



DIFFERENCE MAKER • NEW HOPE CHURCH

See What Others Miss

June 28, 2026 • Will Heath

WILL HEATH

A couple of guests with me, actually, have been here more this weekend. JD and Chris, would you all stand up, please? I have an incredible opportunity to get to be on their team and just serve churches. We love serving churches. The greatest thing you could learn from me or about me is Allie and I just circled 27 years in May. We have a 22-year-old. We have a 17-year-old. And yesterday, I didn't get to fly in earlier because we were celebrating the seventh birthday of my... Seven-year-old. So, yeah, do the math. Anna and Alex were 15 and 10 when Andy was born. Not planned, but we are so grateful that that's the way the Lord worked it out. Love doing this. Love working by this, not preaching.

You'll have a much better preacher than me. We love serving churches. We love working with spiritual communities that are going through significant moments. And it gives an opportunity for us to actually practice what we say we believe. Too many people look at succession through the lens of risk. I think it's the most fantastic opportunity for churches. The World Economic Forum. In 2025, they release their jobs reports every two years. If you go back, I would highly recommend you download it and read it. I love stuff like that. On page six or seven, right-hand column, about a third of the way down, it lists two demographic realities that are shaping global economies. One of those is an aging demographic workforce.

What was once just kind of a swell on the ocean is now a tsunami hitting every shore in every country around the world. And it is this thing of... of older leaders transitioning out of their various vocations, and that's what we get to do. By God's grace, we have clients on five different continents. And we work with the smallest church I've had the privilege of working with is like 20, 30 people. The largest is a pretty big church. I work with college universities and NGOs and non-profits. All of that is just to say. God has been so kind to our team to give us the opportunity to be on the front row seat, kind of like we've got this little perch into how spiritual communities all over the world navigate this thing.

And see how they do an incredible job. The first lesson I learned about succession planning happened in 2007. I was 31 at the time. I had just read the 20... One Laws of Leadership. Anybody ever read that by John Maxwell? Anybody know that book? The 21st law is the law of legacy. I was about to have lunch with a mentor friend of mine. He's a pastor at a church in a neighboring community. And I said, 'Hey, Steve, if I buy this book for you, have you read the book?' He said, 'No.' I said, 'If I buy it for you, will you read it?' He said, 'Yes.' So I'm 31. Steve is 63 at the time.

Somebody told me I need to have friends that are a few decades older than me, so I've always tried to keep those guys around. And so I'm there. I'm just, I mean, I'm 31. I do have no clue what I'm about to ask, Steve. I like no decorum. There's no like honoring this man. He's like he's like an uncle in many ways. I just love this guy to death. So after we catch up and whatever, I said, 'Hey, here's the reason I wanted to give you that book.' 21st Law is a law of legacy. I said, 'Hey, Steve,' I got two questions for you. Remember how old am I at the time? He was held. I said, 'Hey, Steve.' What's it going to look like for you to be a pastor when you're no longer the pastor?

And number two, what are you guys thinking as a church today so that your successor doesn't mess this place up? That's a pretty bold question. That's the kind of relationship we had. You ever see the TV show Beverly Hillbillies? He sticks the thing in and up from the ground comes a bubbling crude oil. Black gold. Texas tea. um, I didn't realize. In those two questions. It was like I stuck a shovel into a vein in his soul that I had no idea, as a 31-year-old dude, even existed. For the next two hours, Steve, through various waves of emotion, unpacked to me just how concerned he was about his eventual transition in me, a snotty-nosed... somewhat arrogant 31-year-old, I just came and treaded over a topic that he had been silently wrestling with for a while.

And I walked away from that. It impacted me deeply, like the tears went from his cheek to my soul. There's a tear-sized dent in my soul because of Stephen Leatherwood that day. I felt like the Lord tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Hey, Will, there's a lot of Steves out there.' I want you to help Steve, but there's a lot of Steves out there. I want you to help them. I'm 31. I have no idea what in the world that meant. I was doing my background's commercial lending and investment banking. I'm doing bivocational ministry. That's a big fancy word that meant that I did banking to support my ministry habit because I worked for free at the church. And so I just went about my life.

Succession became this thing that was on my radar. No idea what it would turn into. No idea that I'd be able to provide for my family and get to work with these incredible guys. And serve ministries all over the place. All I knew was that succession became this thing. And for the next couple of years, from 2007 to 2010, I would read the Bible through the lens of transition. One of my favorite ways to study the Bible is by doing word studies. Anybody ever done that? Like you find a word and you just kind of look up the Greek or the Hebrew and like, okay, how many times and where is this referenced in scripture? I'd go read all those passages. Well, one of the words or a concept that was on my brain was stewardship.

Let's do a little word association. I'm going to say something, and I want you to repeat it back to me, okay? You get this? So we'll practice Dallas Cowboys. It's amazing. Summer. Winter? Yeah. Washington, D. C. No, be careful. Stewardship. Silent. A lot of times, if you didn't say it, maybe the first image that popped into your brain was dollar signs. So often people interpret, especially in spiritual local church communities, stewardship through the lens of money and giving and financial stewardship. And that is very appropriate, but that's not the only thing stewardship's about. And so I'm thinking about this succession thing. It's like this conflation of disciple-making, intergenerational relationships, stewardship. And I'm doing a word study on the topic of time. Of all things.

And here's what I saw over a month or two of just digging into the idea of time. I saw one that there's different ways the Bible talks about time. One of them is seasonal time. This is probably the one that captured my, ooh, that was, sorry about that. Let me spit in your ear there. The Acts 17 is really where this grabbed me. Paul is describing God. And he's giving this explanation of the one true God that we serve as Christians. One of the ways that he describes... God took one man and made all the people, all the nations of the world, and he put them in their time and boundary of existence. He put them in their place.

In other words, what Paul is saying is you were born the year you were born because God willed it to be so. God is the author of seasons. God is the one who created the construct of time to begin with. And God is the author of seasons. So one of these ideas of time is seasons. I'll put seasonal, I'll put seasons. Another word that I ran into was chronos. It's a fancy word. It's where we get our modern day word chronology. A lot of times in scripture where you see a reference to a day, a week, a time. Or a month, or whatever it is, it's a reference, some derivative, or some form of chronos. So this idea of stewardship is on my mind. Time is on my mind, and here's here's what I saw.

And here, this became my thesis for what it means to be a steward. We are stewards. When we allow that the season that we're in to determine the way that we manage. Our moments. We allow our seasons to determine the way we manage our moments. I grew up on a, my uncle had a hobby farm in southeastern Oklahoma in the peanut country at that time. So when we would go to plant peanuts, we'd take a plow. Anybody here ever have the privilege of walking behind a plow or working with a plow? How many hands? A few of you. I can still smell the dirt. That old Oklahoma sandy clay, like you get the blades, how a plow works, the blade gets under the dirt and then it folds it over.

Gets air into the sand like that would be the best candle ever made, like I could just like burn dirt if you could and put it straight to my nostrils, like to this day I viscerally can smell it and taste it there. Well, when it was time to plant, we would use a plow, because that was the season. You fast forward a couple months. And it's time to harvest. Take a wild guess as to which specific tool we did not use. The plow, right? Why? And this. Right. The tool, the activity that demonstrated faithful stewardship and taking advantage of opportunity in this season. If we just repeated that same action, used that same tool in this season, it would have actually destroyed everything we worked for in the previous season.

The thing that demonstrated stewardship over here. If those activities, those chronos activities, those moments in the tools, if we just repeated them over here. It destroys and undoes. Yeah. I saw this analogy. It's not with me, original with me. I wish it was because it's brilliant. We see time like this. God sees time like this. And what God did, and now Paul, one of the things, the most powerful things God teaches us about Paul is that God is the author of seasons. And what God is doing is he's wrapping seasons. season after season after season after season until one day Jesus is going to step out of that eastern sky and he's going to come back to fulfill what he started on the cross. cross redemption is coming.

reunite being reunited with the king is coming that is where everything is headed. ultimate redemption. ultimate salvation. But until that moment, what God is doing is he's moving season after season, weaving them together. And, like Acts talks about somewhere around Acts 13, it says that when David went and

served his purpose for his generation, he went to be with the Lord. David was born in a generation, in time and space, in the season he was in, to accomplish something that was going to connect to this redemptive movement. God had intended. So what is God doing? God is the author of seasons and he is on the move. He is doing something. And every time there is a seasonal shift, you and I have the opportunity to match the season with our activity.

You get this? Pretty simple concept, isn't it? Simple. But sometimes what I've found in life, some of the simplest ideas have the most profound impact. Because all of us get this, right? It's why seeing a 40-year-old dude wear skinny jeans is just weird, right? It's like, 'Dude, it's pastor season.' Or seeing a grandpa at a kid's baby birthday party doing the hokey pokey. It's like, 'Dude, don't throw a hip out, grandpa.' Man, what are you doing? Sometimes, if we're being honest with ourselves, God moves the season. But we've really built some expertise around the plow. I'm really good at the plow. Like people are known, I'm known for using the plow. In fact, other farmers come to me and ask how much I get so much yield because they see how I use the plow and they're kind of jealous about what I can do.

And they come to me and they ask me questions about the plow. So not only am I good at the plow, but it's also a platform for me to kind of demonstrate influence. I know it's harvest season right now, but I'm really good at the plow. So I'm just going to keep plowing. I've done that. Sometimes God moves, we stay. And we get out of sync. And we're no longer stewards in this moment. Sometimes, though, what happens is we leap out in front of God. And we manufacture activity for a season that doesn't even exist. The first lesson I learned about succession is that succession is personal before it becomes tactical. As a 31-year-old guy, that idea seared into my brain, but I had no idea what it meant, and I didn't understand why.

I mean, I saw Stephen's heart breaking in front of me, but I'm like, 'Dude, suck it up, man. Follow the Lord. Trust the Lord.' Why is this so hard? I'd ask that question. This young 30-something-year-old dude, oh, man. Don't you trust God? I got really frustrated with older leaders for a season of my life because I didn't understand. In the same way, when I told Allie for the first time that I loved her some 29 years ago. Those words then mean something very different than what they mean today after 27 years of marriage. I own the love for my wife in a very different way than I did when we first got married. My 22-year-old daughter. I have a very different relationship with her.

At 22 years old, a college graduate, than I did when she was three. I have a very different relationship with my 17-year-old, than I did when she was five. I have a very different relationship with spicy food now that I'm 50, than I did when I was 40. We get this principle, right? So why are transitions personal before they become tactical? Here's just the practical reality of it. We experience transitions not like these clearly etched lines on a whiteboard, do we? In fact, most of you are probably like me. I realize that I'm in a new season by looking through the rearview mirror, not the windshield. There's been a few times in my life, three. to be exact, where I felt the Lord tap me on the shoulder and tell me, 'Hey, we'll get ready for something.' And I did it.

And I was prepared. And I stewarded that really well. But I've been through a handful of transitions and I've only got three proactive. Why is transition personal? Well. Proverbs 1, verse 20. I love this passage. Wisdom

shouts in the streets. I think it's beautiful that the Bible in the Old Testament personifies wisdom as a woman's voice, by the way. Wisdom shouts in the streets. She shouts in the streets. She cries out in the public square. She calls to the crowds along the main street, to those gathered in front of the city gates. Spaces and the economic spaces and the political spaces are all referenced in this one little verse. Wisdom's voice is screaming at us, trying to get our attention, telling us to do something. And most of the time, what wisdom is saying (season change, season change) is something is about to happen. You have an opportunity to listen to me. Follow me.

The reason why transitions are personal before they're tactical is because whenever there's a seasonal shift (personally or organizationally) it's like the Spirit of God inside of us sends off warning bells. It's like the barometric pressure of our soul changes. How many people with bad knees in here felt the rain cloud coming like a day ago? Feel that? It's like the Spirit of God setting off warning bells and something's, listen, listen. And we sense. There's a seasonal shift, but very rarely do we have clear words and language to even understand what it means. So we start to grab a hold of things that we are used to and what we experience and what we know to be true based on our personal experience of that moment. But biblically...

I want to introduce you to two words. You know these, I'm not introducing them to you, but I want to pull out two words. Faith. Faith is always a forward-facing muscle. We walk by faith, not by sight. Without faith, it is impossible to please God, who is the author. The application of faith is one of the greatest demonstrations that we have as human beings in our personal life, in our organizations that we are part of, that we actually put our trust and our hope in God. Who is the author of Kairos and the seasons? Who architects time itself? God. And for those who have confessed that Jesus is Lord and believe that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For those who have confessed that Jesus is Lord.

And like Peter says, like I'm Peter in 2 Peter 1, he says, 'I'm Simon Peter. A servant, an apostle.' That word 'servant' there, the idea there is that Peter has been so consumed with the purposes of Christ that he's giving his own life to the purpose of Jesus. For people who know and trust and believe what God says about himself is true. Transitions are a great opportunity to flex that muscle of faith, trusting in God to provide provision into the season that we are about to go into. It doesn't matter if it's an end of career transition or if it's a high school kid wanting to go to college, trying to figure all that out. There is a moment in time where we have the opportunity to cast our fear forward.

Our faith forward, not our fear. Fear is the other word, fear. Is a backwards-facing muscle. Where fear is extolled as a virtue in Scripture, fear God is the beginning of wisdom. Where fear is extolled as a virtue is always in response to an encounter with the holiness of God. Ananias and Sapphira misrepresented their generosity. God killed them. And what happens? It says that fear went through the church. In other words, the church saw. Somebody do something manipulative to get social gain. God killed them. The story of that caused fear in the hearts of the people, and they started relating to God in a different way. God's having a conversation with Moses and he says, 'Hey, Moses, when you go into Canaan land, the people that are in Canaan, the people that are here, they're going to.'

to hear about what I did at the Red Sea, how they parted. They're going to hear what I did with the plagues, and they're going to be afraid of you because of what I did back here.' Peter, James, and John go up to the mountaintop with Jesus. You see Elijah and Moses, and Peter's like, 'Dude, it's awesome.' We're here, God. Let's build a tabernacle to Moses and Elijah and Jesus. Indicating he did not completely understand who Jesus was because he put Jesus on equal billing with Elijah and Moses at the moment. And that's when Daddy stepped into conversation. He's like, 'This is my son. Do not dare treat him like anybody else.' And they fall out in what? Fear. Isaiah. In the year King Uzziah died, I looked up and I saw the Lord.

Isaiah chapter 6, this calling for him as a prophet. He has this encounter with God in this moment, this holy moment. Foot replies in fear. I'm 50. Let's say that. Fear is always, when it's working at its best, it's a backward-facing muscle. Looking back at those moments where we have an encounter with the holy, where we've seen God do something, and it causes us to divert our eyes in respect and reverence to the holy one. Faith is a forward-facing muscle. What happens? Barometric pressure in our soul changes. Wisdom screaming at us. We don't always know what's coming or what to expect. And what we'll do is we'll cast our fear forward. And we'll project our faith at the season that we just came through.

And if we're not careful when that happens, we'll actually turn yesterday's tools or yesterday's methods or yesterday's activity into an idol. The things that we use to serve God over here can become idols in the season if we're not careful. Why is transition personal before it becomes tactical? Because I think, whether it's a personal transition or an organizational transition, these are intentional inflection points where we have the opportunity to demonstrate something about our faith that is unique in a season of transition. That we actually believe. That what God says about himself is true. And that he will behave as though he is God. And I'm going to walk by faith. Proverbs 1, verse 20, wisdom shouts in the street. She cries out in the public square.

She calls to the crowds along the main street, to those gathered in front of the city gates. Verses 22 through 32 is really good, night-night reading for your kids. My personal favorite is, 'Hey, if you don't listen to me in the day of your calamity, I'm going to laugh at you.' Wisdom's screaming at us. We have an opportunity. God's not grabbing our arms and making us do anything. We have the opportunity to choose to obey and to follow. In verses 22 through 32 is all the negative consequences of not following, but it closes out this section, verse 33. To me, it's one of the most beautiful. Profound, impactful, practical promises of Scripture. This is not a promise that we will realize when we die and finally our eyes open up in glory.

This is a promise that you and I can walk in today. But all who listen to me will live in peace, untroubled by fear of harm. But all of you who listen to me will live in peace, untroubled by fear of harm. God's leading us somewhere. He's sending us his spirit to direct our behavior. Whenever we get into these seasonal shifts, we have an opportunity to trust. or to do what we want. How I want to. Close our time. I want to acknowledge. Did you guys know that y'all are going through transition? If you'd be honest with me, how many of you has that elevated some feelings in your spirit? Some of you have been impacted deeply by the Spirit because of the work here, of what's happening, because of Rusty's teaching, and probably more so just by him and Miss Becky's time with you.

There's a real lament that is going to happen, and it's appropriate, but lament is not a cul-de-sac. It's a rite of passage. It's okay to feel loss while at the same time pressing forward in faith. Those two things can be true at the same time. We've got three minutes. How I want to end my time is I want to use verse 32 as a response time for you to have a conversation with the Lord. The first half of that verse is all who listen to me will live in peace. If you're going through a personal transition, after conversations with some folks after the first service, there's some folks going through transition in the first service, and I bet there's probably some folks going through transitions personally in this service as well.

Or if you want to think about transition here with Rusty's transition and as New Hope is stepping into this new season. Can it be said of you that you are living in peace? I love the beauty and the simplicity and the power of this one. Here's the promise. Do we believe in the promises of God? If we listen to the Spirit's voice, what is the promise? To be at peace. Doesn't mean it's going to be easy. Nowhere in scripture does Jesus promise easy. But we will live in peace. I want you to have an honest conversation with the Lord right now and confess and celebrate the peace you have in whatever transition or you just take your angst and give it to the Lord. I'm going to give you a minute just to process that. Spend a time, confess, reflect on your level of peace in this moment right now with whatever transition the Lord brings to mind in your life personally.

Living in peace, trusting the one who makes the seasons. The one you're leaving and the one you're stepping into. The second half of that verse is untroubled by fear of harm. Untroubled by fear. Fear is an incredible gift of the Lord as long as it's facing the correct direction. When fear becomes a trouble is when we treat it like a compass. Fear does not direct our path. Fear reminds us whose path we're on. It becomes very troubling when we try to cast and understand the future through the lens of fear. And if I'm willing to bet, there's probably some of us in this room that are trying to define their future through fear, not through faith. Take a second just to give that to the Lord.

By the way, this isn't an easy believism kind of prayer. That's hard work. It's not just easy to do. But there's a mindset. There is a posture of your soul before the Holy One who created the seasons that is able to do incredible transformative things in the way that we think and the things that we feel and the things that we say. If you are troubled by fear, let's have a moment to ask the Lord. The author of 'It's the Spirit of God. The Helper. To help with that. Jesus says, 'My burden is easy. Give that fear to the Lord.

Y'all are in a sermon series called Difference Makers.' There's a lot of ways that we demonstrate, as individuals, our trust and our hope and our faith and our dependence on God. One of those ways is that we make a difference around us by the way we personally and corporately navigate significant moments. Thank you. As we, as a body, and you, as an individual, strive to be a difference maker. Perhaps one of the greatest opportunities you have is to be a difference maker in the way that you or embracing whatever transition you're in. In a way that is letting your light shine before men in such a way that the people around you see your good deeds, see your faith-forward posture. and they glorify your Father who is in heaven. Father, I pray a blessing over the people of New Hope. That they would be a people embodied by this beautiful promise of Proverbs 1: 33 that they would be at ease. They would be at peace. Without dread of

disaster in this incredibly important time as a church, but also in whatever transitions they are facing on their own.