



DIFFERENCE MAKER • NEW HOPE CHURCH

This Is Bigger Than You

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If you want to be encouraged, just hang out with the Isaac family for a few minutes. They are great. I'm going to do a couple things first. It's not related to the message. Well, I guess it could be, but you don't know.

Yes, so two things about New Hope that are a little odd, and I want to explain it. Becky was talking to someone the other day, and they like our church, and part of the reason is because it doesn't have any rules or anything. It's not really true. We do have a rule. We've had it now for a while, and some of you may be rule breakers, and I want to cure you of that right now. We have what we refer to as the five-minute rule.

Five-minute rule is the five minutes right before the service and the five minutes right after, go see someone you don't know. Introduce yourself. Say, hi, I'm Elaine. Well, if you're not Elaine, don't do that, but you could just make up a name. But churches, they do all these surveys of churches, and almost every church says they're warm and friendly.

Then they survey the people that have visited those churches, and they get a different vibe from it. And part of it is that we're warm and friendly with the people that we're warm and friendly with, but we stay away from others that we don't know. So like when you leave here, you'll immediately get coffee or a Coke and talk to someone you already know.

The five-minute rule says, don't do that. Go to someone you don't know yet. Just introduce yourself, say hi. They may be new. Maybe they're just new to you, but we don't want anyone to feel just like they're an afterthought. The other thing is about the take-home sheet and stuff. We've been accused at times of not really caring much about the Bible because people will come and they don't see many of you carrying your Bible.

There's a reason, I mean, I think if you bring your Bible, that's great. But none of my non-Christian friends carry their Bibles much. And in fact, anymore, very few people even own a Bible because they got an iPhone with 60 translations on the U version. I mean, a lot of us, it's all electronic. I still use paper ones, but we started doing these take-home sheets years and years ago.

Almost all the Bible verses we use are on this because we didn't want anyone to feel left out. When you come in, if you don't have a Bible, and they say, well, why don't you just put Bibles in the seats? Well, then what are you going to say? Well, let's turn to Job 3.

Well, first of all, people are saying, is it Job or Job? I'm not sure which it is. And where do I find it? And they're going to thumb around for five minutes trying to find it. Is it Old Testament, New Testament? Which is the difference? I don't know. We don't want anyone to feel unnecessarily awkward. So we print it out.

so that we're literally all on the same page. It's not one of our rules, it's just something that we practiced for a while because we don't want, if you bring a neighbor or friend or classmate or coworker, we don't want them to feel unnecessarily left out. We really do want to remove any distractions. So anyway, that's part of the way we operate. I know it's weird, but when the new pastor comes, it won't be as weird.

Let me mention this to you too. There are 150 post-it notes on this cross. They were here, someone noticed it last week. This is from our Camp Water Kid. Our kids have been working on, they do all kind of lessons during the summer. They've been focusing on joy.

And so each of those notes is something they feel joyful about. They've been doing some studying in the New Testament. One of the stories you'll see in Acts chapter 16 or 17 is about Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas were early, early believers, and they were arrested and thrown in jail because they were telling people about Jesus.

That still happens today, just not in the United States. There was a pastor in China that was just released. He's been in prison for quite a while because he was leading a church. And the offense they had is they were teaching their people that their number one allegiance was Jesus Christ, not the state. And anyway, these kids are learning about this. And so they wrote out, this is something I feel joyful about. And they're learning that joy is not based on the circumstances you're in, that's happiness. Joy is much deeper than that. Joy is something that can't be taken from me even if all my externals go haywire. I can still have joy because it's something lasting. It comes from this relationship with Jesus. So anyway, that's what's going on with that. I've done the two PSAs. Good. I'm going to get into the message now.

We've been doing this Difference Makers series, and if you've missed any of it, I hope you'll go back and see it. We interviewed Jenny Herzog, Stephanie Schleyer did. We had Will Heath, who was working with the group that's helping us with the pastor search. And then last week, Brett Berzio spoke and did a phenomenal job talking.

This idea of being a difference maker, it should be normal for us, but we need to be reminded because we can lose sight of it quickly. There are really two key questions that every one of us need to have an answer for and a good answer. This is something that can start. Parents, you do this with your kids, but you need to constantly remind yourself, too, of the answer to these two questions. Who am I and why am I here?

And you might think, well, that's kind of silly. We have all kind of groups trying to get us to identify with who am I. I'm a Republican. I'm a Democrat. I'm an American. I'm not. I'm in this generation. I've got this ethnicity or this racial background. I mean, there's all kind of metrics we use of who am I.

Why am I here? Again, if you watch any TV, you've got all kind of advertisers trying to tell you why you're here. You're here to buy their stuff. You're here to make a living. You're here to be happy. You're here to

make other people miserable. I mean, there's all kind of reasons why we're here. Followers of Jesus have some clear answers to this, and it may sound simple. It kind of is, but it's fundamental to our lives.

Who am I? Why am I here? I'm going to read a passage to you, and it's going to give some answers to this. This is Ephesians 2. It says, God saved you by his grace when you believed, and you can't take credit for this. It's a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

So I'm going to pray. We're going to look at these two questions and then implications from that. And I hope that when we leave here today, we'll be better focused, ready to live very deliberately. Let's pray together. God, you know us completely. You know all the things that are wrestling for our attention.

You know, the things we feel guilty about, the things we feel hopeful for, things we think we deserve, and the freedoms that we ought to have that maybe we don't right now. You are completely aware of us, and you really have our best in mind. No one could have a better parent than you. No one could have a love that is like yours.

So I pray that you would help us today to look at these two questions. Who am I? Why am I here? And that we would settle on some healthy answers and be set up to move forward really, really well so that we can be impact players in our culture and our nation and our world.

Help us to listen and not listen for somebody else, but listen to what you have to say to us in Christ's name. Amen. Who am I? If I've accepted Jesus Christ, then I know that I am a son or daughter of the King and Creator. And no one can take that birthright from me. I'm saved, I'm rescued, I'm forgiven. And it's all been the result of his kindness and his mercy.

I didn't get treated like I deserved. He came for me. He gave me the greatest gift that anyone could ever have, and that is his son coming to take my place so I could have real hope. I could experience real love. And why am I here? Once I know who I am and whose I am, I am here to be his partner, to do good for him to others in his name. I get to help them to know the kindness and mercy and grace that I've experienced. I get to lead them and hopefully persuade them by my example and my words so that they would come to know Jesus too. That I could be like Paul and Silas where I'm regardless of the circumstances I'm in, I can still be joyful because of all God's done and will do for me. The thing I loved about the profiles that we've had during this series, the different families, is that we get to see, in so many cases, we get to see parents leading their kids to understand answers to these questions early. We get to see, in some cases, the kids guide the parents in it.

We get to see that there's a pattern of serving and giving and being actively involved because it really matters and that there are things that are more important than me just being happy in the moment. One of the things that concerns me, and look, you don't have to agree with this, but I watch a lot of parents that seem to be utterly focused on wanting their kids to have everything maybe they didn't.

wanting their kids to be able to experience everything they weren't able to. And what happens over time if we're not careful, that we're inadvertently showing our kids that they're the center of the universe. And that as they get older, everything is about me and my being happy. And then I watch some of these parents, like the Isaac family, their kids aren't being deprived, but their kids are being guided by an example of, you know, we're going to invest the lives we have and the talents we have and our abilities. We're going to invest in being part of a church community and we're going to be involved. It's not an either or, but it means there are priorities. Because we want our kids to grow up in understanding they're part of something bigger than themselves. And that there's this great God that has big, big plans for them.

And they want to help their kids learn that, not just talking about it, but actually living it out. So these two questions, who am I, why am I here, there are big implications to it. And so I'm going to walk through a handful of them with you. And I'm going to ask you to do something with me. I'm going to make a statement, then I'm going to ask you, after I count to three, to repeat it.

You may not agree with it, so I'm going to make you a liar for a minute, possibly. But I do want you to hear yourself say it because you might end up buying it. Based on what God's done for us, based on all that we read and have experienced, we can understand this, that my life is too valuable and too short to waste. All right, we're going to try this. I'm going to count to three.

My life is too valuable and too short to waste. I didn't count to three yet. Rule number two at New Hope. All right, so I'm going to count to three and we're going to say it. One, two, three. My life is too valuable and too short to waste. Do you really believe that?

I know some people that are militant about not wasting food. They'll keep things in their refrigerator. They'll have company. They'll scrape the green fur coat off and hand it to them as if it's brand new. I'm sure none of you do that. But we don't want to waste it. We're waiting for these great bargains to come along. I can go to Costco and get enough food for a platoon. Now, I am going to waste a lot of it, but I got a great deal on it.

And some of us get really aggravated when we go through the pantry and have to dump stuff that's out of date. Some of us don't think the dates matter, Becky. I kind of think that it's a setup. They're just trying to get me to replace good food. But when it's expired in 2012, maybe it's about time to get rid of it. Money. You know, we don't want to waste our money.

Amazon has their mid-year sale, and we're spending all kind of money to save money. I can save you a ton more. Don't even read the ads. Don't buy anything, and you're saving even more. But, I mean, how many times are we looking for the deal? Because I need to save my money.

And then time. Time is one of those things a lot of us are aware of, but I've talked to several people recently that have just kind of beaten themselves up. They said, you know, I got on Instagram. I was just going to look for a minute. And an hour later, I'm still scrolling through all this stuff. It's addictive. It's French bulldogs singing. You know, I just busted you, didn't I? Becky loves French bulldogs on her Instagram. I don't get it.

I'm going to need to go somewhere for lunch today. So if any of y'all, but we do. We think of, you know, whether it's food or time or money or things like that, we're aware of it. But do we really think about our life overall being that valuable and deciding I don't want to waste any of it?

John 9, 4, Jesus said this. He goes, we must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. In other words, we've got a short span, and some of us are thinking, oh, I've got so many years ahead of me. Maybe, maybe not, even if you have a long life.

Everyone I talk to that has had a long life, almost all of them say, man, it went by like this. It was so quick. Parents, they're watching their kids. You can almost watch them grow out of their clothes. It just seems like time moves quickly, and with it comes the potential that our lives have to make a difference. Using our time and our talent, our influence, our treasure, and all that. Am I using it well, or am I wasting it?

I was asked to do the eulogy at a funeral for a friend of mine's mom this week. And she had a long life. She was 98. Grew up in the Depression.

But hearing her three kids talk about her, hearing the stories about her, it was fascinating. Her legacy was that she was a genuine follower of Jesus, and she really lived her faith out. I don't think she's ever been mentioned in the newspaper. She doesn't have a podcast. She wasn't wealthy. But her legacy of this being genuine and her investing her life in others continues.

And I just ask myself when I do funerals like this, I'm just asking, how am I going to be remembered? Am I investing my life? Because right now, all of us are building the legacy we're going to be remembered by. You're doing it right now. And a lot of times, the things that have impact are not the big public speaking kind of, it's the little things along the way. It's the things that get caught more than taught.

And how am I living today that shows that I recognize the value God places on my life? Or am I putting it off for later on? Or am I regularly remembering who I am and why I'm here? Or do I get distracted? And it's easy to be distracted.

Here's another statement we're going to repeat. I'll say it first, then I'll count to three. I'll say it first. A life of active devotion to Christ is the best investment I can make. All right, I'm counting to three. One, two, three. A life of active devotion to Christ is the best investment I can make. Again, the question is, do you really believe that?

How many opportunities are there for us to invest our time and our talent and our money and influence and all that? They're constantly coming around. But listen to what this says in Galatians 6. I love this passage. So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time, we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to those in the family of faith.

The word blessing gets thrown around a lot, but it has this idea of something that is deep and good that has been given to me.

It's not just something that makes me happy temporarily, but a blessing is something that God has provided that is deeply satisfying. It comes from having a life that I recognize fulfillment. I recognize real joy. I have contentment. And it all comes from recognizing God's presence in my life. When he's with me, these things go along with it.

Not just temporary, and it all comes from this relationship, this personal relationship with our God and Father. And these blessings also, we see them in our own life, but we see it in the lives of those around us where we live our faith out in a way where they discover hope and love and forgiveness and freedom. There is nothing more encouraging.

And then see someone that you care about, someone you love, discover what it means to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. And to know that you had a part to play in that. Not to get yourself credit, but just to realize I'm God's partner in this. I get to be a part of what he's doing. So we have this harvest of blessing, both now and later. And then it goes on to say, and therefore, because of this, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to those in the family of faith. This doing good means a deliberate choice to live focused with my church family, but then also beyond that too. That's why volunteering, being in a small group, financial support of the church, all these things are really important. The take-home sheet will help you go further, but it's because it's part of this process God is using to help me and help others become what he wants us to be. We've got people right now that are watching kids upstairs.

They're doing it because they want to, for the parents, they want to come alongside the parents and partner in helping invest in these little ones so that in an early age, they'll understand what really matters, that they'll be able to have some answers to who am I, why am I here. When you support the church financially, you're resourcing us to be able to do this in an ongoing kind of way.

And all the different ways you volunteer, it's helping us be stronger so that we can do the work he's called us to. And one of the things about being part of a church family that you don't get if you just, and again, I'm not denigrating people that watch online. I think that's great that you can. But there's something about being connected and being in groups and volunteering together. God wants us to develop character, and that doesn't happen in a vacuum.

Character is developed in relationships. Some of us didn't get that growing up in our homes, and so we have our new family. And some of you are really hard to be around. And we've got character issues, don't we? And so one thing about us working and being in teams together and all is we get to learn some flexibility and forgiveness. We learn what it's like to receive it and to offer it. We learn what it's like to be on a team where not everyone gets to make all the choices.

We're developing this kind of community that can be inviting to others, and when they see it, they say, I want what they've got. Not a perfect community, but one that is growing, one that's strong, one that's real. And this is one of the privileges and responsibilities we have that we need to take real advantage of. We get to connect with each other. We get to come alongside and encourage and motivate. We get to do projects together. And I love it that there's some things we do that are intergenerational. We do the mobile pack coming up in November. From five years old up to 105 years old can work side by side doing something that

is going to make a difference and change lives in some of the hardest places in the world. We have a food drive coming up. And again, we're helping with Lorton Community Action Center, helping our neighbors, but we get to do it together. As we do it together, we get to learn stories with and from each other.

I know in my small group, our group is a wide variety of people in our group. A lot of differences, but there's some things that we have in common that have built friendships together. We hear stories of wrestling with things, whether it's marriage or work or family.

We hear stories of people trying to care for their friends that don't know Jesus yet, and we learn with and from each other on how to approach things well, and when we mess up, how to make things right. The fact that we get to do this together is pretty amazing.

And it's not something to take for granted. It does take time. It does mean I'm not going to do something so I can do these priorities first. And then I'll make room for all the other. When you leave today, I hope if you're not volunteering somewhere, I hope you'll go to the fireplace and find a place where you can. And I know some people say, well, I'm just, my schedule's, we'll work around all kind of schedules.

You need to volunteer. We need it as a community. And we need to do this so that we can grow and develop and be the people God wants us to be. It's just that simple. You'll notice tables in the atrium. There's a volunteer training later on today to encourage and come along and support our volunteers. We don't ever ask anyone to do something that there won't be support for them along the way. So that's my PSA for today.

As I was working on this message, though, I want to make one more statement that you'll repeat with me, and then I want to point out something that I think fits where we are as a culture and where we are as a nation. Here's the last statement. Deliberately investing my life in doing good to others will pay off now and later. So I'm going to count to three. Let's say that together. One, two, three. Deliberately investing my life in doing good to others will pay off now and later.

United States 250th birthday, I think it's a big deal. I am very glad that I'm an American. I've watched all the kind of things and some of the celebrations look pretty inviting, some of them not so much. I mean, it's just, how do you come up with a party everyone likes? I don't know how you do that.

But one thing I heard over and over again were people that were selecting a phrase from the Declaration of Independence, and that is that we believe everyone has this right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

I will say you ought to look up the definition of happiness from 250 years ago, and it wasn't necessarily what you and I think of, like a donut from Krispy Kreme. Happiness had a depth to it that was a bit, Krispy Kreme donuts are fine, but I'm going to say the one that shoppers are twice as big and half as much. We have a support group for people that are carb addicts, so go get your donuts and join us.

But there's a part of the Declaration of Independence that I haven't heard anyone mention. It may have happened, it just wasn't in the circles I was in. You know, there are 56 delegates that signed it. And when they did, they signed right after making this final statement in the Declaration.

And it's this, I'm going to quote, it says, And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor. Every one of the 56 knew they were signing a potential death warrant. Because they were going to be taking, we were breaking away from the powerhouse nation at the time with an army and navy that we didn't have. Let me read this again. And for the support of this declaration with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor. I'm not saying this because I want to draw all kind of comparisons to political leadership we have now. That's not my point. I do think it would be worth everybody evaluating this because the freedoms that we enjoy did not come, and you hear it over time, didn't come free.

came at a huge risk and a huge cost. But I want to move this and think of us as God's partners. We believe these things. We believe Jesus came so that we could be forgiven, that we could have a brand new life now and forever. But are we willing to stake our lives on this and promote it regardless of what it costs?

Are we really going to be God's partners in season and out, or is it just when it's convenient, or is it going to be down the road when I have more time and money and all that? Will you and I mutually pledge our lives and our fortunes and our sacred honor to promote the work God's called us to, like those that came before us 250 years ago?

There's some practical ways to do it. One is if you're a partner at New Hope, renew it. I don't think it is a big deal. You get to help shape what we do as a community. If you've never been a partner, find out more about it. We'll be glad to help you with that. If you're not volunteering, start. If you're not supporting the church financially or if you're doing it kind of as a tip every once in a while, get serious about it.

Pray for your neighbors. Invite them to come to things that we do, whether it's a service or projects that we do. Open your home to get to know your neighbors and classmates and coworkers. Learn hospitality so that we can build these relationships and we can explain to them this really, really good news that we've been given and that we get to share with others.

This idea of being a difference maker is just, it's a natural expression of understanding what God's done and how we get to be a part of it with him as his partners. So I'm going to lead us in a prayer. Part of it's going to be quiet. Some of you will be very uncomfortable, and that's okay. But let's close out this series giving God our full attention. Would you pray with me?

God, it is easy to forget the simple and clear answers to who am I and why am I here. For those of us that know you right now, help us to think about this, to give you our attention. And if there's anything you see that's interfering with us living deliberately, as your sons and daughters investing our lives and our talent, our fortune, all that we have for you, would you show us one or two things that we could do about that right now?

Father, I know there's some of us that are tired. We feel like we've been carrying more than we should, that others need to step up, and we're burned out, we feel bitter, and we're ready to bail. Remind us that what we do with and for you is worth whatever it takes.

Father, if there's anyone here that doesn't yet know you, either here or watching, I ask that you would help them to see the overwhelming value of a life that's fully devoted to the one that gave us everything, that offered us freedom, forgiveness, and hope. And I pray that you would spur them on to find answers to their questions, that they would discover this really, really good news that we know that comes from Jesus. Please speak to us today and help us to be active listeners. In the name of your son, amen.