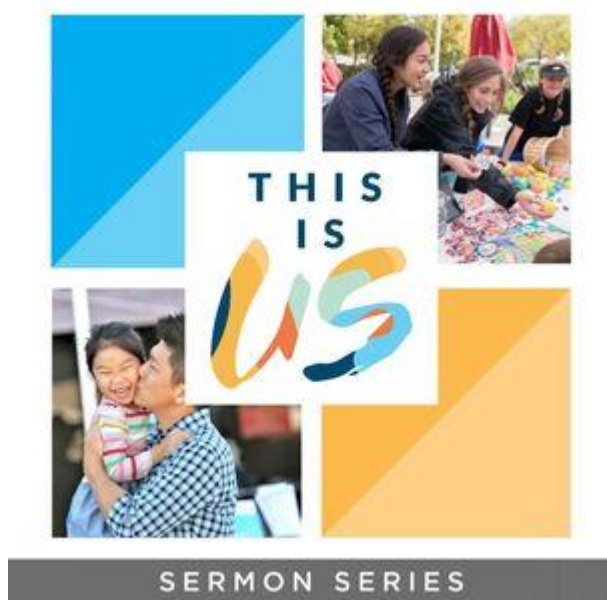


THIS IS US

Part 4: HOW GOD GROWS OUR FAITH

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
January 25 – 31, 2021

Words of Encouragement Days 160-165



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:

"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

Colossians 2:6-7

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 160

“Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body”
1 Corinthians 6:19-20

BOUGHT WITH A PRICE

A few days ago, it was stated that any God-ordained vision will have its roots in God’s overarching vision for this world. There are some people, however, who think their vision has no such spiritual significance. For example, someone might say, “I’m not hoping to start a church or ministry or anything like that. I’m trying to get a business off the ground. What does that have to do with God’s overarching vision for the world?”

If you have a similar question in mind, think about this for a moment: God does not compartmentalize our lives. From God’s perspective, there are no "spiritual" versus "non-spiritual" components of your life. He makes no distinction. There is no secular division of your life. You are a spiritual being. In this case, when we say "spiritual", we mean having to do with your Christian journey, your walk with God. Therefore, everything you are involved in has spiritual overtones or has to do with your walk with God. And God sees you in your entirety.

The Christians in the city of Corinth believed there was a division between the soul and the body. They thought they could sin with their bodies and it would have no impact on their souls. Paul pointed out that no such division existed. He told them that they were to glorify God with their bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20) When Christ purchased you at Calvary, he purchased all of you: body, soul, and

spirit. There is no division. You are to glorify God through your actions, regardless of where they take place and what role you are in at the time you do them. You are to glorify God as a spouse, parent, friend, employee, boss, and citizen. What you do at the office, then, is no more or less spiritual than what you do at church or at home.

Consequently, there is a spiritual element to your vision regardless of which category of life it emanates from. There are no secular pursuits. Your vision does not exist apart from your responsibility to glorify God. The challenge is to discover the link.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, In the name of Jesus, help my life to be a loving expression of truth in all things — speech, life, relationships. Whatever I do — no matter what it is — in word or deed, help me to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Colossians 3:17) Help me to depend on You and give praise to You. Thank you for the vision You have for my life. Whatever vision You lay before me, give me the strength, wisdom, and ability to work at it with everything that I am. To You be all glory and honor and praise. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 161

***"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."* Matthew 5:13-16**

BE A BEACON OF LIGHT

GOD'S ultimate plan for your life reaches beyond the vision He has given you for your family, business, ministry, and finances. He has positioned you in your culture as a singular point of light, a beacon in a world that desperately needs to see something divine, something that is clearly not of this world. Above and beyond the achievements associated with your vision, God wants to use you to draw people to Himself. Our visions, therefore, are means to a greater end, namely the glory of God and the salvation of men and women. *This* is His ultimate objective, His ultimate desire.

Have you ever prayed something along these lines: "Father, let my light shine before people in such a way that they may see my good works and glorify You"? Prayers like that are probably not prayed very often. Instead, our prayers usually hover close to our personal visions and dreams, and more than likely, we focus our prayer energies on requesting that God bless something, change someone, or grant us success with a project. Yet God is far more interested in how consistent we are at shining the light He gives us into environments where light is not appreciated. All of our projects, dreams, and visions are merely potential opportunities for the Father to draw attention and people to Himself.

When you pray for your family, don't limit your request to "protection" and "blessing." Instead, try this. Boldly pray that

God would establish you and your family as a light in your community. Ask Him to use your family relationships to attract others' attention to Himself. Ask Him to allow others to detect a divine element in your family's life and lifestyle. When you pray for financial and business success, ask God to grant it in such a way that those outside the faith sit up and take notice. Pray that the people around you would realize that your success is accomplished with the help of your God.

You are here to be a light in your world. You are to be a beacon in this dark night, and the success God grants you is not for your sake alone. It is a means to a much greater end, an eternal end. There is God's divine potential in all that you do.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I know that in You there is no darkness. Your character has no shadows, and You are pure and good. In our broken world, we see so much darkness around us in the form of pain, sickness, and disease which are in our community and in many of our homes. Today, I ask that You would use me to bring Your light and restoring presence into the dark places in the lives of those around me. (Matthew 5:16) Use me to bring Your hope to hearts that feel defeated, and to bring your love and compassion to those in pain. Give me faith to say with the psalmist, "Lord, You light a lamp for me; my God illuminates my darkness." (Psalm 18:28) May Your light of hope shine through me into the darkness for those I meet. Use me to show them glimpses of Your presence and the comfort You bring. (2 Corinthians 1:4) In the busyness of today, help me to take a moment to be still and sit with You, to slow down, breathe deeply, and release my burdens to Your strong hand. (1 Peter 5:7) You are trustworthy, good, and true, and I thank You for caring for me so deeply and beautifully. Open my eyes to see You at work today. Give me your light. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 162

"At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." I Chronicles 16:79

BLESSABLE

THERE are certain things God chooses to bless. Obedience, for example, is one of the things God will bless. There are also things He refuses to bless. Disobedience, for one He will not bless. As a visionary, it is imperative that you remain blessable. This means you must adhere to, and lead your team to adhere to, a set of beliefs and behaviors that reflect the tenets of Scripture. Your business or ministry may want to develop specific applications of these tenets that set you apart from competitors or similar organizations, but at a bare minimum, you must embrace the standards set forth in Scripture. 2 Chronicles says that the Lord strengthens those whose hearts are completely His, so let me ask you: How important is it to you that the Lord strengthens you in what you are doing? If it is important, then your heart must be completely His. When you embrace what is important to Him, you bring your heart into alignment with His, and when your heart is completely His, you are blessable.

Your core beliefs and behaviors can be divided into two categories: general and specific. General beliefs and behaviors are those every believer should adhere to. These include honesty, purity, and integrity which should be embraced regardless of the nature of our vision. We all have seen visions damaged by mishandled finances and unresolved relational conflicts. Failure to adhere to general

standards of honesty and purity have caused countless visions to come apart at the seams. These two things, along with moral failure, account for just about every failed vision that happens.

Specific beliefs and behaviors are specific to your particular vision. No one can tell you what these would be for you. You, with God's help, will need to figure them out on your own. Let me give an example to illustrate specific behaviors. Years ago, Billy Graham elected not to receive personal speaking honorariums. All honorarium checks were to be written to the Billy Graham Association. That rule doesn't appear in Scripture, but it was a standard Billy believed was important for maintaining the integrity of his ministry.

Do you think God strongly supported and strengthened Billy Graham and his ministry? Yes, He did. In the same way, if you want the same kind of blessing as you pursue your vision, you need to make choices that will please Him and follow His Word. That's how you become blessable.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Dear Lord, Teach me how to align my heart with Yours. I recommit myself as a man/woman after Your heart. I choose to seek Your face ([Psalm 27:8](#)). In difficult times, open my heart to receive Your revelation, and hide me in the shelter of Your tabernacle ([Psalm 27:5](#)). Reveal deeply to my heart Your love for me, rescue me in the midst of difficult circumstances, and bring me into a spacious place ([Psalm 18:19](#)). Teach me to enjoy life the way You desire I enjoy it. I am Your Bride and choose to be confident in Your love. "I love you, O LORD, my strength" ([Psalm 18:1](#)). In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 163

*"So I purged out everything foreign and assigned tasks to the priests and Levites, making certain that each knew his work. I also made sure that the supply of wood for the altar and the first portions of the harvest were brought at the proper times. Remember this in my favor, O my God."
Nehemiah 13:30-31*

FULFILL YOUR DESTINY

THE biblical figure of Nehemiah can be used to illustrate the effective pursuit of a vision for one's life. Nehemiah pulled the war-damaged city of Jerusalem back together and back to functioning as it was supposed to. He organized the people to rebuild the city's wall. He instituted social and spiritual reform. He put the temple back into operation again. And he convinced the people to observe the Sabbath as God intended. You see, everyone ends up somewhere in life. Nehemiah ended up somewhere on purpose. When he had completed his vision, he asked God to remember him with favor. This shows he had a sense of destiny, and he never lost sight of the divine nature and significance of his work.

Like Nehemiah, you have a destiny to fulfill. God has placed before you opportunities and responsibilities that are brimming with divine significance. He has given you gifts, talents, and relationships that are waiting to be developed on behalf of His kingdom. You have a multifaceted mental picture of a preferred future. You have a vision. But as Nehemiah's story demonstrates, it takes more than imagination and passion to make what could and should be a reality. A vision requires more than a singular encounter with God, for even those experiences where God clearly births an idea in your heart will not provide you with the tools nor the momentum necessary to

see it through to completion. Developing vision requires patience, investigation, and planning. It requires faith in God's ability to work behind the scenes and confidence that He will orchestrate what He has originated.

There will be seasons when you feel like you are making little, if any, progress, and during those times, it will be easy to get distracted. This is when you must join with Nehemiah in declaring, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down" (Nehemiah 6:3). Whether your visions are family, ministry, or business oriented, they require constant attention. Stay focused. Even more important to your vision, remember that there is divine potential in all that God has put in your heart to do. The end of a God-ordained vision is God. His glory is the ultimate agenda, so allow your heavenly Father to exploit the visions you are pursuing for His glory. As you pray and reflect, identify the steps and challenges that lie immediately ahead of you in your own course of developing a vision, and then get going on it.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for having a vision for my life. In Jeremiah 29:11, You state, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." As I seek You, give me the wisdom I need to understand Your plans for my life. Help me to set priorities today so I can obey Your call on my life, and grant me the ability to follow Your leading to gain a wise heart as I spend my time in ways that honor You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 164

"And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as His children? He said, 'My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when He corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes each one He accepts as His child.' As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as His own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as He does all of His children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really His children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in His holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." Hebrews 12:5-11

NOT A DOORMAT

YOU know what agape love is all about. It is gift-love. It is the love that God has for us and that He wants us to pass on to other people. And it is sacrificial—we may have to give up something, but we expect nothing in return from those we love. Now that you have that down pat, vote “yes” by checking any statement that describes what true agape love looks like:

- You lie down in the doorway at school or work on a snowy day so people can wipe their boots on you.
- You invite the guy who copies the front page of your homework to copy the back too.
- You let your friends order you around and always pick what to do.

When our biggest goal is to love others, we might think we have to do some crazy things, but that thought is sloppy agape. True agape love does not turn us into someone others can abuse. To understand agape love more, check out these points about it:

— Love involves discipline. Look at God. He is a loving Father, yet His love does not mean He looks the other way when we do what is wrong or does not take time to train us up to do things the right

way. He “disciplines those He loves, and He punishes those He accepts as His children” (Hebrews 12:6). Love does not go soft on wrongdoers by letting bad behavior slide. It helps them grow up.

— Love can be tough. Jesus—God’s love in human form—unleashed anger at His opponents (Mark 3:5). He verbally blasted hypocrites, who said one thing and did another (Matthew 23). He chased greedy merchants out of the temple (John 2). Love can mean calling attention to evil—or taking a time-out from a friendship when your friend continues to hurt you.

— Human love can fail, but God’s love will not fail. You may remember hearing, during a sermon at a wedding, the phrase, “Love never fails” taken from 1 Corinthians 13:8 (NIV). Actually, the right way to translate that is, “Love will last forever.” The sad truth is this: humans do not show that love perfectly. God, on the other hand, who demonstrates perfect agape love toward us, His children, does show love perfectly. His love will last forever!

When Jesus walked on earth, He modeled perfect agape love, the kind God wants us to show to others. But showing His love, His care, and His best to others does not mean letting them take advantage of us. If that starts to happen, the most loving thing we can do is to be a better example—and, if necessary, point others toward better attitudes and actions. That is real love.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for loving me unconditionally, and thank you for modeling agape love through Jesus. His words and actions towards others set the perfect example for me to follow. As I strive today to love others, help me to love wisely. Help me to discern when I need to show a generous helping of compassionate love and when tough love is needed. Show me what true agape love looks like in each situation I encounter this week, and as I spend time in Your word, help me to see just what You would do to love those You place in my path. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 165

"Don't worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong. For like grass, they soon fade away. Like spring flowers, they soon wither. Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you our heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust Him, and He will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun." Psalm 37:1-6

GOD'S WILL, YOUR DESIRES

"I'M doing all that big universal will stuff," Cheri says. "I obey God as best I know how. But how do I figure out all the specific little things God wants each day?"

Cheri is in a great spot! When you are committed to following God's clear, universal will, it is time to dig in and discover His specific will. God gives us four ways to search out His plans:

Step 1: Look for God's will in the Bible. Knowing Scripture is our starting point for zeroing in on God's will. We don't have to wonder, for example, if it's okay to swear to fit in with friends. Ephesians 5:4 says, "Coarse jokes—these are not for you." If our idea of God's specific will doesn't match up with Scripture, then it's not God's will.

Step 2: Look for God's will in prayer. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10). God wants us to ask Him for the guidance we need—as often as we need it!

Step 3: Look for God's will in the advice of others. God puts wise, mature Christians in our life to help us spot God's specific will—people like parents, grandparents, youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, and pastors. They have experience we lack.

Step 4: Look for God's will in your circumstances. God can direct us by opening and closing doors in life. You might be

good at languages and want to attend a pricey, month-long language camp. Well, being offered a scholarship might mean God has opened the door for you, while missing out on one might mean the door is shut. But circumstances are tricky. There might be other ways to get to camp, so even when the scholarship doesn't come through, it still might be God's specific will for your life to attend camp.

Being sure of God's will happens when we make the most of all four ways God wants to guide us. But how do we settle on a final choice?

Here's where God makes it easy. If you're doing God's universal will and seeking His specific will, here is how you make your choice: Do what you feel led to do. When you put God first in your life, He promises to give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4). That means He will put His desires into your heart. And guess what? If what you want to do does not line up with God's will, He makes it His job to kindly point that out to you.

THINK IT THROUGH: How does it make you feel to know that God cares about you enough to show you His specific plan for your life?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, You know me better than I know myself. You know my fears and my desires, how much I want (this) and how much I will be devastated if it does not happen. I know You love me and have a plan for me. Please, Lord, don't let my desires blind me to Your will. If (this) is not within your plan for me, throw up a Brick Wall. Give me an obstacle I cannot get past. Help me follow Your will, Father, and give me peace about whatever is to come. Then, if this falls through, I will know it is Your hand guiding me every step of the way. Thank you for loving me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

Pastor Steve