

40 Days of Encountering God
Week Six: Navigating the Challenge
March 30 – April 4

Who would've think it a few weeks back that the American badge of honor would become red, chapped hands?

Times have changed dramatically for all of us. My prayer is that you have been encountering the living God during this time of nervousness, restlessness and...for some...intense illness or deep sadness. Psalms 90, 91 and Matthew 6 are great places to hang out during these days.

One thing you may have noticed in our society (or in your own heart) is the tension we Americans feel between law and liberty. We are a loose, liberty-obsessed culture. We bristle when anyone or anything "cramps our style." But threats to our life and to the lives of those we love call for a tightening not loosening of laws. We don't like that, but maturity enables us to roll with the punches and do what is good for all, not just what's fun for us.

Be aware that, even in households, the need for more order and discipline (tighter laws) can create conflict with those who want more liberty. Whether it be the tightening of the home budget due to unemployment, or staying sheltered in when you're going stir crazy, or even being stricter about the study habits or gaming practices of kids, beware of the very real tension between law and liberty.

Anger issues that already exist in our hearts can be exacerbated during times of stress like this. When law and liberty clash, bad things can result. We can say and do things we later regret. What is the solution? Always seek for love. Love trumps both law and liberty. Law without love is harsh, even abusive. Liberty without love is careless, even reckless. Love means laying down your life for others, not just doing what pleases you. Choose love above all (see 1 Corinthians 13).

Stay smart; stay sheltered; stay close to Jesus. It will take longer than we would prefer, but we will get through this.

As the days of the coronavirus pandemic drag on, let's pray this week for New Life's leaders and for this flock of God. There is a spiritual momentum growing; let's cry out to God for more!

Monday, March 30

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting..."

(James 1:5-6a ESV)

Dear heavenly Father, if the truth be told, we lack wisdom at every moment of every day. It just takes crises to open our eyes to that fact. With a whole paradigm shift of ministry best practices facing the New Life staff, I pray they would seek your wisdom, Lord, and in no way lean on their own understanding. Cause them to be unified in their relentless, intentional pursuit of You, Lord, and shower them with your clear guidance.

Tuesday, March 31

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”
(Isaiah 43:19 NIV)

Thank You, Father, for how the staff at New Life have challenged us to engage with new media to stay connected, and for how they are modeling that paradigm shift. Protect all our technology, Lord, and make us courageous and skilled in using it for Your glory. Thank You, God, that You are never caught off guard and that You are not intimidated by new strategies and methods. You had all this planned well in advance. Give us grace to change with these changing times and to not be afraid to try new things.

Wednesday, April 1

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;”
(Colossians 4:2 NASB)

Father, You are a prayer-seeking and prayer-answering God! Thank You that prayer is increasing and organically springing up at New Life, especially via social media and videoconferencing. People are more desperate and aware that You are our only hope. Continue, Lord, to draw us to Yourself and empower us by Your Holy Spirit to pray as Jesus would. That’s what it truly means to pray in Jesus’ name.

Thursday, April 2

“Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about this mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should. Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of the opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.”
(Colossians 4:3-6 NLT)

Dear Lord, whether it is Chris preaching on Sunday mornings or all of us reaching out in love to family, friends and neighbors, grant us wide open doors and great boldness to tell others of the saving power of Christ. Show us all what to say and grant such grace, kindness, truth and power to our words that many would come to faith in Jesus.

Friday, April 3

“What good is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

(James 2:14-17 ESV)

Merciful Father, there are many who are out of work, whose businesses may have to permanently shutter, who cannot pay rent or mortgage nor put adequate food on the table. You care deeply about these dear folks, Lord, and have not abandoned them. Would You please mobilize Your people as an army of merciful caregivers to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, encourage the elderly, and provide what is needed for the destitute. Break our hearts with the things that break Yours, and show me what You want me to do today.

Saturday, April 4

“And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!’”

(Mark 11:7-10 ESV)

Heavenly Father, we remember “Palm Sunday” tomorrow and in anticipation of Holy Week we too acknowledge that we need You to save us. Hosanna in the highest! Save us! Rescue us, dear Lord, from this pestilence; save us from poverty; please provide for us, our loved ones, our church family and our neighbors who don’t know You. May this pruning of our nation result in much greater fruit for Your kingdom. Turn tragedy into triumph! We cry out to You, O God! Nothing is too hard for You! Hosanna, Lord Jesus!

Next week will be our seventh and final week of “40 Days of Encountering God.” It will be a journey through Scripture and prayer with Jesus on the road to the cross and resurrection.