickly come to mind. Just take a look at Hebrews 11, often titled the Great Hall of Faith, and you’ll find summaries of their captivating lives. Scripture also contains powerful stories describing the miraculous works of the God who remained faithful to a people who chose pride, selfishness, and rebellion over his perfect, loving ways. God placed examples of all types of people in His Word so we all can relate to someone!

Taking time to read the Bible, whether it is to learn about the people in these great stories, to learn some truth of God's character, or to clarify understanding for daily living can help us go deeper in our walk with the Lord. But what if you struggle with reading God's Word? You're in good company. Many people have struggled with reading and understanding God's Word at some point in their lives. In fact the Bible can, at times, feel more like an assignment than an encounter with the powerful words of God.

So how do you move from reading it to loving to read it? You start by talking to the one who wrote it. Tell God about your challenge and your desire to read and understand it. Then, as you read it, ask God to help you

begin to read the Bible as an avenue to connect with Him and have your life transformed. Once you begin to allow God’s word to fill you with faith to live differently, you will discover the power of the Bible . . . and the joy in reading it. When we use Scripture as a way to learn about and connect to the heart of our heavenly Father, our desire to read it grows to the point of overflowing gratitude for God and His Word. Remember, TODAY is the best day to begin!

### TODAY'S PRAYER:

Lord, I know it is your desire for me to be a child of yours filled with your life-giving words. You long for me to experience the joy, purpose, and peace of faith found in your word, and you long for me to live my life with Scripture as a constant source of hope when the world seems to be crashing down around me. Proverbs 4:20-22 says, *“My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.”* Since your word gives this instruction, you also give a way for me to do it, so in this new year, give me a desire to read your word and fill me with joy when I read it. Help me to learn from your word and live according to your word! In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 142

*“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” 2 Corinthians 5:7*

### LIVING BY FAITH

**LIVING** by faith is the key that unlocks the door to the fullness of God’s promises. There is no doubt that God will always be faithful to His promises. Just consider 2 Timothy 2:13, which states, *“if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.”*

Faithfulness is within God’s nature, and without faith, we will not experience the fullness of what is available to us in God’s promises. God desires for us to experience all of His character. He does not, however, force emotion on us. He will not force us to receive the joy and peace that comes through trusting him, He does not force us to come into the fullness of a relationship available to us in faith, and He does not force His purposes on us. Faith is simply the vehicle by which we experience all that God longs to give us. Specifically, faith is the avenue through which we experience the fullness of God’s promises for intimacy with Him, for purpose in this life, and for freedom from sin.

According to Hebrews 10:19-22, *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”*, it is by faith that we walk into God’s presence. By faith, we believe God desires to be with us. In order to experience the fullness of a restored relationship with our heavenly Father, we *must* have a heart full of faith and trust that God longs to tangibly be with us, His children. Without faith, we will

live solely for the pleasures this world has to offer and miss out on all the satisfaction of living this life for and with God above all else. In faith, we can experience all the intimacy available to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

We all need a greater measure of intimacy with God, a greater understanding of our purpose, and freedom from sin. And because we are always learning and growing in our faith, not one of us has yet experienced all that is available to us through faith. Today, seek out all that God has in store for you. Take Him at His word and trust Him in response to His faithfulness.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Hebrews 11:6 says, *without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.* Lead me, O Lord, to a greater measure of faith. Give me the faith to pursue intimacy with You, Your purposes, and freedom from sin. Help me to hear all that You would say to me in these quiet moments. Give me a fresh perspective of what it is to live by faith. Show me, Lord, what new levels of relationship You long for me to experience. What new purposes do You have in store for me? What freedom do You long to give me? Help me to make space in my life to gain a fresh revelation of the abundant life You have for me. Reveal to me, Lord, what life looks like when I seek greater depths of a relationship with You. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 143

*“Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mark 11:22-24*

### PRAYING IN FAITH

**PRAYER**, when done in faith, is our most powerful gift. E. M. Bounds described the power of prayer by saying, “We can do nothing without prayer. All things can be done by importune prayer. It surmounts or removes all obstacles, overcomes every resisting force and gains its ends in the face of invincible hindrances.” God loves to move when we pray. He is not a God who forces His will on His people, but in love waits for us to capture His heart and ask Him to move and work in our lives and the lives of others. There is no more important task before us today than to learn what it is to pray in faith.

In Mark 11:22-24, Jesus illustrates an important link between prayer and faith. He said that when we have faith that God will move as He has told us He would move, and we pray in response to that faith, the impossible happens. You and I have been given the incredible gift of conversation with our God who longs to move in response to our prayers!

As you begin this year, take a brief inventory. What obstacles stand in your way today? Where do you need a miracle? Who around you needs prayer? God is ready to respond perfectly to your prayers as only He can, and do the work only He can do . . . when we pray in faith.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you through prayer. Thank you that there is never a busy signal, I never have to sign up for a time slot, never have to schedule an appointment, and am never turned away when I come to talk to you. Show me the obstacles that stand in my way. Show me where I need you to work, and reveal to me those around me who need the power of my prayers today. Sometimes, Lord, waiting for an answer to a prayer is hard. In those times, Lord, it is difficult to pray boldly when I feel You haven't answered my prayers in the past. Help me to not let past experience stand in the way of living my life in total alignment with Your Word. I know that You desire to move and work in my life on a daily basis, so help me to bring all of my concerns boldly to You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 144

***“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” James 2:26***

### FAITH AND WORKS

**THE** word “work” typically has a negative connotation in the mind of most people. When we think of work, we associate it with something we have to do but don’t feel like doing, and we often seek to separate our work from play or fun. With God, however, the word “work” couldn’t be more different from that thought. God designed work to be the expression of our abundant, life-giving relationship with our heavenly Father. He doesn’t call us to work out of obligation or to earn His love. Instead, He gives us work to do so we can live our lives *in response* to His love. It is for this reason that Scripture is clear about God’s intention for the marriage of faith and works.

James 2:26 says, *“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”* James continues by challenging us with these questions: *What is our faith if it doesn’t produce action? What is the nature of our relationship with God if it doesn’t cause us to live differently?* We often have a misunderstanding about what it is God would have us do if we were to truly submit our life fully to him, and that misunderstanding veils our heart from experiencing the fullness of life and enjoyment of the work God intends for us to do.

The truth is, God has a plan and purpose for each of us. He has something He wants us to accomplish, a person He wants to touch, or an idea He wants us to begin, and He calls us to a life of work because He loves us and has designed us for such a purpose. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ*

*Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* The work He is calling you to is perfect for you because He is the one who formed you and knows you. Have faith in the love and perfect will of your heavenly Father. Choose to live a life full of good works He specially designed for you to do, and experience the joy of living every minute of your day with intentional and eternal purpose.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for preparing good works for me to do. I ask, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that You would reveal to me what good works You have laid before me today. Help me to choose to do my work filled with the joy and purpose of the Holy Spirit. I know that the fruit of the Spirit is just as available to me during work as it is at any other time of the day, and all I have to do is choose to live my life with a different perspective from those around me. As I begin this day, help me to remember to bring to You any hardships and difficulties I may encounter as I work so You can make clear to me Your perfect plan. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 145

***“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4***

### FAITH IN TRIALS

**TRIALS** and tribulations have the power to either keep us from abundant life or produce character in us that sustains abundant life. Trials will come. That is a part of life. The choice we need to make when we face a trial is how we will get through it. Will we cling to our faith and remain steadfast in the face of trouble or will we abandon the lifestyle of faith for the easier way? When faced with a choice between God's way or the way of the world, will we stand strong against the world knowing that God will strengthen us and give us His grace to continue to stand, or will we join with the world's way through the trail and miss everything God will do as He takes us through it?

James 1:2-4 says, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* Allow the phrase, *“Count it all joy”* to settle in for a second. What trials have you faced in the past? What trials stand before you today? Is joy the emotion that stirs up within you when you think about your problems?

The greatest gift we have been given in the face of trials is faith. When problems are staring at us head-on, it's hard to see around them to the beneficial outcome intended by God. In order to face trials the way God intends, we must

have faith. We have to believe that God has an outcome as beneficial as the trial is hard. We have to have faith that God will see us through every problem that stands in our way and produce in us a steadfastness which is the foundation for us to experience abundant life.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Your word says that trials will come into my life, and You will use them to produce steadfastness and to complete Your work in Me. I admit that I don't like to face trials so when they come my way, I ask You to grant me Your perspective about the trials. Fill me with hope for whatever challenge I will face today. Fill me with faith in response to the trials that are before me, and allow Your Holy Spirit to reveal to me Your plans to use the trials for my good. As I face them, show me what characteristic You long to produce in me, and fill me with renewed strength and courage to face the trials head-on and to overcome them. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 146

***"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days." Hebrews 11:30***

### FAITH THAT MOVES MOUNTAINS

**THE** Holy Spirit loves to move with power in response to our faith. Hebrews 11:30 tells us, *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."* Hebrews 11:32-33 says, *"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions."* From the examples of those gone before us, who lived by faith, we see that as we live by faith, God will fill us with His power to do what He has called us to do. In order to receive His power, we need to open our hearts and minds to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and we start this process by simply asking God to teach us about His power and, in faith, invite Him to work in our midst today.

As we invite God to do His work, we also need to remember that we serve the Creator of all. 1 Chronicles 29:11 says, *"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all."* All throughout Scripture, we see God using His power in response to the faith of His people. Whether it be the walls of Jericho tumbling down into rubble or the lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful jumping to his feet, God clearly moves in powerful ways when His people live by faith.

Jesus even promises in Matthew 17:20, *"If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."* If we have the smallest amount of faith, Jesus said, *"nothing will be impossible"* for us. The God who formed every mountain, valley, river, ocean, and person has told you that He will fight on your behalf in response to your faith.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I want to live a life of faith directed by Your Holy Spirit. I boldly come before You today and ask that You make Your reality, power, and love known in my life. Give me time in Your Word this week to learn what I need to know so I can be effective for You. Show me where I need Your power in my life and where I need Your help the most. I know that You love me and that You desire to help me become all that You want me to be. May Your perfect plans be at work in and through every circumstance in my life this week, and may You receive all the glory for what You will do through me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**