**PRODIGAL MESSAGE HANDOUT**

**HOPE**

**Message #1**

**This Weeks Memory Verse:**

**Hebrews 12:2 *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning it’s shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God***

*In a sobering review article by Aaron Kheriaty, UC Irvine School of Medicine Psychiatric Associate professor and director of the Medical Ethics Program, he reviews the alarming and increasing rate of suicide in America. He notes that 12% of Palo Alto HS students in a 2014 study had seriously considered suicide. In a national study in 2017 that number increased to 17%. The article is both informative and shocking as he relates what he calls “Deaths of Despair” to loneliness and social isolation. He notes that people who attend church once a week were 5 times less likely to commit suicide. In 2016, the US Attorney General stated that social isolation or loneliness was now listed as a disease that is associated with increased stroke, heart disease, premature death and violence. He noted that social isolation is on par with heart disease and cancer as a major pubic health issue in the US. When high risk suicide patients, those with failed attempts or those hospitalized for suicidal ideation, were studied there was one risk factor that rose clearly above all others. Hopelessness. We cannot live long without hope.*

**Introduction**

Jesus promises in John 16:33 that in this world we will have trouble. He did not say “if” or “maybe”. He said we *will* have trouble. Those troubles can be minor, or they can seem overwhelming at times. Those who come to the Prodigal ministry are almost always in the midst of chaos. Our ministry’s purpose is to give hope in the midst of that chaos. We believe hope, founded on emotion and false assumptions, is not only useless, but also cruel. The more certain we are that our hope is based on Truth, the more we can be comforted by it. We believe that such Truth is based solely on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.(John 14:6)

**What are you hoping for in your Prodigal chaos?**

What specifically are you hoping for right now? Are you hoping that your prodigal will come to their senses? Are you hoping for your prodigal to find happiness and become a responsible citizen? Are you simply hoping for some peace in your own life? Are you crying out from deep within your soul that your Prodigal will not die in this process? Are you hoping that your Prodigal finds God and the loving arms of Jesus?

Questions to Consider:

* What if you are hoping for the wrong things?
* How do I know what to hope for?
* How do I find hope?
* How do I know that my hope is real, based on Truth and is dependable?

These are questions we hope to answer in this message.

**Hope in something greater than yourselves**

Victor Frankel was a prominent Jewish psychologist who found himself a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp in WWII. He was a researcher in his craft and continued to study prisoners’ responses to their torture and imprisonment. He studied what they placed their hope in, in the midst of this horrific experience. He summarized the responses into 4 categories.

* Brutality
  + Some became ruthless leaders in the camp and found hope and satisfaction in their own power and status.
* Survivalists
  + Some found their hope in survival alone, believing all would work out on the other side. All they would have to do was survive the time of capture and abuse and their lives would be restored once they found their freedom.
* Despair
  + This group gave up hope altogether.
  + Frankel describes a particularly dramatic example of a renowned musician in the Berlin symphony who had a vision that the war would end on a certain day. He placed his hope in his freedom and release on that day. As that day approached ever closer, a dramatic and telling story played out. A few days before the predicted day, the man became ill. The illness progressed and with less than 24 hours left before the time of his expected rescue, realizing the war was not going to end and his hope was unfounded, he slipped into a coma. Ironically on the predicted day both his hope and his life ended as he passed away. ***Hope that is not based on truth will eventually be found worthless, cruel, and harmful.***
* Hope in something greater than themselves
  + - They had a faith in the God of their choosing. This group, according to Frankel, coped the best. However, what we place our hope in will eventually be held up to the light and discovered to be true or another cruel and harmful temporary salve. ***We believe that hope in Jesus Christ is the only real hope as it is based on absolute truth.*** *Faith does not have to be blind. Faith in Jesus Christ is based on reason and facts and is the only hope that will stand up to eternity. The Prodigal ministry has a 20 week curriculum that walks through this faith based, truth filled hope and it’s implications, not only for our prodigals, but for us as well!* It is hope that we can hold on to with great confidence in the midst of any storm.

“*In religion, as in war, and everything else,* ***comfort*** *is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for* ***truth****, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for* ***comfort,*** *you will not get either* ***comfort*** *or* ***truth*** *– only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair. “*

C.S. Lewis – from *Mere Christianity*

**Where Do YOU Find Hope? What is Truth?**

Many people find their hope in financial security, power, or fame, all of which serves their pride and desire for personal pleasure. For those who believe this world is all there is and eternity is a myth, then such a paradigm makes logical sense. However, for those who believe this world is not our home and belief in Jesus Christ is a ticket to guidance by His Spirit now and eternal paradise forever, such hope in earthy pleasure is no hope at all. Upcoming lessons will look at Truth, the evidence for an absolute truth and how you can pursue it reasonably and with integrity.

If you do believe in a hope greater than yourself, or higher power, then what does that look like? Do you believe in Allah, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, Buddha, Jesus, Self, or some other god of your choosing? We will compare these options in greater detail in another lesson, but the one thing that is evidential and factual is that the world’s religions do not agree with one another on critical tenets. Jesus Christ stated in John 14:6. *I am the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through me.* We will not explore the merits of each faith system in this lesson, but we must at least come to grips with the fact that despite being a popular secular paradigm, not all roads lead to heaven. We must decide what truth we will base our hope on, admitting that Truth cannot contradict itself and there is an absolute truth.

At this point in our initial lesson of the curriculum, we will state that our hope is in Jesus Christ. Everything in our curriculum and teaching is predicated on that belief.

**What has the God of the Bible provided to give us hope?**

1. **His Son ( a living hope)** 
   1. Tim Keller points out in a sermon entitled “Hope”, that “there is no way to get through life without experiencing suffering. There is no good way to get through suffering, unless you have a ***living hope***.“ With that in mind, we are encouraged by I Peter 1:3-9. *Praise be to the God and the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ! In His great mercy he has given us a new birth into a* ***living hope*** *in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time… in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*

**In Prodigal we encourage you to find your hope in the Truth of the living God and His Son, Jesus Christ.**

* 1. How can we be assured that we have this living hope?
     1. **Belief in Jesus Christ**, his death on a cross for our sins and his resurrection in bodily form so that we might be resurrected with him after our death to life with Him forever in paradise.

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Romans 10:9-10 *That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord”, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*

* + 1. Diagnostic Questions
       1. If you died tonight, how sure are you that you would get to heaven? Answer: 100% in the passages above and others found throughout the New Testament it is clear that if you have accepted Christ’s sacrifice for you, you can be assured 100% of your salvation.
       2. If you get to heaven and were asked why you should be allowed to enter, what would your answer be? Answer: Through belief in Jesus’ work on the cross alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works , so that no one can boast.* If you feel that you have to do anything to earn your way to heaven then you are saying, in essence, that Christ’s sacrifice was not enough. Such a perception is not found in, nor supported by Scripture. (see also Aug. 6,2017 WM sermon “Do good people go to heaven?”

1. **His Holy Spirit**
   1. Jesus says in John 14:26 *But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*
   2. John 16:13 But when he, the spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.
   3. We quote the reality of John 16:33 often as we remind ourselves that in this world we will have trouble but lets not forget the rest of that verse that is so important in giving us hope in these troubled times***….”but take heart, I have overcome the world.”***
   4. Many of us have struggled in the depths of our troubles to even find the words to pray. We should take great comfort that God knows that and he tells us through the apostle Paul that the Holy Spirit intervenes for us in those times. Jesus Christ’s spirit is the Holy Spirit that lives within all believers and therefore Jesus Christ himself through His Spirit prays for us even when we can’t. **Romans 8:26** *In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*
2. **His Word**
   1. *God has given us His Word to guide us and to give us hope as the following scriptures clearly state*
      1. ***II Timothy 3:16*** *All scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching,, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be fully equipped for every good work.*

***See also Romans 15:4***

* 1. *Examples of Scripturally inspired hope*
     1. *John 14:1-6; John 16: 20; Isaiah 43:2; Revelation 21:4;*

*Romans 8:28*

1. **His People (Community)**
   1. *We are encouraged by stories of transformation in the lives of those who have placed their faith in the truth of Jesus Christ. Those stories give us encouragement and hope, as we see a living God work in the lives of human beings.*
   2. *God’s people are also a gift when we live with them in authentic community. Wise biblical counsel is a way we can better process the Truth of His Word. Community encourages us, and spurs us on to love and good deeds, and in that, gives us hope. We sharpen one another, which matures us in Christ and strengthens out relationship, which also gives us hope.* 
      1. ***I Thess 5:14*** *and we urge you brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone*
      2. ***See also Heb 10:23,24***

**Simultaneous Joy and Suffering: What?**

Let’s remind ourselves of I Peter 1:5 again. *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.* The world would say this verse seems odd or even crazy. How can we have joy and rejoice in the middle of suffering? The answer is a life lived firmly rooted in the Truth of the living hope of Jesus Christ. This truth reminds us that this world’s troubles will make us sad. However our joy in knowing that our eternity is secure and that these troubles are temporary give us an assurance that these tears will be wiped away and will be totally forgotten one day. That reality allows us to acknowledge that we hurt and we can grieve in a healthy, honest way with tears. Even though painful, we can have joy in the journey by the truth of God’s promises to us both now and in the future.

*see* **(Hebrews 10:19-25)**

**How Then Shall We Live? Application of Truth**

We should live our lives every second with our eyes fixed on Jesus. This is incredibly difficult to do, as humans, but this should absolutely be our goal.

**Hebrews 12:2,3** *Let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lost heart.*

Let us look to the Old Testament, of all places, for a powerful example of what it looks like, in very real terms, to fix our eyes on Jesus. Read **Numbers 21: 1-9**

*When the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming along the road to Atharim, he attacked the Israelites and captured some of them. The Israel made this vow to the Lord: “If you will deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities.” The LORD listened to Israel’s plea and gave the Canaanites over to them. They completely destroyed them and their towns; so the place was named Hormah. They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; They spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you.*

Before we read the last few verses of this story, let’s pause for a moment to honestly ask ourselves a serious question. Know that in the very next verse, the people of Israel are going to ask Moses to pray for something specific to help them. Before you read on, ask yourself what you would pray for if you were surrounded by venomous snakes. I suspect if you were in risk of death every day from deadly snakes surrounding your tent, your request to Moses would be exactly the same as the Israelites.

*Pray that the LORD will take away the snakes from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, “ Make a snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.*

Pause to think and pray about God’s response. God did not answer the prayers of the people specifically as they requested. It was a logical and reasonable request from a human perspective. It is a similar prayer request that I lift up for friends and family often. “Lord, take away this burden, this hardship, this trouble”. However, *God gave the people exactly what they needed.* He gave them a way to live dependently on Him, by looking at the bronze snake. The snakes were still there and that daily hardship could only be overcome by daily dependence on looking at the bronze snake.

We gain significant insight into the greater meaning of what this bronze snake on a pole truly represented by Jesus’ own words in John 3:14, 15 right before most likely the most quoted verse in the Bible John 3:16 ***just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up****, that everyone who believes in Him might have eternal life. For God so loved the World that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

As Chuck Colson reminds us, “Emotions should not determine your Truth, rather Truth should determine your emotions. “ The Truth is that this world is broken and is ruled currently by the Prince of darkness. As a result, we will face trials,hardship, pain and suffering. The Truth is that our hope is found in no one other than Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion**

Remember the story of Jesus walking on the water in Matthew 14:22-33? The disciples were in deep trouble in a boat in the middle of the lake amidst a terrible storm. They looked up to see Jesus walking on the water. Peter asked Jesus to allow him to walk on the water and come to him. Jesus told Peter to “come”. He did and walked on the water, until *Peter took his eyes off Jesus* and began to focus on the wind and the magnitude of the trouble he was in. The text says he became afraid and began to sink until he refocused and cried out to the Lord to save him, which Jesus did.

*II Cor. 4 :16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day be day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us and eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

*A few years ago, a man in his thirties took his own life by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. After his death, his psychiatrist went with the medical examiner to the man’s apartment, where they found his diary. The last entry, written just hours before he died, said, “I’m going to walk to the bridge. If one person smiles at me on the way, I will not jump. “*

*…Excerpt from Dying of Despair by Aaron Kheriaty*

*In 2018 instillation will begin on the construction of a $211 Million safety net under the Golden Gate Bridge set for completion in 2021. Senator Diane Feinstein (D) California stated upon the passage of the bill stated, “what we are doing here today, what the taxpayers are doing today is reducing that number (of suicides) to zero. “*

Is a safety net the answer?

If you are reading this message, it is quite likely you are being tossed around in a terrible storm. You are most likely not suicidal but you are understandably sad, probably frustrated, confused, and possibly in despair. You have most likely tried everything you have at your disposal, but you are at the end of your rope and are fearful of what’s next. A safety net or a system based on emotion will not be effective. **Your hope lies in Jesus Christ alone. He is the Truth.**  He knew you would be here. Listen to his comforting words in Matthew 11: 28-30

*Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble at heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

***Jesus is the only safety net we can depend on. He is our only Hope.***

**He is sovereign, good, caring and loving. He died for you and for me. Even If you find He is all you have, He is all you need.**

**Questions for Closed Group Discsussion**

**Day 1**

Describe a previous situation where you placed your hope and happiness in something that you eventually found disappointing and unsatisfying. Try to point out how this hope was misplaced and how you might approach the issue differently now.

Day 2

In John 14:6 Jesus states that He is the way the truth and the life. Describe in your own words what it means for Jesus to “be “ the truth instead of know the truth.

Day 3 I Peter 3:15 states in paraphrase that we should all be ready to give an account to everyone that asks us for the “hope” that is within us. Can you do that ?

Day 4

This message lists the things that God has given us to give us hope. He has given us His Word, the Holy Spirit and His people. Describe how these gifts impact you and give you hope?

Day5

It is a strange concept to the non believing world how you could have simultaneous joy and suffering. Explain your confusion over that concept or your encouragement by that concept.

Day 6

Can you explain a time in your life where you have had hope despite no change in your circumstances? If so share this expeience with the group. If you struggle with that concept, share that openly as well.

NOTES