



New Life Christian Community

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." 2 Cor 5:17

Sunday, January 13, 2019

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PASTORAL PONDERING

Owning Your Faith

My new Immerse class is called "Owning Your Faith." That, essentially, is the call of God's people throughout all time: to make their faith *their own*, to experience it and live it for real. Saving faith in only Jesus is meant to be tangible, not abstract. It is meant to infuse and transform every facet of our lives. While the strength or quality of our faith in Jesus may vary from time to time, our pursuit of Him should never grow stale.

Jeremiah 29 is filled with instructions and encouragement for God's people in exile. It was a new and dark experience for them. They were undoubtedly full of questions about God's promises and faithfulness, wondering where he was, wondering why he had allowed them to suffer, et cetera. And God's counsel to them is essentially this: "Don't give up. In this dark time, *seek me*. Look for me, and you'll find me. I will come through for you; I'll restore you." It's as if God is saying, "In the midst of exile, don't become complacent. Don't become apathetic; don't give up on your faith."

"Own it," in other words. It's a beautiful call because it's not random. It's not simply, "Own your faith today" all by itself. Rather, the call is more profound: "Even in the darkest of times, even in the suffering, even when it seems like the only reasonable thing to do is give up, *own your faith*, even now in the midst of that." It's not about owning your faith when life is going smoothly; it's about owning faith when life is spinning out of control. How do you do that? "*Seek me with all your heart*" (v13).

There are other places in the Bible where we're told to seek after the Lord. For example, Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and in the eighth year of his reign he began to seek the God of David his father (2 Chronicles 34). Psalm 9:10 tells us, "*Those who know your name put their trust in you, for you O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.*" Psalm 14:2 says, "*The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.*" There are many other instances like this.

But then, you flip over and read in Romans 3, "*No one is righteous, no not one. No one understands; no one seeks for God*" (v11). How do you reconcile those two ideas?

In John 6, Jesus says, "*No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*" (v44). In other words, God's grace is always *prior*—prior to everything. Prior to

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Pastoral Pondering

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our salvation, prior to our growth. This means that you'll never own your faith unless the Holy Spirit works in you. There's no formula or three-step program to owning your faith. I cannot convince you by myself to own your faith, and I can't tell you how to do it.

But I can show you the gospel, the good news, and let the Holy Spirit move how he moves. I can try to help you understand God's grace, as I continue to understand more and more myself. God's grace is prior. When Jesus made that statement in [John 6:44](#), he meant basically, "*You'll never seek after God unless he first seeks after you.*"

English poet Francis Thompson called God "The Hound of Heaven" in his famous poem by that title, and he did so because he understood and experienced God's grace. Long before he came to Christ, God was after him, chasing him down.

Author Harold Best puts it like this: "God's grace...does not come to us *after* we turn to God, but precedes, surrounds, and enables our turning" (*Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, p156-157).

Consider the parable of the two sons in [Luke 15](#). When the younger son returns home from his chaotic, messed-up, out-of-control life, the father doesn't sit and wait for him to fall on his knees begging for forgiveness before he lets him back in. Instead, the father hugs him and welcomes him home before he even has a chance to repent. He may not have repented at all; he may not have been able to swallow his pride. But in response to his father's freely welcoming him home out of love and grace, the younger son repents.

This is how it works for the Christian. Our repentance doesn't bring God's favor and acceptance; it's the other way around. It's *grace-enabled* repentance. We don't try our hardest to repent and really mean it and make it sound really good and sincere, and then just hope that it will be good enough for God to forgive us. We don't try to own our faith by merely our own efforts. We don't try to do a bunch of things that we hope will earn God's favor and forgiveness when he looks at us and sees how hard we're trying. God's grace is prior. God opens His arms and welcomes us home, initiating our repentance.

So, God says, "*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart*" ([Jeremiah 29:13](#)). And when you really do that and experience God's grace in Christ, you'll understand that it was God who initially sought after you. When you really own your faith, you'll know that it wasn't merely a result of your effort alone. Christians take credit for nothing. And the more we find ourselves in Christ, trusting in and relying on Him alone, the more we will truly own our faith.

~Pastor Bennett

Announcements and Upcoming Events

ANNUAL PARTNERS MEETING

Mark your calendar for our Annual Partners Meeting **Saturday, January 19th @ 10:00am**. As a partner of the body of New Life, this is one way to participate in the workings of the body and also to be aware of the goals and direction the Lord is leading us in. If you have been attending New Life for some time and you would like to become a partner or have questions about what it means, please reach out to one of the elders or pastors and set up a time to meet. Regardless if you are a partner or not, for whoever calls New Life home, we all need to be continually praying for the Lord's leading, especially as we enter a new year. May Jesus always be at the center! Please bring a dish for the potluck brunch to follow. What great way to express your partnership!

PRAYER

Set aside **Tuesday evening, January 22nd, 7:00-9:00 pm** for prayer. We will be commemorating the U.S. Supreme court decision that legalized abortion in 1973. Let us seek the Lord and His mercy and ask for grace to know His heart for the unborn in these days. If you have questions, prayer concerns, or want to help with this prayer night, contact Sara G. 715-294-0748.

2019 MEN AND WOMENS RETREAT

Please don't forget to check out the retreat taking place right here in the valley. Do you hear my voice? Do you know my name? The 2019 Conference "He Seeks, the God of the Bible" is taking place at Oak Forest Retreat Center in Frederic, WI on **January 25th - 27th**. Space is limited. The conference is open to Men and Women. For details please see the flier on the welcome table in the entrance or text Rene Germain at (715) 417-4363.

NEW LIFE CONNECT

If you'd like to join others to discuss the daily readings from the *One Year Christian History Devotional*, you are invited to a group just created on New Life Connect - the "1 Year Christian History" group (go to the top of the page, under "groups" click "Join group" and select "1 Year Christian History." Come join us!

January Memory Verse

John 14:6

"I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." ESV

Fellowship Tip: Want to build a deeper relationship with one another? Consider serving in a ministry team. Ministry Team Leader information can be found in the newsletter.

Upcoming Potluck/Meal Teams:

Jan 20 Meal Team #6

Jan 27 Meal Team #7

Please join us for fellowship and a meal following our service today!

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This Week's Schedule of Events @ NLCC:

Jan 16 Women's Bible Study 12:30 pm

Jan 16 Immerse Family Studies 6:15 pm

Jan 17 Men's Bible Study 6:30 am

Jan 17 Women's Bible Study 9:30 am

Jan 17 ALL GriefShare Folks 6:30 pm
Adults and Youth meet separately

Jan 17 Ezekiel Bible Study 7-8:30 pm

Jan 22 Prayer Vigil 7:00-9:00 pm

Check out New Life Online

newlifechristiancommunity.org

• Events • Sermons Online • New Life Connect • Set Lists • & More



Today's Passage:

Pastor Paul's message is from the New Testament book,
Titus 1:1-4

Sermon Notes: