

Sunday, February 22, 2026

## Title: Facts Of Our Existence-Faith Walked Out

Kevin McSpadden, Garden Gathering, 2/22/26

Lord, we do give you glory and thanksgiving for your presence. No matter what else we do today, we want you to feel welcome. We thank you that you really come in our midst. Every testimony and every encouragement that has been released and is being released is this, one more way that we know our God is God, and you are our God. I pray, Father, that you would encourage every heart this morning. Those that are gathered with us and those that are listening from various and sundry places. That your Holy Spirit would come in a fresh, invigorating and empowering way. We count it pure joy to be considered yours. Have your way. In Jesus's name we pray, amen.

If I haven't had the opportunity to meet you yet, my name is Kevin McSpadden, and I have the honor and the privilege of getting to fill in this morning while Brandy and Grant and their families are in the mountains experiencing the glory of God and the snow. I thought I would open up this morning by telling you a story that I saw. I found it to be a pretty encouraging story. It's possible you may have seen this already, and if you have, that's fine. It's a pretty cool story. I hope that it will encourage you to think a little differently, and to really lay hold of that promise of God's presence. That's what this is about.

This is a story about three young guys, Hank, Ezra and Mike. Hank, Ezra and Mike were young fellows that had excelled in their company. They were recognized for their character. They did things in a righteous way. But, something unfortunate happened to them. Their company was bought out in a hostile takeover. A lot of people didn't make the transition. These three were fortunate enough to at least get a start in the new company. The problem is the new company was known for not doing things in a righteous way. Hank, Ezra and Mike knew that going in, but the commitment that they made was to say, we are going to do things excellently. We are going to do things in a way that pleases God, no matter what it costs us. Interestingly enough, these three guys excelled in the new company as well. They started working their way up, got the attention of the head boss, the CEO, and were promoted, because they did things righteously and excellently, even in an ungodly environment. That was the commitment they had made. Of course, that inspires jealousy. Some of their co workers figured out a way to trap them. They got the CEO to start a new policy that they knew these three young guys would not follow along with. Sure enough, that's exactly what happened. Hank, Ezra and Mike found themselves in the presence of this CEO being threatened. The CEO said to them, "You're going to do what I tell you to do. This is my company, and you are going to follow my policies. If you don't, then not only are you done here, but I'm going to destroy you. I'm going to make it where you not only can't leave, but I'm going to humiliate you publicly, and you will not work again." Hank, Ezra and Mike had a decision to make. Are we going to bow our knee to this CEO? Are we going to do something that we know is not in alignment with God's will, or are we going to invite his wrath and thus be destroyed? So, what they said to this CEO was, "It may be true that you have power, but whatever power you have over us, you have it because God gave it to you. It may be that God rescues us from this situation. But, even if He doesn't, we want you to know this, He's still good, He's still God, and we will not violate our consciences before Him."

If you haven't figured it out, I'm talking about three Hebrew boys by the name of Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael, aka Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But, I put it to you that way this morning in the hopes that maybe you would hear it differently. When it's Hebrew boys from long ago facing an evil king, that sounds like something that's somewhere else that happens to

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other people. But, what about West Texas boys? Hank, Ezra and Mike, standing in front of the CEO, and having to stand up for the Word of God. That brings it a little bit closer to home. I did that this morning, in alignment with the encouragement we've been receiving in this house, to not let the testimonies and the stories of what we read in here be distant from us. To not let it be a Bible story. Let it be a testimony. Let it be my family history. These are my family members. This is my God, and these signs and wonders and miracles demonstrate to us who He is and how He thinks and what He does. He hasn't changed from Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael, to Kevin McSpadden, Nancy Hadley and everybody. You see what I'm saying? He is the same God right now.

I've called this word this morning, "Facts of our existence—Faith walked out." What I want to encourage us all in is to continue to dig into what God has given us in His word, that we may know Him better. Who is He? What are His ways? What is He like? Who am I, because of Him? How can my life carry His glory into where I am? To treat that not as a story, but as a fact. Not as an idea or even a principle, even though we love ideas and principles. They are helpful for guiding our thinking. But, when I rely on this as if it is a fact, and I live that way, then I'm going to look a little different. Kind of like the three Hebrew boys. Even when the enemy comes, and he will. Even when he tries to trap you, and he will. Even when he puts you in a situation where you have to decide, what are you really going to live for? That will happen. I still know who God is, and like those boys declared, "Oh king, not CEO, whatever power you have, God gave it to you. It may be that God delivers us from your hand, but even if He does not, know this, God is God. He gets the glory no matter what." That's the mindset we want to develop. We're living as if God's word is a fact, and it is.

What does that mean? I looked up "fact," in Merriam Webster's online dictionary. A fact is, "something that actually exists or occurs." Did this really happen? Did God really work that way? Yes, He did. Yes, it did. Yes, He does. That's what we want to say. We want to settle that in our hearts. This is not an idea or a book of stories. These things happened, and they are happening right now. Will God still deliver you right now? Will God still hear your prayer right now? When you're in a situation that's bigger than you, do you have wisdom that's bigger than you and power that's bigger than you to face it? Yes, you do. That's a fact of your existence. It's not an idea that sounds good. Then you face it, and you're like, "Well, I don't know." No, it's a fact. "I have it. It's mine. I am going to put it to work."

Here's another definition. It's the "quality of being actual, existing in fact, or reality." A synonym would be, "reality, truth, the truth of God's word." That's why Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." He also said, "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life." We look at this truth, draw near, allow it inside and really abide here. Now, there's an intimacy with this One who gave Himself that we could have life. Now, there's something new and deeper and better than a principle or an idea or a rule. A rule is constricting, but in relationship, there's intimacy, and it's life giving liberty. You'll know the truth. You'll know Him intimately and personally, and He will make you free. We have a call and a duty as believers, and we've been encouraged over the last few weeks to look at these signs. This is going to be a sign to you. It's going to go down like this. Then when that happens, now I know God in a new deep, intimate and personal way. Our duty as a believer is to grab a hold of that and then to say, "I'm going to invest that word into my life. I'm going to plant that in my heart and in my mind. I'm going to let it change the way that I think and the way that I act. I'm going to live in light of these facts."

What happens when I live that way? Believing God exists, God is here, God is in my life, and God is moving. He will move right now. I'm going to take that light and I'm going to shine it in this world. That's what we're aiming for, and that's what I want to encourage us in today. It changes how we think. I'm going to ask you which side of these equations would you rather

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find yourself on? Is God really listening to my prayers or not? Is God willing to heal or not? Am I really filled with the Holy Spirit and power or not. Is His word to me, true, living and active or not? Do miracles still happen or not? When He says, "I'll come into your midst if there's two or more of you, I'll be there with you." Does He do that or not? I'm asking all of us to consider which side of that do I want to be on? The, "or not," or the, "Yes?" We want to be on the, "yes." That's what we're looking at today, being on the, "yes."

I want to share with you that there have been two people that have made statements in light of the reality of God's word that I have found immensely encouraging in my walk over the years. I go back to them again and again and again, especially in a time of discouragement which we all know we go through. We all know that sometimes we face things, and for whatever reason, it doesn't, at this moment, appear to be moving. I have to decide *if* am I going to go up against that again. Am I going to stand again? Am I going to keep on believing regardless of what my eyes see? That is sometimes the call of courage that we have. That is sometimes the test that God allows so that we understand Him better. Not because He wants to humiliate us, or to make us feel like, "Oh, do I really trust?" No, if it's there, then it's there, because God is going to use it to show you His glory. If it's there, and if you're going through it, number one, He's with you. We're going to talk about that. He's with you in it. The same way He was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They went into the fire, y'all. But, they didn't go into the fire alone. In that moment, they said, "Who's that fourth one in there? It looks like the Son of Man." They encountered the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ in the fire. But, in order to do that, they had to go in the fire. I'm just saying. But, they went in faith. They went knowing God's either going to deliver us, in which case He gets the glory, or He's not, in which case He gets the glory. That was their mindset.

With that in mind, I want to share *about* these two people and their statements on the Word of God. I want this to encourage you the way that I think it will. I know it has encouraged me, but I think it will encourage you. This is from Watchman Nee. Watchman Nee was a Chinese convert who basically got a hold of the revelation of going deeper than the flesh or the soul and living by the Spirit. That was the thing that the Lord really moved on in his life to encourage the body of Christ. Yes, we want our physical temple to be full of the Holy Spirit. Yes, we want our thoughts to be changed. But, the way that that happens is you live by the Spirit. This is what Watchman Nee wrote about the Word of God. He said, "His Word is not a study book. It is intended to meet us in the course of our day to day walk in the Spirit and to speak to us there." I'm not done with the quote, but I want you to hear that "It's intended to meet us in the course of our day to day, walk in the Spirit and speak to us there." Yes, it speaks to us. Yes, He speaks to us when we study the Word. Of course, Watchman Nee isn't saying don't study the Word, but what he would say is study it and live it. That's what it's about. It's about being met by the Word as you go in your job, with your family, or when you're fishing. That's my personal place to encounter the Word of God is *when I'm* fishing. But my point is, as you go in your day to day walk.

What he's saying to us is that's where the Word of God is intended to meet us. To encounter us, you might say, where we get to see that Word in action in our lives. I'm going to finish the quote now. "It is intended to meet us in the course of our day to day walk in the Spirit and to speak to us there. It is designed to give us knowledge that is experimental and related to life." Experimental knowledge of the heart of God. Experimental means you can test it and verify the result, but don't test it the way a scientist does. A science based experiment is performed from the position of doubt, and what doesn't happen in an experiment is just as important as what does. That's all good and well, when it comes to measuring things in a lab, figuring out what medicines work. That's fine, but in faith, the experiment is from the position of trust. I believe that God will bless me when I give away a tenth of my income. I'm going to do that because I trust Him. Wait a minute, you're going to give away 1/10 of everything that you

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own? Yes, I am, and I'm going to be wealthier than I would have been had I not done that. That's the outcome. I'm going to test Him from the position of trust, not doubt. When I say I'm testing Him, what I'm really saying is, "I'm taking you at your word, because I trust you." Not, "Well, I don't really know. I don't think so." It's made quite clear in the word that God doesn't bless a person like that. They're double minded. Let that one expect that he'll receive nothing from God. Move in the position of I trust, and therefore I'll put it to work. When I lay my hands on somebody to pray for them, I trust that He wants to heal them, that He will heal them, and that He's going to move in response to my prayers. How magnificent is that? The God of the universe will move in response to my prayer. Are you serious? Yes, I trust that He will meet me there. That's the position we want to be in. That's where we're trying to get to, and that's what the Holy Spirit is doing in our life. I believe God. I am putting His Word, His commands, His principles and His kingdom truths to work in my life, knowing and believing. I know because He's done it before. I have a story that got me to here, that gives me faith for the next step I'm going to take. I know what I've seen Him do, and I believe that's what He's done. He will do it again, even if it wasn't my testimony. What if it was Kimmi's, or Nat's, or Steve's, or whoever's testimony? If He did it for them, He will do it for me. I trust you, Lord. Here I am, your vessel. Fill me up, and pour me out. Do your will. Experimental knowledge of God through His Word.

The second one is from a study I did many years ago in Sterling City, America, by Beth Moore. She called it her, "shield of faith." It's five statements that I still *declare* to this day. I'm like, "yes, amen." This is encouraging. They are, "God is who God says He is. God can do what God says He can do. I am who God says I am. I can do what God says I can do. The Word of God is living and powerful in me. Amen." Well said. When we read this, it is God's testimony to us that He wrote down for all generations to say, "This is who I am. This is what I can do. This is who you are. This is what you can do." We're encouraged.

Elijah was just a man, said the apostle. He was just a man, but he was Elijah. No, "He was just a man like you. He was dirt like you." But when he prayed, it didn't rain for three years, and then when he prayed again, there came the rain. If Elijah can do it, that's the point. He was just a man like you, and the Word of God is alive and powerful in me. That's the mindset. This is experimental knowledge. I'm not studying it to pass the test. I'm studying it to live. Those five statements, "He is who He is. He can do what He can do. I am who I am. I can do what He says I can do. His word is in me." Take them with us into this world. No matter what happens, we can say like the three Hebrew boys, "God is in control. He is still good. Whatever happens, it's happening for His glory. If He gets the glory, I'm 100% okay with it. At the same time, I fully expect that I'm about to see His glory."

Not from resignation, right? Like, "Well, whatever happens, happens, glory to God." No, no, Nebuchadnezzar, no, whoever you are. Whatever happens to me, whether I live or whether I die, God is going to be glorified, but I expect that I'm about to see His glory." Why do we need that fierceness? Why does it sound like that coming out of my mouth? Because we need that sometimes. A lot of times things don't look like what we thought they were going to look like. Just by show of hands, how many of us have a testimony of God in some way, shape or form? But until you saw the breakthrough, it didn't look good? Look around you. Sometimes it doesn't look like what we thought it was going to look like while we're still in it. Sometimes it takes looking back and going, "Oh, now I get it. Now I see it." But while you're in it, you need that fierceness and you need that dedication that says, "I'm not living based on an idea alone. I'm living based on a fact. The fact of His existence inside me. The fact of His power at work in my life. The fact that no matter what happens to me, God is going to get the glory, period, the end. Hallelujah! There's fierceness in that, and there's strength in that. I want you to feel that. I want you to feel like, alright, this is the way it hits me. I want to get my shoulders back. I'm dealing with things in my life right now that don't look like I want them to look. I'm going to

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show up at Central High School tomorrow and see a lot of them. But I'm like, "All right, here we go. Going again." Yep, it looks like that. "I'm coming again, and maybe today is the day that the glory strikes my classroom, and people can't stand up when they walk in the door. Thank you, Kim. Maybe today is the day that I get a chance to speak life into a soul that is dead and they come to life. Maybe today is the day that a co worker needs to be encouraged. You see where I'm saying, "I believe in the facts of my existence as a spiritual being, having a temporary physical experience, and the power that's available to me as a result of that." I hope that you're being encouraged at the same time.

What's the key in all this? The key is to be led by the Spirit, because the Spirit is the One who teaches us how to understand this word properly and unfolds it. Like that one verse that you've read 100 times, and today, there's something new in it, because He opened it up to you. Today there's something that you never saw, or there's another layer, or there's a deeper understanding. It's like the 10,000th time that your spouse says, "I love you." Why is it that today that hit my heart in a way, like it's fresh and new? It's like that in the relationship that we have with Holy Spirit. But the danger is that so many people will come at this word as if it's a way to gain position or influence or power, but without the Holy Spirit. They're trying to get the glory without submission, and that's what we have to watch out for.

#### John 5:36-40 NKJV

What we're reading is a piece of the conversation that Jesus was having with Pharisees, who challenged Him. Oh, well, who's your Father? You're bearing witness of yourself, so your witness is no good. That's the accusation they came at Him with. But I want you to understand, if you don't know, who these men are. I want you to understand who they are. The Pharisees were people who dedicated their lives to studying and memorizing and doing their level best, to live as much as they understood it by these scriptures. My understanding is that they had huge swaths of it memorized. Maybe the entirety of what you and I would consider the Old Testament. Maybe they had about that much memorized. They could recite entire scrolls of prophets or the Torah by heart. These were people who, "knew the word." right? Their lives were literally dedicated to it. They they read it, they prayed it, and they debated it fiercely with each other. That's the kind of person we're talking about right now. They believed themselves to be the authorities of God. There is the Word, Himself standing in front of them, and listen to what He says to them.

#### John 5:36-37

What a rebuke to people who spent their life in the word of God. You don't know the voice of your Father, or of My Father. You don't know the voice of the One you claim you are representing. But, it gets worse.

#### John 5:38-40

I see that as a stern warning. If they could miss it, because they didn't listen to the Spirit, they didn't hear the heart of God in it, how much more one of us, and how much more me? What do we have that those men didn't have? We have the Holy Spirit. We have a Teacher who can open up this word in a way that we understand it, know it, encounter it and live in it. When Jesus stands in front of us, we don't miss Him.

#### First Corinthians 2:16

They made the mistake of looking at the principles and the practices, and they didn't see it as the fact of God's relationship with them. When God Himself, the Living Word, stood in front of them, they didn't know Him. How are we different? This is how. We have His mind. How do we have that?

First Corinthians 2:9-12

That's what we're being developed in. The Holy Spirit is developing in us the mind of Christ to think like He thinks, to hear how He hears, and to perceive the way He perceives. This is what He's doing. The Holy Spirit is the one who teaches. The Holy Spirit is the one that tells us when something is not quite right. That's why two people can look at this same word and draw vastly different conclusions. They're not being led by the Spirit. That's where error comes in. We're warned against that. We're warned against trying to approach Him in a natural way, versus being led by the Spirit.

Romans 8:5-11

This is the warning. What you're seeing is the contrast between the carnal mindset led by the flesh, the natural man, who does not receive the things of the Spirit because they're foolishness to that mind, versus the Spirit who says, "This is the way to life. This is the way to not only receive it, but give it. This is how you do it, son. This is how you understand what I'm saying. It's deep enough that you might see it at a surface level, and that's good. But let me take you to here, and that's even better. Let me dig more, and that's even better in relationship, time, trust, and understanding knowledge by the Spirit." That's why it's essential that we're led.

As we're being led, what I want to spend the rest of today doing is to remind you of some key facts of your existence, that are good to keep in mind. It's good to live in light of these facts and to see them as exactly that, saying, "Lord, I trust you, and I'm going to take these facts and I'm going to put them to work in my life. I'm going to allow you to show me how, when, who and where. I might not always get to know why, but I trust that there is a why and that it matters. I'm going to live as if what you said to me is a fact." Now I believe I left off in Romans eight, right? Let's read a few facts.

Romans 8:16

That is an important fact. We who have the Spirit, are His children. His beloved members of His family. He made that possible because of the cross. Verse 17, "If children, then heirs,— heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus." Everybody say, "with Jesus," joint heirs with Christ. Here's what that means. If I am a joint heir with Him, what He gets, I get. Consider, what did the Father give Jesus? His presence and His affirmation. He publicly declared, "This is My Son in whom I am well pleased." Now we don't all get that, but when you put your hands on somebody, and they get better, or when you have the ability to speak the word, that is the Lord saying, "This is my son. This is my daughter. I'm putting myself on display. I'm bearing witness that this one belongs to me." How much love does God have for Jesus? How much? How much love is that? I see some of you wanting to move your hands *far apart*. Yes, you're right. It's that much. Some of y'all are like, "Oh, I don't want to do it in church." It's okay. It's infinite. It's unlimited. It's incomprehensible to this mush in my head. But, I have to look at it like that. If He got that much love; I get that much love. If He got that much power; I get that much power. If He got angels; I get angels. If He got the word in the moment by the Holy Spirit; guess what I get.

Let's consider the full picture. "Joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." The sufferings of Christ are not pleasant. They're called suffering for a reason, but that's one of the ways that we're identified with Him. I am willing to be mocked. I'm willing to be harmed. Not saying I'm excited about it. I don't like pain, but I'm willing because that identifies me with Him. That's what Paul said, "I fill up in my body what's lacking in His sufferings." In other words, I haven't suffered as much as Him yet. But I'm doing my level best, because I want to be identified with Him. That's the honor and the glory in it.

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We've heard about Stephen recently. How when he was being stoned, he wasn't saying, "Ouch, I feel rocks." He was saying, "I see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. There He is." He wasn't worried about the rocks by the grace and the glory of God. He wasn't worried about that, because he was seeing the Lord in that moment. That's what we're after. It's not like, "Oh, I want to suffer for the sake of suffering." It's, "I'm suffering if that's what it takes for me to be identified with Him. I'm willing to deal with that, and I know that His glory, in one way or another, will meet me there." "Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you, for my name's sake." Blessed are you? That's what He told us in that moment. That's a fact of my existence. I have to be willing to say it is possible in this world that I will suffer. In fact, it's highly likely in some way or another. Not a person in here hasn't dealt with some kind or another of *suffering*. You have been called a name, you've been made fun of, or you've been treated as if you're a fool for believing what you believe. You might have lost relationships for it. Welcome to the family. Can you still continue on, knowing that what God is going to do is good and that He gets the last word in this matter. He will have the final say. "Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, you can throw me in the fire, and maybe God will come in there with me. But, even if He doesn't, He's still God. He's still good, and He's still going to get the glory." That's it, if indeed we suffer with Him.

Why? Why are we suffering that we may also be glorified together? The glory of God is being revealed in us as a family and in each one of us individually, not either or, both. Both in you personally and in us all together. I consider what is in this room a miracle, because I wouldn't have known you all. I wouldn't have met you. Our lives would not have crossed if it hadn't been for God, and if it hadn't been for the fact that we love Jesus like we do. When I look around this room, some of you, I know better than others, but what a miracle. What a miracle that I can look at these people who, in some way, have blessed me in some way or another, personally. The glory of God is in our midst and the love that we have for each other. He goes, "I'm gonna tell you a secret." This whole world is going to look at what you have, and they're going to know you belong to Me, because I'm going to teach you how to love. They may call you names. They probably will, and they may even try to hurt you. But they're going to know you're different. They're going to know you belong to Me, because of the love that's in you and My glory in your midst. Let's look up more facts while we're in Romans. I'm going to read a few verses, and then we're going to unpack them.

#### Romans 5:1-5

What are some key facts? We have been justified by faith, declared innocent, and right in the sight of God, the minute that you chose to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. You were justified, made completely right, and sins wiped out forever. Where are they? They're under the blood. Go find them. Go look for them. You won't find them. We are justified in God's sight.

Secondly, we have peace with God. He's not angry at us. Too many times, the picture of God is the angry old man looking to beat you up, saying "You messed up, or you missed." No, I have peace with Him. He's not angry at me. I have shalom in our relationship. Nothing missing, nothing broken, and nothing out of place. That's what's been granted to me. That is a fact of my existence. Tell me how excited you are to approach somebody when you know they're angry at you. Even with your wife, *you think*, "I messed up, she's not going to like this." It's not fun. How much more if people really, genuinely in their heart don't understand this fact. You believed in Jesus, your sins are wiped away, and you have peace with Him now. His invitation is, "Come." How many Christians do you know that wrestle with that basic fact of our existence and still go on believing, "He must be angry at me? He must be mad at me." Well, God knows how to not like my sin and deliver me from it without being angry at me. He doesn't need anger. He doesn't have to yell at me to get His point across. Sometimes it cuts even harder when He's like, "Son, no." I don't feel His anger in that moment. What I feel is His

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love for me telling me, that's not what's best for me, or that's not what I need to have life and prosperity and goodness. I can feel that, and it's like, "Oh, He didn't have to raise His voice."

Where do we stand? We stand in His grace. I would spend the rest of today trying to define that word for you. Let me give you a condensed definition. We stand. We exist in this beautiful location called God's grace. Which means His power, His favor, His presence, His mercy, and His unmerited status before His throne, that empowers us to do all that He has called us to do. If I were to take that whole big word called grace, that's how I could boil it down. I'll say it again. I'll go slower. It's His power, His favor, His presence, His mercy, and unmerited status before His throne, that empowers us to do all that He has called us to do. It says we stand in that. We exist in that, and that's good news. Do I need His power? Absolutely, because if His power doesn't show up in things that I can see, they're not going to move. They're not going to change, minus the power of God. Do I need His favor? Absolutely, I do. I am continually amazed when I receive His favor. People show up saying, "Oh, I noticed this about you." I'm like, "Really, because I didn't notice that about me." It's God's favor highlighting things to people. It's His presence and His mercy. The status that He has given me before Him, that I didn't deserve, and I couldn't have earned. His empowerment to do everything He called me to do, and that's where I live. I live in that state called grace.

Again, you saw it. Tribulation is part of the walk. Why? Well, we live in a broken world? But, look at the process. God redeems it. Why do we glory in tribulations? Do we just not get it? Are we just lacking? No, it's not the tribulation in itself. But, why do we glory? Because we know that the things we go through produce perseverance. You're stronger today, because you've walked through something with God. Your faith has scars, but that scar is the testimony of what you and Him went through together. When you want to come *against me* this time, I *have* the scar that says I lived through it once, and you can't stop me this time either. Faith knows that tribulation is coming and says, "You know what? Tribulation produces perseverance. Perseverance produces character." That's where you find out who you really are. I've had to learn many times I wasn't as brave as I thought I was. I wasn't as humble as I thought I was. *I'm doing that one a lot of times.* Sometimes I didn't believe as hard as I thought I could. But you stand in that fire long enough, and God puts something in you that gives you the backbone. Do you know how you get steel out of iron? You put iron in a furnace and you melt it. While it's melted, you blow air through it. What that air does is it removes impurities, so that the new product, when it cools, is lighter, stronger and prettier. Isn't that something? That's for free, but that's the process.

In the end, hope, because I know that at the end of it, I have hope that will carry me through the next thing that comes. Ultimately, what do I know in the middle of all of that? Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. Everybody say, "He's not stingy." When it says, "He's pouring it out." Imagine He's got the vessel and it's upside down, right? He's not going, "No." It's He's an, "all in," kind of God. If He's going to pour out His love, He's like, "I'm bringing all of it." Here it comes, and I've got to be ready to receive all of it. He's not a stingy God.

Let's look up another fact. Here's the fact that we're highlighting. "God loves each and every one of us the same way He loves Jesus." Here's the fact.

#### John 15:7-10 NKJV

There now it feels finished. When we say, "abide," it can mean a variety of things. It can mean to remain. Remain in His Word. I'll let His word remain in me, to abide. It can be like to live in something. It can mean to keep it deliberately. I abide by this. I deliberately keep this principle, this rule. So, it's more than just a study session. It's more like, "Okay, I'm going to learn this. I'm going to memorize it, and file that away as interesting information back here in

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the back of my brain, then move on. I'm just being honest with you. I've done exactly that with this word. But, that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about intimacy. Letting Him reveal Himself. Knowing Him, and interestingly enough, that begins to transform what I desire. That's why Jesus can confidently say, "If My word abides in you, ask what you want, because you're going to want what I want. I'll give it to you, because I can trust you. You're showing me that you're trustworthy, when you let My word remain and transform you. Then you can start to ask what you've been trained in, or taught in." "Lord, I want to see these homeless people let go of their desperation and lay hold of hope." Amen, right? "I want to see so much provision poured on our house that we don't rely on outside donations to be able to go feed this city."

"I want to see people come in these doors, God. I want to see them encounter your presence in a way that leaves us all undone together. Whether there are drums in the worship today, or whatever else, Lord. If there's a work, just come in a way that leaves us undone. If you would, grant us to experience that together as a family. Wow, Lord, would you please come that way?" We're crying out for that, right? Here's the beauty, "As the Father loved me." Jesus is making this statement quite plainly, "As the Father loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in My love." Again, what kind of love is that? It's limitless. It's unending. It's unchanging. It is relentless love. It is love that says, "I am with you no matter what." It's love that says, "I'm going to pursue your best at all costs, and I'll prove it to you, because I gave the best I had." He already proved it, right?" God already proved it. He sent the best He had to the cross and said, "This is how much I love you." A lot of people worry about that. They say, "Well, no, God loved Jesus, and look what happened to Him." But, here's my question, did He love Him any less when He was being scourged? Did He love Him any less when He was getting mocked by the people He came for while He was on the cross?" On the cross, Jesus still called Him, Abba or Daddy. "Why have you forsaken me?" He knew why. In that outcry, it reminds us, oh yes, this was prophesied. Everything that is coming to pass, is coming to pass exactly the way God said it would. Jesus's desire in that moment wasn't to make us doubt. It was to say, "I know He still loves me and I love Him. That is why I'm doing this." Those of us who are His disciples can go and look in the word and say, "Oh, you told us exactly that was going to happen. We can see the bigger picture. Why would Jesus do that? He told us quite plainly.

#### John 14:31

This is why He did that. This is why He was on the cross in that moment, crying out that way. "That the world may know that I love the Father. As the Father gave me commandments, so I do." This is why, there is a bigger glory that is happening in this moment than you might understand. Guess what? It doesn't look like what you thought it would, if you're Andrew or Nathaniel, and you've been following Jesus all this time. You didn't think that was where it was going. But, it took the Holy Spirit after the fact to say, this is the bigger glory. That three days later, He came out of the grave. We recognized that wasn't the end of it. Did God love Jesus any less when He was going through those things? Absolutely not. How hard must it have been to refrain His hand? He's like, "I have to hold back, because if I stop this, then I can't be with all of these people. If I stop this right now, then the mission fails. The glory on the other side of it is worth the suffering that we're encountering in this moment." That's the mindset. It's like, "If I'm going through something, there must be a bigger purpose for it. Otherwise God would not allow it. Even if it is my testimony in that moment, God is still God. God is still good, and His glory is going to come through this one way or another."

When I was thinking about this, I was thinking about our brother, Ivan, over in Midland, who was in that bad car accident. His body was mangled up. But, to every person who's putting hands on him, he says, "Hey, did you know that God actually saved my life?" I mean, he's laying on a stretcher testifying to people. Am I saying that God wanted Ivan to be in a car accident? Of course not, but when I talked to that man at the Vision Conference, he said,

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"I was reborn again that day. God killed the old me, and He resurrected a new me. I can't wait to tell people what He's done for me. Will God take that and use it for a bigger purpose? I have to believe that, or I'll become discouraged.

Here's another fact while we're at it. No matter what we go through, and we know it's going to be there, this is the testimony that we have.

#### Romans 8:31-37

"More than a conqueror," and more than enough to get through it, because of the one who loves us and doesn't leave us alone in it. That's a fact of my existence. No matter what I'm facing, I'm not alone. I am up to it. Even if this body dies on the other side of that, I will wake up in glory. You are unstoppable. That is a fact of your existence, that the God who lives in you will not be stopped, and He will be glorified.

I want to finish with one more thing today. This has continually come up, and I believe that the Lord is using this to encourage our house greatly. This is a great picture of our life and the facts that we can expect to see in the course of our life.

#### Psalm 23

You want to know what that tells us? Yahweh, the same God who created this universe, is my shepherd. The fact is that He humbled Himself to consider Himself my Shepherd. If I'm His sheep, that means He made Himself like me. That happened through Jesus. Think of it this way, a shepherd slept where the sheep slept, walked where the sheep walked, and led them. They knew His voice. He knew them by name. He smelled like the sheep. Yahweh smells like me. Jesus smells like me. Yeah? Because wherever He sends me, He's leading me there. If I went off the path, He's coming to get me there. Either way, He's going to smell like me. He's going to lay down where I lay down. He's going to walk through whatever I walk through. What's His intent for me? His intent is to make me lie down in green pastures where I'm safe and provided for. For me to go by waters where I can get what I need, drink from the living water of His Holy Spirit and not be in danger. That's His intent for me to be alive, healthy and prospering. That's His intent. He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul where I've been angry or broken or embittered. He's going to remove that and make it new. I need that. I need that. I am a teacher. I need my soul to be restored frequently. But, it's like that person who takes that old vehicle that looked like a junker, and by the time they're done, it looks like a brand new thing. Imagine the Lord doing that work, that labor of love in your soul, your mind, will and emotions. Imagine that He doesn't get tired of it. Imagine His passion to restore your soul to be led in the paths of righteousness. Why? So, that my life lifts up His name. That is His intent for me. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Uh, oh, did He send me? No? Why? He is with me there. Here's a cool thing. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me even in those dark places. Why? His rod of discipline keeps me in the path where life is. His staff is what the enemy gets when he comes. You know that David was a shepherd. David killed lions and bears. He killed lions and bears. He wasn't a meek little *guy*. I love the movies, but he fought lions for his sheep and won. He fought bears for his sheep and won. Shepherds are bad to the bone, and if you mess with me, you get my Shepherd. Keep that in mind Satan, because if you're going to come, He's going to deal with you. His staff is a big old stick, just saying. That rod of discipline, it may not feel good, but it sure does help me know I'm going to be on a path that leads to life.

What else? He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You really believe? Yes, I really believe. You really think? Yes, I really think that. But here's the thing, if they're over here, jawing in my face, what am I going to focus on, the feast, or the voices? They're going to come. They're going to mock you. They're going to make fun of you. They're going

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to try to make you not feel good. But, I have the choice to feast on what? Feast on His goodness, and enjoy the fellowship that I have with Him. You know, you sit down at the table with somebody you love. You sit down at the table with somebody that makes you feel protected and safe. I think, if I'm seated at this table, they're still present. I noticed that He didn't make them leave. Yet, we know that that's promised at the end. But, they can't touch me. They can talk. But, they can't touch me there. What does He do? He anoints my head with oil. I've been taught that old shepherds would anoint the sheep with oil because that made the flies leave. They didn't like the scent of it, and if they got in it, the flies got stuck and died. The anointing in my life will cause them to leave, or it will overcome that which tries to distract me. That is a fact of my existence. My cup runs over, that is the abundance of His joy, His Spirit, and His upliftings. My cup is full of it, to the point of running over at all times, because my Shepherd cares for me, even in the presence of my enemies. His goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. I have a six year old. This is the picture I get. This happens to me right now. We're walking this way. The six year old stops. *I'm trying not to fall over them.* I wonder if goodness and mercy are like that. If I stop, get that picture in your mind. Goodness and mercy are following after me so closely, that if I stop, they're going to knock me down. The ultimate goal is I will, starting right now, dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Forever!

Today, it has been my goal to encourage us as we've been being taught, to lay hold of what God has given us in His word and in the testimonies that continue to pour forth. To say, this isn't an idea, and it's not a story. These are facts. This actually happened, and it will happen again. My life, one way or another, is going to put His glory on display. Lay hold of it. Live it out. Trust Him and know Him in a way that you can put it to work. Will you join me in prayer? Afterwards, if you need prayer, we're here.

Father in the name of Jesus, on behalf of myself, and those in this house, we renew our commitment to you. We believe you, and we're taking you at your word. We will let you lead us in the paths of righteousness for your name's sake. We know that it is your intent to provide for us and protect us. It is your intent for us to overcome, even the valley of the shadow of death. That when the enemy comes, we have a choice of who we're going to focus on. We thank you for the feast at your table. I pray that we would find grace to fasten our eyes upon you, no matter what. God is God. He is good. He will be glorified in this house and in our lives individually. Be it done according to your will, Lord. In the mighty name of Jesus, we pray, amen.