

God's Generous Disciplines

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, January 28, 2024
PASSAGES	Galatians 3; Proverbs 3; Luke 17; John 5; Ephesians 2; Ephesians 6; Hebrews 10; Acts 2
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:02:20 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

God does give his people challenges — but never as the price of his favor. That was purchased outright by the blood of Jesus, and it stays purchased. The measure of whether we understand this is simple: the more we dread an assignment from God, the less we actually know his character.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ We are saved by grace through faith from the first day to the last breath — not by the blood of Jesus plus our improvement. Matt wants Hope stubborn, even combative, on that point.
- ◆ Legalism sneaks in through the back door as much as the front, usually in the sentence “if you were a real believer, you'd do this.”
- ◆ Every challenge Jesus handed out in the Gospels turned out to be life. “Go show yourselves to the priests.” “Get up, take up your bed.” “Come.” None of it was a chore list.
- ◆ Don't intellectualize the faith into the realm of ideas. Nobody is closer to the kingdom for having a bigger brain.
- ◆ We do have real spiritual enemies, but we make petitions, not spells. There is exactly one opponent we can never beat — God — and he resists the proud.
- ◆ Giving at Hope is down while attendance is up. The challenge is not an amount; it is that everyone participate rather than leave it to the large donors.
- ◆ A live stream is a good thing that cannot fellowship for you. Its quality is high enough to mask a pain we ought to be feeling — especially about the homebound, who cannot choose otherwise.

- ◆ Being known is the price of admission to church life, and it takes bravery. If you have not experienced Hope as the church that moves your sofa, you may simply not be known yet.

► 1:02:20

This message closed out a two-week micro series Matt and Mark Proeger had planned together on purpose. Mark's week had made the positive case — co-laboring with Jesus as joy and honor rather than burdensome chore — and Matt wanted that framing locked in before he handed the church four specific challenges. “God's callings and requests of us are not intended to bring about a burdensome drudgery and death,” he said. “Just the opposite.” Ask Paul, after the shipwrecks and the stonings, whether he would do it again. Not one regret.

The frame: stubborn about grace

► 1:04:48

“Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

GALATIANS 3:2-5 ↗

Salvation from death, eternal life, favor with God, the spirit of sonship — all of it by believing the gospel, not the gospel plus our works and gifts. And yet, Matt pointed out, there are believers who deep down think their tithes and long prayers are quietly purchasing something, and others who think the same effort buys the baptism of the Spirit or miracles. It is nonsense, and it never becomes beginner material we graduate from. “There's no sense in which we're going to get to a point in our Christian walk where that becomes the boring easy stuff.”

► 1:07:08

The standing temptation is to re-read the Bible as a rulebook — don't eat this, do wear that. Jesus named that failure directly:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life... yet you refuse to come to me.”

Legalism can also arrive through the back door, and Matt called that version what it is — passive aggression dressed as discipleship. If a culture repeats “a real believer would do this particular thing” long enough, the church will pay lip service to grace while believing something else entirely.

What God's discipline is actually like

► 1:09:20

“My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

PROVERBS 3:11-12 ↗

Matt conceded the instinctive flinch — some people's reproof really is terrible, so the word arrives carrying other people's baggage. So he went looking for how Jesus actually handed out assignments. Ten lepers are told “Go and show yourselves to the priests,” and as they went, they were cleansed. No threat attached, no probation. “That's the filter some of us put on God's disciplines,” Matt said, “where he's just waiting to roast you, and he's always looking for an opportunity for you to fail. Every new request is a new chance for him to push that button he's really longing to push.”

“Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.”

JOHN 5:8-9 ↗

On paper it reads as a command dropped on a man in the middle of a long sob story. In fact it is the whole rescue in five words. Same with Naaman sent to the Jordan, and with Peter told “Come” — not a put-down but an invitation to stand on water beside Jesus. This is what Ephesians 2:8-10 is doing when it puts “not a result of works” and “created in Christ Jesus for good works” in the same breath: not a sin-forgiveness program, but a Father who wants his children healthy.

► 1:15:30

He told his own version. A year or two back he was stuck in a compulsive news-and-politics habit he did not even enjoy, had prayed about it, and was still doing it. A sister in Christ brought him a prophetic word in the form of a challenge — “metaphorically speaking she took a spiritual shotgun and just blew this thing off me.” He has been free of it since, with the hours going to books and his kids. Then in prayer he sensed that it was not only for him.

“The Lord's rebuke is good and fun. I'll take a rebuke from the Lord any day over encouragement from this world.”

1. Don't intellectualize the faith

► 1:19:19

Hope is a room full of smart people, and Matt has no quarrel with that — “it's fine to be a nerd, I love it.” The quarrel is with a faith that lives only in the realm of ideas. No one is closer to the kingdom for having a bigger brain, and searching the Scriptures without coming to Jesus does nothing. “How can I obey you, Lord?” should not induce panic. It is, in his words, the dynamic equivalent of asking what death and boredom you can trade in for wonder.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

MATTHEW 11:28-30 ↗

He is gentle and lowly *in heart* — not just on his good days, and not as a bait-and-switch where the chores get loaded on later like a frog in a warming pot. Obeying human masters is genuinely awful; we lay heavy burdens on each other without lifting a finger to help. Jesus is not that. Where this bites is personal: ask him where your own boredom could become honor. Matt got bored of reading books about healing and went with friends to pray for people instead — not because God was short-staffed. “The Lord doesn't need you out there. He's not struggling. But you can join him.”

2. We battle — but not against flesh and blood

► 1:23:32

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

EPHESIANS 6:10-12 ↗

Two ditches, and Matt marked both. One is the physicalist ditch — nothing exists beyond what you can see. The other is the freak-out: your car wouldn't start, so that's a demon. He was sharpest about the third error, the formula. “I have been told by people, say this prayer, it works — it works better if you say it in Latin. Bro, this is not Hogwarts.” These are God's enemies before they are ours, and he is the victor.

“We make petitions to him. We don't cast spells in his name.”

“Do not be anxious about anything” is not naïveté; it is permission to stop scanning the bushes. And there is one opponent no one overcomes: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Walk humbly, take refuge, make your cares known.

3. Giving

► 1:26:18

Matt admitted he was nervous about this one and did not want it to sound self-serving, then gave the actual numbers. Over two years Hope lost three families and gained about ten — and giving went backwards anyway. He does not know why; possibly inflation, possibly three congregational meetings in a row where the finances looked strong. He does not check who gives, or how much, and doubts Sharon, the business administrator, would tell him if he asked.

So Hope has been dipping into savings, deliberately, because the priority is as much ministry as possible: Andy hired, Wes brought on full time, the Lighthouse redone. Anyone who wants to track it can read the back of the bulletin — the paper one, this week with a bird on it. “My commitment to you is that even if I have to take a second job, we're going to keep preaching.”

► 1:29:12

Then the theology, carefully. We are not under the law, Torah included, so no one should carry a legalistic burden about a particular number — though he noted the funny overcorrection of people who will give nine percent or eleven, anything but ten. “You don't even want to be legalistic in your anti-legalism.” Nor can you build a rule from the New Testament: Jesus told one wealthy man to sell everything, but plainly did not say it to the wealthy women funding his ministry, or there would have been no money bag for Judas to keep. Paul took money from churches, passed money to other churches, and worked as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3–5) — until Silas and Timothy arrived and he devoted himself exclusively to preaching.

The challenge, then, is not an amount but participation. When the widow put in two copper coins, Jesus did not call it a shame that it wasn't more; he said she gave more than everyone. What Matt does not want is a church quietly deciding to let the big donors cover it — which disrespects the givers and the rest of us at the same time.

4. Investing in our fellowship

► 1:34:08

COVID left the church some strange habits, and the one Matt named is television church becoming normal for whole families. He started by conceding the point the Bible does not make: it never says “go to church,” and the phrase barely means anything anyway — he used to go to a mosque to meet Muslims and pray for them.

“...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

HEBREWS 10:24-25 ↗

That is not a duty to be discharged by showing up and checking a box to keep the Lord off your back. It is how believers keep each other from drifting out of the faith. Which reframes the familiar complaint — *I dropped out of church and nobody called me*. Matt's concern is what came three or four layers before that: who were you mentoring, who was mentoring you, where were you serving? Not chores. God places the lonely in families, and Jesus promised a hundredfold in houses, brothers, sisters, mothers and children to anyone who left them for his sake (Matthew 19:29).

► 1:38:16

Hope, he said flatly, is the kind of church that will move your sofa, collect you from the airport at a terrible hour, watch your dog, and knock the sense back into you with an unexpected prophetic word. He knows this by experience. “But if you're not experiencing that, maybe it's because you're not known yet — and that's on all of us old-timers.” Being known takes bravery, which is the whole reason for small groups and game nights and sandwiches. On mentoring he passed along a board member's correction: the younger among us are waiting for the older to take the initiative, the way adults always did when we were children. Ask instead. There are wise people here who see something in you and don't want to presume. He floated speed dating for mentors, three minutes a head, and cheerfully took ownership of the idea in case the room hated it.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

ACTS 2:42 ↗

Fellowship is something you can devote yourself to — and something you can avoid by arriving late, leaving early, and talking to no one.

The part about the live stream

► 1:43:45

Use it if you are contagious, out of town, reviewing something, or curious about Christianity and not ready to walk in — Matt remembered being terrified the first time he set foot in a mosque. What it cannot do is fellowship for you. And here he turned the quality of Hope's stream into the problem: after an injury he skips the pain medication for a while, because pain tells him which foot not to step on. “The quality of our stream is so good it might cover up with sweetness the pain that we should be feeling.” The people that pain should be pointing to are the homebound, who would be here if they could. His conscience is pricked about merely sending them a link. Andrea Edwards has already come to him about assembling mobile ministry teams — because Frank cannot make every pastoral visit, and Matt cannot call people he has never met.

► 1:46:53

“If you're isolated and you suffer from all the same things we do — loneliness, depression, discouragement — please tell us. We want to hear from you.” The board's email and his own are on hope.org. His stated goal is measurable in its way: raise the average number of other Hopeites each Hopeite actually knows. Pastoral care, hospitality, the prophetic voice, acts of service — all of it is on purpose, all of it is the body.

And every bit of it, start to finish, stands on the blood of Jesus. Nobody purchases more of the Holy Spirit by tithing again or by attending in person. “There's this huge bounty in front of us, and when God says a challenge like ‘hey, don't hold back, eat of the feast’ — you'll find that's the kind of chore you're really glad to engage in.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Galatians 3:2–5
- John 5:39–40
- Proverbs 3:11–12
- Luke 17:11–14
- John 5:8–9
- 2 Kings 5:9–14
- Matthew 14:28–29
- Ephesians 2:8–10
- Matthew 11:28–30
- Ephesians 6:10–12
- Philippians 4:6
- James 4:6
- Luke 18:22
- Acts 18:3–5
- Mark 12:41–44
- Hebrews 10:24–25
- Psalm 68:6
- Matthew 19:29
- Acts 2:42

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said the more we dread an assignment from God, the more it shows we don't know his character. What does your gut reaction to “how can I obey you, Lord?” reveal about the God you actually picture?
2. Where have you seen legalism come in through the back door — the “a real believer would do this” sentence — in your own thinking or in churches you have been part of?
3. Matt's freedom came when someone brought him a challenge he had not asked for. Who has permission to do that with you, and what would you want them to aim at?
4. He described a middle path between ignoring spiritual reality and blaming a demon for the car that won't start. Which ditch are you closer to, and what does petition instead of formula look like for you?
5. Of the four challenges — obedience over ideas, spiritual warfare, giving, investing in fellowship — which one is God putting his finger on, and what specifically will you do about it this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7Axu5pVQHU&t=3740s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.