

Hope Christian Church
D. Todd Cravens
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Sermon Series: *Hope 2.0*



Let Us Rejoice and Give Thanks

Introducing James & Yun Mi Park (Nora)

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

This morning I will step out of our current sermon series. I will not preach an expositional sermon as I normally do, because today is special. Today is a day for rejoicing and giving thanks to God. Rejoicing, praying, & giving thanks in all circumstances is the will of God for us.

Today we have good reason to do just that. We have good reason to rejoice and give thanks. We want to tell you some of what God has lately been doing among us. We have a good biblical examples to encourage us in this direction. In Acts 14 we read that when Paul and Barnabas returned from their mission trip,

"...they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done..."
(Acts 14:27)

This is what we want to do now. We want to declare to you all that God has done, and at the end of our time together, I hope you will be able to enthusiastically join me in rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks to God for all that he has done.

On January 10 I preached a sermon entitled, "Ask That Your Joy May Be Full." That sermon was based on John 16:24, which says,

"Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive that your joy will be full."

In that sermon, I shared that back in October I had thought about something that I sensed might be good for this church, but which, in my opinion, was humanly impossible to bring about. I shared that I didn't pray about it because I could not conceive of how it could be possible. I also shared that God had revealed a way that it might indeed be possible. Then I said that one day I hoped to be able to share with you all those details. **Today is that day.** Today I want to share with you how our mighty, awesome, powerful God has the power "to do abundantly above and beyond all that we can ask or even imagine" (Eph 3:20). I pray that the result will be that you are filled with joy.

A Brief Review of Hope 2.0

Many of you are new to Hope. In order for you have a better understanding of what God has been doing among us, I need to go back in time a little bit and color in the background. This will also be good for us who have been here for a longer time to be reminded of these things.

In 2013 this church turned 20 years old. That year become for us a year of reflection. We began to analyze everything we did. We began to think more intently about the structure of our corporate gatherings. We asked ourselves the question, "If we were to start over again, would we do anything any differently? If we were to plant a new church today in Winchester, MA is there anything about our building that we would change? Is there anything about our ministry or mission that we would change?"

At our elders' retreat in May of that year, Doug Simpson, a former elder and dear brother who now lives in Costa Rica, came up with the notion of **Hope 2.0**, as in the second release and

upgrade of a software application. This caught our attention since it signaled that there were improvements and changes that could be embraced and it was also our 20th year of ministry.

We agreed that our mission and purposes would not change. Our mission is “to develop a community of committed disciples of Jesus that has an impact for Christ locally and globally.” Our purposes are to **Reach Up**, **Reach In**, and **Reach Out**. While we agreed our mission and purposes would not change, as we examined things, we agreed there were some things that could change.

We sensed the Lord inviting us to lean further into our purpose of **Reaching Out** (to a lost world with attractive news of the gospel of Jesus). This led us to think about our physical space. We made a few small décor changes in the lobby. The response was overwhelming and consistent. Many people had a similar response, “This is so much more welcoming.” This caused to think. If our own people felt more welcomed simply by a few changes in the furniture, would visitors and strangers feel more welcomed if we changed a few more things? We asked ourselves a question, “Should this wonderful building, that has not been physically refreshed in eighteen years, remain unchanged?”

Renovating the Building

We agreed, “If we were starting a new church today, we’d want to refresh and rearrange a few things internally.” We began to pray. We dreamed up some plans. We found out how much the dream would cost. If the Lord was in this then he would have to provide the money. We do not want to be strapped with long-term debt. So we asked you to pledge what you might give over a three year period. We reached the amount we needed. The Lord provided what we needed to move forward.

The main reason we decided to tear down the walls between the two front rooms was to open up a larger space for hospitality, a space to make visitors and strangers feel welcomed. We are doing this renovation for several reasons but the main one is because we want to keep **reaching out** to Winchester and the surrounding towns and communities. We want young adults and young families to have an attractive building in which to worship an attractive God. We want visitors and unbelievers to be drawn to this place so we will have an opportunity to introduce them to and teach them about the most important Person this world has even known —Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son of God the Father.

The primary reason we are renovating this building is to create an attractive space to show hospitality to visitors and newcomers who are seeking to know God. We desire to have an increased space in order to have spiritual conversations. That is the reason we decided to refreshen and renovate this building. We do not want the beauty of the gospel to fail to be given a hearing because we have a dull building. Our renovation of this building is an expression of Hope 2.0.

Of course I know that having a nice building will not necessarily mean that people will suddenly come begging to hear the gospel. I don't think for a minute that because we have new paint, new chairs, and new carpet some passerby will knock on the door and say, "What a beautiful building you have here. Tell me about this Jesus." But I do believe that a place to which people are happy to come, can be a helpful tool in the hands of a happy people who occupy that place to introduce some unhappy people to One Person who is the source of all true happiness. That person is God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

And He has lately made me very happy.

Reaching The Next Generation

He made me happy last September when we introduced you to our *Associate Pastor for the Next Generation, Emanuel Oglice*. We changed the title and expanded the youth position from "Director of Children and Youth," because of our desire to keep **reaching out to the next generation**—children, youth, and young adults—with the good news of Jesus Christ. The expansion of that title and that position is an expression of Hope 2.0. The Lord brought Emanuel & Bianca to us in May of last year. We didn't know the Lord had chosen Emanuel to be our next children, youth, and young adult pastor until August. The Lord was kind to us. He brought Emanuel to us before we knew he was to serve with us and among us.

The Lord has done this again. Once again he has made me very happy. Once again he has brought someone to us before we knew he would be serving with us.

James & Yun Mi Park

Last October the Lord brought James & Yun Mi Park to us. James had perviously served Genesis, a church birthed out of this church five years ago, as a worship leader and director of creative arts. James' service at Genesis came to end last September. James & Yun Mi visited us in early October.

Alisa and I had them over for lunch the day after their first visit here at Hope. We listened to their story and got to know them a little bit. That Monday afternoon as they walked out our front door, I looked at Alisa and sighed, "Oh how I wish they could come join us at Hope." Alisa said, "Can we hire him?" I said, "I wish we could, but we don't have the money or a vacant position."

I remember thinking about them later that night. I wished we could make room for him, but we couldn't. There was something within me that yearned to pray that they would be able to come serve at Hope. But it was impossible. Why pray? We didn't have the money. We're not even able to pay Iain at full salary. He's currently serving full-time but only receiving 50% salary. (Granted, he did request greater freedom to have more time off and stay away longer, but he deserves a full salary.) There's no financial room to add staff and there were no open staff positions. So I did not even dare to pray that God would make a way for James.

James and Yun Mi visited a several more times off and on over the next couple of months in between looking for jobs. They spent Thanksgiving with the Whitfield's. Dave Butters bumped into James and invited him to play with the worship team sometime. Then the New Year came.

At the beginning of the first week of January, Iain and I received a phone call from someone requesting to meet. This person said, "We know the situation of James Park. We know the church does not have the money to pay him. But if you two can make room for him and can find enough work to keep him busy, we'd be willing to cover his salary for up to one year."

As the Brits would say, I was gobsmacked. As what I heard began to sink in, I nearly wept.

I nearly wept because I realized that God had answered a prayer I hadn't even been bold enough to pray. I thought of Isaiah 65:24, which says,

(Isaiah 65:24 ESV)

²⁴ Before they call I will answer;

God answered before I even called. I suspect, though, there were others of you who were bold enough to pray. As it turned out, we had an elders' meeting that very night. So we explained what had unfolded that morning, and we were unanimously agreed that we should explore this and see if God was in it. But we didn't even know if James would be interested in serving at Hope. So we called James and invited him to sit down with us to talk about the possibility. We set up a meeting with him the following afternoon. That morning the Lord woke me up at 3:30 a.m. with my head swirling with ideas for a job description. I presented the job description to Iain and he made a few tweaks. We passed it on to James when we met with him. He and Yun Mi tweaked it a bit more. I passed it by Emanuel and the other elders. Along the way, we kept seeing green lights. There were no red lights.

James Leads Worship

Then we invited James to lead worship on January 24. The response from many of you was noteworthy. Many of you reported that you were blessed. I had one person say to me, "This morning was wonderful. I'd say it was a high-water mark of my worship experience here at Hope." One of the elders emailed and said, "Something extraordinary happened."

We invited James to join our elders' meeting on February 3. We met and talked with James for about 2 hours. After James left, we all prayed and then shared our thoughts. We unanimously agreed that the Lord is inviting us to make room for James on staff at Hope for the next twelve months.

As I told you, his salary for the next year would be covered. However, we still had to consider the extra expense of payroll taxes and health insurance. Health insurance is not cheap. In fact,

it is very expensive. We had to get that covered. We worked hard and found coverage for 50% of the health care costs. Then one of the elders emailed and said, "My family will take care of 25% of the health care cost." This was a tremendous blessing and another confirmation. The elders agreed that we will step out in faith and trust the Lord to provide for the remaining 25% of the health care costs and the additional payroll taxes. Will you please pray with us that the LORD will provide for these needs over the next year?

Job Description

This situation is completely unique. We didn't have a position we were seeking to fill with a person. We have been given the gift of a person for whom we needed to find a position. And we have found one. Iain said it well. He said, "we believe that the Lord has something for us through James and something for James through us."

So what will James be doing? James will be coming along side Iain, Emanuel, and me as we labor to develop a community of committed disciples of Jesus that has an impact for Jesus locally and globally. James will use his unique set of gifts to help us Reach Up, Reach In, and Reach Out for the glory of God through Jesus.

I believe James can help us **Reach Up** by joining the rotation of leading in worship, by helping us think through the flow of Sunday morning services, by helping us plan special services, and think through how to creatively to use our space. He may also help Emanuel develop a youth worship team, and he could help us plan and execute the worship time for the summer sports and arts camp.

James can help us **Reach In** by looking at our church culture with his unique set of eyes and helping us to be aware of anything that we're doing that does not cultivate a true sense of authentic, biblical community. We can also **Reach Into** James and Yun Mi's lives by providing them with a season and space to discern the next long-term steps that God may have for them as a family.

James can help us **Reach Out** by focusing our attention on young adults and young married couples and by being a face for us to a younger generation. He can help think through our web presence and help us more effectively reach a digital generation.

Well, enough from me. I want you to hear from James. James will you join me?

Questions for James:



1. You previously served for two and a half years as worship pastor at Genesis. Last September it became clear that the Lord was closing that chapter of your life and opening a new one. Share what you believe the Lord has been doing in your life during this season.
2. You've turned down several other jobs over the past six months, including one offer in your home town of Atlanta. Can you share why you said no to the other jobs?
3. What has drawn you and Yun Mi to Hope?
4. Obviously you enjoy leading worship. Beyond leading worship, in what other ways and places do you believe that you may be able to help us achieve our purposes (of Reaching Up, Reaching In, & Reaching Out)?

Yun Mi will you join us on stage so we can pray for you as a family.

Please keep them in prayer as they join us.

Now, let us rejoice and give thanks to the Lord for his continued work among us.