

Thriving During, Before and After Events

Three practices you have to put in place before the phone rings

SPEAKER	Denise Hance
DATE	Sunday, April 26, 2026
PASSAGES	Ephesians 3:17-21; James 1:2-4; Matthew 13:5-6; Romans 8:26; Matthew 5:3-10
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:05:26 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Some events divide your life into before and after. What carries you through one is not what you reach for in the moment — it is what was already there: roots in Christ and in his body, scripture already lodged in your memory, and a habit of praying and listening. All three take advance preparation, which is why Denise spent the second half of her message telling the room to start now.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ A before-and-after event is any event that changes the shape of your life. Most of them are not good, and you do not get to schedule them.
- ◆ Denise and Brian spent 2023 quoting James 1:2-4 to each other — and by the end of the year they had worn it down to one word: *consider*.
- ◆ The support that held them was there because the relationships were already there. You cannot draw on a community you have not joined.
- ◆ In the hospital she could not focus well enough to study. What comforted her was scripture she had memorized long before the accident, and scripture other people sent her so she did not have to go looking.

- ◆ When she could not find words to pray, the words of scripture and of songs became her prayers — and the Spirit prayed underneath them.
- ◆ Crisis can bring someone to Christ, but crisis alone will not keep them there. Shallow soil sprouts fast and scorches.
- ◆ Her three recommendations are unglamorous on purpose: get in a small group, study and memorize the Bible, and practice prayer and silence.
- ◆ She also prayed for other people harder than she ever had — and found that being prayed for, and telling people you are praying, matters more than she had understood.

► 1:05:26

The question Denise came to answer was simple and practical: how do you maintain — or even grow — your relationship with God during the events that split a life into before and after. She had ideas. But first she told the room a small part of her story, which turned out to be one year of it.

One year, told plainly

► 1:06:08

2023 started with a bang: COVID, and a cross-country drive to Florida with Brian and their two youngest sons to move Evan into an apartment near campus. They got him set up, and then they left him in Florida. In early February her stepmom called — her dad, who had been fighting cancer for several years, was having a very bad day. They were afraid that if they went to the hospital he would not come back out. They went anyway. Over the next week Denise, her sisters and all of her dad's grandchildren got to visit him, and he got to meet his great-granddaughter. He died on February 24.

► 1:07:19

That same weekend they found a dog that had been dumped in their neighborhood — sweet, cute, wildly energetic, entirely untrained. Nobody claimed him and no shelter would take him, so they kept him. The piano, the bed and the baseboards still carry his signature. In early April, days before her dad's celebration of life, her finger got caught in that dog's leash and broke. Not badly. It hurt for months.

► 1:07:58

On April 14 she was serving on a Tres Dias weekend — a Christian renewal weekend, where she does not normally use her phone. It was on the bed as an alarm. A call came in and she ignored it. A second call came in, she glanced down, and it said Orlando Medical Center. Evan was in Orlando. She

answered. He had been hit by a car and was in a level one trauma center with a broken leg and a severe brain bleed. "This is life-altering," she told the friend beside her.

► 1:09:08

She and Brian spent six weeks in Florida, in the hospital and then the rehab center, before moving Evan home to Austin at the end of May — then months of appointments, therapy, a surgery, and learning to manage the seizures the accident left behind. In September her father-in-law, known to many at Hope as Cotton, died after seven years of cancer.

► 1:09:46

Early in that year, she and Brian had taken to encouraging each other — half joking — by quoting James:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

JAMES 1:2–4 ↗ (NIV)

By the end of the year, they had stopped quoting it. When something hard happened they would just look at each other and say the one word: *consider*. And that, she noted, was not even all of it. Apart from Evan going to college, she would not call a single one of those things good.

1. Rooted in Christ, and in the body of Christ

► 1:11:03

First, and she said most importantly: she was carried by the body of Christ. Without their families, their friends, Hope Chapel and their Tres Dias communities, "we would have fallen apart." She pointed back to Amy Cogdell's February message on inner healing — that we help bring about God's healing by loving one another — and said she had been on the receiving end of exactly that.

► 1:11:38

The detail she returned to was the first ten minutes after the call. She could not function. She grabbed the hand of the nearest woman in the dorm, who could see she needed help, and that woman got her paper and a pen and wrote down the information because Denise was shaking too hard to write it herself. Then a group of women surrounded her, prayed over her, comforted her, packed her things and drove her home. She and Brian flew out the next morning.

► 1:12:53

A thousand miles away, they never felt alone. Calls, texts, verses, songs. Family came to help wrangle Evan as he began to wake up and grew agitated. John Cogdell, a longtime friend of Evan's from Hope, went to see him as he started therapy in Florida. And their seventeen-year-old — left at home with the animals, including the puppy — got rides, meals and company from their Tres Dias and Hope Chapel families. The support did not taper off after the first few days; it lasted all six weeks.

► 1:13:35

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”

EPHESIANS 3:17–21 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:14:12

She read it as description, not aspiration. Because of the connection they had with the Lord's holy people — because they were rooted and established in love through family, church and community — they got a glimpse of the love of Christ and some measure of the fullness of God. That is what made it possible to hope for and imagine Evan healed and whole.

► 1:14:47

Then the turn that gives the message its spine: "I wouldn't have had that support if I had not already been rooted and established in Christ and in the body of Christ." The relationships existed to be drawn on because they had been built first. So: find your place and plug in. Get involved. "Serve and don't just be served." Be the hands and feet of Jesus to someone else in need. Join a small group.

2. Scripture that was already in her

► 1:15:28

The second thing was God's word — but not in the way a church audience might assume. Her mind was overwhelmed, and she was honest about it: in the hospital she did not have the ability to focus well enough to study. Two things worked. One was scripture other people sent her, so that encouragement arrived without her having to go hunting for it. "Oh, that was life-giving."

► 1:16:04

The other was scripture she did not have to search for because it was already in her heart and mind, studied and memorized long before the accident. What she had put in was there to comfort her and to remind her of God's goodness. Scripture set to music did the same work — she played *Goodness of God* over and over, and read the words out rather than sing them: *All my life you have been faithful. All my life you have been so, so good. With every breath that I am able, I will sing of the goodness of God.*

► 1:17:26

For Brian it was the Beatitudes, which stopped being a list and became a description of where he was standing.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

MATTHEW 5:3–10 ↗ (NIV)

3. Prayer, meditation and plain silence

► 1:18:05

The words of scripture and of songs became the prayers she could not come up with on her own — for Evan, for herself, for her family. And one verse opened up in a new 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 through wordless groans.”

ROMANS 8:26 ↗ (NIV)

► 1:18:41

Much of her praying was silence — sitting, processing, listening, letting God give peace. Which is hard to come by in a hospital. She normally listens to audiobooks and could not take in a word of one; she needed quiet instead.

► 1:19:24

What she could do was pray for other people, and she and Brian both felt a strong pull to. If they heard of a need, they prayed like never before. They came out of that year quicker to ask for prayer, quicker

and more earnest in praying for others, and newly convinced that people need to know they are being prayed for. "We know prayer is powerful."

Every one of these takes advance preparation

► 1:20:00

Here is the thing all three practices have in common, and Denise said it flatly: they all take advance preparation. Yes, some people come to Christ *because* of a devastating event. But many will not stay once the crisis resolves or fades, because they have no roots to survive on.

► 1:20:34

"Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root."

MATTHEW 13:5-6 ↗ (NIV)

"You need to be rooted in Christ before the event happens."

So start now — three things

► 1:21:15

Get connected to the body by joining a small group — "and no, Lee and Sarah did not pay me to say that." Hope Groups, she said, are "the best place to be known and to know others in the church." Second, start studying and memorizing the Bible, and if you do it with a group of friends "you can knock both of these suggestions out at once." She pointed anyone who needs help or ideas on where to start back to last September's message on how to study scripture — "he gave some really good ideas" — and mentioned that she has been working through *The Bible Recap* with Tara-Leigh Cobble alongside a group of friends: "it's so good to have both the accountability so that I don't skip those days when it's busy, but also to have their insight as we comment on each day's readings."

► 1:21:44

Third — and she framed this one as building the relationship now "so that you're ready to survive and thrive during before and after events" — start practicing prayer and silence. It does not have to be anything fancy or specific: "You can just talk to God and sit and listen to him. It's both really easy and really hard. He wants to talk with us, but we have to be quiet to hear him." Then, honestly: "And that's the part that's hard for me."

Where things stand now

► 1:22:23

"Life has continued on since that awful year with both ups and downs, but thankfully it's been a little less dramatic recently." Evan is "really doing amazing now" — back in school in Florida, associate's degree completed (the room applauded before she could finish the sentence), bachelor's degree finishing at the end of June, then back to Austin to find a job. He still has some issues related to the accident, "but overall he's managing them well, mostly by himself, but with a little help now and then."

► 1:23:00

She and Brian and the rest of the family are doing well too, and she was candid that they still carry trauma from the accident that they are working through. She has done some counseling, and has met and prayed with friends when memories come up. "I am quick to text, and I have friends that are quick to text me when they know that anniversaries or such are coming up." Even the dog landed well: her daughter rehomed him while they were in Florida, so that he was in a more stable place and the family could focus on what they needed when they came home.

Thank you, Hope Chapel — then the three points one more time

► 1:23:32

"We are still well supported by the body of Christ." And then she said the thank-you out loud, to the room: "Thank you, Hope Chapel, for your support of me and Brian and our family during that awful time and since then. We felt your love and your support and the love of Christ through you."

► 1:24:12

Then she repeated the three points of encouragement, because she wanted them to be the thing people carried out of the room. One: connect to Christ and to his body — "get in a small group." Two: dive into studying and memorizing the Bible. Three: spend time in prayer and silence with God. "I was really short and fast today," she said, unapologetic about it, "so I'm going to close in prayer."

► 1:24:59

The prayer gathered the whole message into a handful of sentences: *Lord, I thank you for my friends and family here at Hope Chapel. I thank you for your spirit being here and being with us. Lord, draw your people to you. Let us be rooted and established in your love and connected to each other. Draw us to your word, the Bible, and speak to us as we pray and listen. I love you, Lord. Your mercy never fails us. Let us know your goodness all the days of our lives. Amen.* That last line is the same note as the song she had played on repeat in the hospital — the goodness of God, prayed back.

► 1:25:31

As the heart ministry teams came up — there to pray for you and with you — Deb asked whether she could share a song. "If you feel the Lord drawing you today, this song is for you."

► 1:26:28

It's a small thing to lay my life before a loving King, one who's given everything to me. And it's a small price to pay for me to give my life away — in exchange for joy, in exchange for peace, in exchange for life abundantly. So I give my life a living sacrifice, knowing it was you who really paid the price. And I'll trust in you that you will lift me high above myself, above this world, above all other loves but you.

► 1:29:02

And then the verse that turned the song into the invitation the whole message had been walking toward: *Why do you hide? Why do you run? He stands and knocks. Why won't you come?* Being rooted before the event is not a technique you deploy when the phone rings from a hospital you have never heard of. It is answering the knock now, while nothing is on fire.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- [James 1:2–4](#) (NIV)
- [Ephesians 3:17–21](#) (NIV)
- [Matthew 5:3–10](#) (NIV)
- [Romans 8:26](#) (NIV)
- [Matthew 13:5–6](#) (NIV)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. What has been a before-and-after event in your life, and what did you discover you were — or were not — carrying into it?
2. Denise could not have drawn on that support if the relationships had not already existed. Who would you call first, and who would call you?
3. She could not focus well enough to study in the hospital; only what was already memorized was available to her. What scripture is actually in you right now?
4. When you have no words, what do you pray? What would it look like to let scripture and songs carry your praying for a while?
5. Of her three practices — community, scripture, prayer and silence — which one are you thinnest on, and what is the one specific step you will take this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Denise Hance is a member of Hope Chapel, where she and her husband Brian and their family were carried by the congregation through a brutal 2023 — her father's death, their son Evan's traumatic brain injury after being hit by a car in Florida, and the death of her father-in-law, known to many at Hope as Cotton. She serves on Tres Dias renewal weekends and studies scripture with a group of friends. She was asked to speak on thriving during, before and after life's before-and-after events.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKooOeQpr4k&t=3926s>

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.