

(recap series)

Wk 1, Joel Larison Hebrews 13:15-16

Wk 2, Karl Stoneking Proverbs 3:5-6

Wk 3, Jason Braun Proverbs 9:10

Wk 4, Eric McCoy Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

They all said it was their *seasonal* life verse. So clearly they all missed the premise, the series is called *LIFE Verse* not *SEASON Verse*.

Just because I'm a nonconformist, my life verse is truly that--I think it's emblematic of my whole life. Now what's interesting is, I have not been a Christ follower but the second half of my life.

So clearly not growing up with God or in church, I didn't pick a life verse. But perhaps as I've examined my life, my life verse picked me.

To help you understand that, let's go back to a snapshot of my adolescence. This is an excerpt from a book that I need to revisit & finish:

/// "Something odd started happening to me around age fifteen or sixteen. I started realizing that our family and our house was different. When I was younger I thought that it was different, in a cool way. Mod 1960's style paper lampshades, bean bag chairs, psychedelic flower-inspired art in the kitchen. Cool music.

But now as a teenager it felt different in a not-so-cool kind of way. By the early 1980s our house looked no different than it did in the late 60's, except that it was more cluttered. More worn. More unkempt.

As a little kid growing up in a home that embraced and encouraged uniqueness and non-conformity, being different was cool just by its nature.

But as a teenager I was drawing my own conclusions. I was concluding that non-conformity alone is not necessarily cool---A mod 60's style house in the early 80's that hadn't been maintained was non-conforming-- but it definitely wasn't cool. It was embarrassing.

When I was a little kid, I could remember that our house wasn't the best, but it wasn't the worst. It was ok. It was cool.

But now years later, a freshman at Kokomo High School, I realized that between all of my friends' homes, ours was clearly the worst.

I remember a time in high school band. I lived somewhat close to the high school and an upperclassman friend of mine, Pam, knew that and on this particular day told me that she needed to stop in my house so she could change. I nearly peed myself.

There was no way I could let that happen. First of all, Pam was a cute and popular upperclassman girl from a nice neighborhood—there are all kinds of enormous emotional ramifications with just that fact alone.

If she saw my house, there was no excuse that I could concoct that would make sense.

*"We just bought this house and it came like this..."*

*"I'm really an exchange student from Canada..."*

*"It's the latest fashion trend—'low-rent nouveau'..."*

I tried so hard in high school to be normal, to have friends, to be respected, to look and act unlike my home implied. It was the early 80's and I wore designer jeans, Levi khakis, and button-down shirts with knit ties---but I did refuse to wear the sweater with my three initials on it!

I was involved at school; ran for things and led things. If Pam saw my home, my cover would be blown. My whole world would unravel. I would be found out.

I did the one thing any posing freshman would and could do. I lied to her. I lied big. I told her my mom and my sister would be using our one bathroom and it just wouldn't work out.

Cute and popular Pam wouldn't take no for an answer. She was determined--she knew there were other rooms in a house that she could change in.

I wanted to pee myself again. I kept coming up with lie after lie until I finally frustrated her and made her mad.

Do you know how hard it is to make a cute popular upperclassman girl mad? It totally sucked. It killed me. This was seriously one of high school's most scary moments for me...." ///

Now, in fairness to my parents, they did a great job instilling some great qualities in us and provided some great experiences for us growing up, to a certain age.

But somewhere around this time of my life--for reasons I don't fully understand, from a family perspective, the wheels started falling off.

My parents, God love `em, kind of withdrew and checked out. The physical house that I wrote about was a physical representation of a family that was also in disrepair--in dysfunction.

At this point when I was in that critical phase of growing into a man--needing a strong dad and some solid parenting--it just wasn't there.

So there I was trying to navigate adolescence, feeling very alone. Feeling very adrift. Feeling very much in need of a sense of security.

I could have gone for an extra-large "Thunder Shirt" right about then ;-)

I was at a place where most of us get to at some point in life--I was looking for

**Something worth believing in.  
Somewhere to belong.  
Something to become.**

This is not the place in my story where I find God the next day skip happily down the Jesus path the rest of my life.

I came to Christ years later. And in those years before I gave into God--in healthy and unhealthy ways I was looking for:

Something worth believing in.  
Somewhere to belong.  
Something to become.

I had no idea at the time, that what I was looking for was the content of my life verse.

**"Three things will last forever--faith, hope, and love--and the greatest of these is love."  
1 Corinthians 13:13 NLT**

Something worth believing in is FAITH.  
Somewhere to belong is LOVE.  
Something to become is HOPE.

I didn't realize this was my life verse til about 10 years ago. I was reading the book *Unstoppable Force* by Erwin McManus. And he said that when we look at the most complex architecture from the ancients to the ultra-modern of today--they're all a combination of just three things:

circles, triangles and squares.

Circles, triangles and squares--squish em, stretch em, make them tiny, huge, cut the shapes in half, use part of the shape--put them in the right creative combination, manipulate them--and you get a structure--you get a building.

Look around this room--it's circles, triangles, and squares. Every building is circles, triangles and squares.

This book, *Unstoppable Force*, it's not exactly about architecture--it's more about the church--what a church should be.

And Erwin McManus made this statement that stunned me.

He said we look at churches and they seem like these complex entities, but really every church is just about 3 things.

He seriously had my attention--because I work at a church and I couldn't imagine how church could be about just three things.

Trying to get my head around the 66 books of the Bible---working here, trying to navigate all the facets of 1,000 person church---how could it be just THREE things???

But just like the most complicated architecture is boiled down to circles, triangles and squares---**every church should be a place where the followers of God:**

**Live by FAITH.  
Are known by LOVE.  
Are a voice of HOPE.**

That's **1 Corinthians 13:13** again. "Three things will last forever--faith, hope, and love--and the greatest of these is love."

There those three things were again--the three things that I was looking for earlier in life and that so many people all over the world are looking for:

Something worth believing in...FAITH.  
Somewhere to belong...LOVE.  
Something to become...HOPE.

One of the reasons this is my life verse is because I believe, in this life of unending complexity, just like **Albert Einstein** said,

***"Everything should be as simple as possible, but not simpler."***

I love to get to the bottom line.  
I hate to feel scattered.  
I love to be focused.  
I love to find the simple in the complex.

And 1 Corinthians 13:13 does this for me--not just as a pastor, but as a Christ follower.

These three pillars of our faith are simple, yet they are utterly profound. Let me show you what I mean.

(Just for the record, this verse is really a 3 week series--[faith, love & hope] so I'm going to hang out on HOPE today.)

Several years ago we got our first family dog, Cleo; the princess greyhound. Greyhounds were mentioned in the Old Testament and for almost that long, they have been bred to chase small fast creatures.

So for months when we first got her, she would chase and tree squirrels in our backyard like it was her job. She would stand there statue-like at the base of a tree looking up for what seemed like forever.

But after a while, Cleo got to a point where she'd just amble past the squirrels, roll her eyes and say,

"Eh, I have better things to do. I'm going to lie in the sun." And she'd turn away coldly, not giving the squirrel the time of day ;-)

But the great Cleo has since passed.

This is Annie. Annie is a silly young girl--a spirited tigress. Hunting squirrels is her job. She will stalk, stare and tree squirrels, like a cop on a stakeout.

Do you know what the difference is between Cleo and Annie, when it comes to squirrels?

HOPE.

Annie still believes. She has HOPE that she will get that chattering joker. And because she has hope, she *tries*.

And because she tries, she might get that squirrel, if it slips or messes up.

Anytime there is something in our lives that's missing. When there's something we wish we were doing. If we wish something were different, but we just don't do anything about it...

We are like Cleo. We lack hope.

So many marriages stay in the same lifeless place--or worse--end in divorce because hope is gone.

We stop believing this can or will ever get better.

So like Cleo, we stop chasing. Instead, we just shrug and go on.

(SELAH)

This time last year I was probably at my worst physical state ever in terms of weight and activity. I was starting, for the first time in my life to feel old.

And why wasn't I doing anything about it?

I didn't have the hope that I could really lose weight, could really take control over this area of my life. In the past, I'd try for a while, relapse back into old ways. I didn't have hope.

And when we don't do anything when we know we should do something, that is often the absence of hope.

Think about it:

If you really thought you could lose weight...you'd try.

If you really thought you could fix your marriage...you'd try.

When we believe, we act.

When we don't believe, we do nothing.

And so last August when I was at the Global Leadership Summit...Dr. Henry Cloud was giving a talk. He is a clinical psychologist and a devout Christ follower. And he made this simple remark in his opening comments:

***"When your maturity is not strong enough in a particular part of your life, add an external structure."* -Dr. Henry Cloud**

What does that mean?

That meant that my maturity in taking care of my body was weak, which meant I needed an external structure--a person, a program-- an expert in this area of physical health.

Ok--a lot of you right now are like, "Duh--could have told you that Morg--not exactly rocket science bro!"

But here's the thing--when we're stuck--when we're lacking HOPE--we can't see the simplicity and objectivity of our situation.

"When your maturity is not strong enough in a particular part of your life, add an external structure."

Ok, so--I add some external structure. I say to Sandra, "I want to go to Dr. Haendigas--she is a pro at nutrition, at helping people like me get to where I want to be."

So in this case, a doctor, her staff and a program are the external structure.

Then after I lost a little weight, sneaky Sandra has this idea of getting a physical trainer to work with me, Dave Dubois and another guy and I'd blog about it and we'd promote the YMCA--good for us, good for the Y.

So I add more external structure: not just a doctor, but now a physical trainer, Nicole Peele, and a couple fellow strugglers and we worked 12 weeks together to establish a new way of living.

So what happens here? The Holy Spirit breathes HOPE into me at the Summit. I add external structure to my physical immaturity.

I learn, I grow, I sweat--boy, do I sweat..

And now at this point-- I'm not done by any means, but I've worked out at least 5 days a week since January, walk-jogged a 5K, done a 20 mile bicycle ride in Indy and since fall lost 40 lbs!

(Not done--long way to go!)

What is it that you sense God wants you to do that you're not doing?

Relationship?

Financial?

Maturing in Christ?

Children challenges?

Addiction?

"When your maturity is not strong enough in a particular part of your life, add an external structure."

What external structure do you need?

Marriage counselor?

Therapist?  
Financial coach?  
Spiritual mentor?  
Addiction program?

I want to be clear here--because there may be some here that right now you're thinking,

*"Hey brother, where's Jesus? This sounds like self-help. Isn't every obstacle spiritual? Can't God do anything?"*

I'm going to get to Jesus. But we need to understand something:

In *this* world, there are things *you* and *I* need to do and things that only God can do. And in between what we do and what He does, He can work in all kinds of ways.

Listen:

Just praying, is not going to make me lose weight.

(trust me, I've tried!)

Just praying won't fix a marriage that we've spent years jacking up.

Just praying will not make debt go away.

Just praying will not fully mature you in Christ.

Just praying will not fix all the junk we struggle with from our past.

This is why there is this little yet powerful verse in **Philippians 2:12**, "*Work out your salvation.*"

This is what I'm doing when I'm fighting to eat better and live an active lifestyle.

This is what we're doing when we meet with relational or financial counselors. Biblically, there is junk for you and me to "work out!" as Philippians 2:12 says.

And we DO pray through and read Scripture about all that stuff we're working out and God shows up in it--but there is stuff we have to do and things *God* will do.

This is so important because (catch this):

**If we spiritualize everything, it will wreck our hope.**

When we just pray about big issues in our life: weight, relationships, finances, our past---when just pray, but don't do our part--don't work out our salvation. Guess what happens?

We end up saying things like:



“Wow, God didn’t save the day again...  
God didn’t take away that craving for food...didn’t fix my body  
God didn’t take away that financial temptation...didn’t fix my finances  
God didn’t save my marriage...didn’t fix my spouse  
God didn’t take away my addiction...”

When we put it ALL on God when some of it, or a lot of it, should be on us, that will surely kill our hope.  
We will falsely teach ourselves that God isn’t faithful.

And when hope is gone, we stop trying.  
Things never change.  
We don’t become who God envisioned us to be.  
The evil one laughs.

(SELAH)

Hope is the fuel to get going.  
Hope gets us out of the starting blocks.  
Hope makes change possible.  
Hope gets us moving into becoming the people we and God long for us to be.  
Hope gives God space to do the things only He can do.

Hope gave me the possibility to live a life that was different from the house I was in, in high school.

Hope says that I can do better than I’ve done with this body in the years I have left.

Hope is fuel!

(SELAH)

Alright--so where does hope come from? (HANDOUT)

Ok, here’s the Jesus part ;-)

**#1. READING and MEDITATING on the Bible, gives us hope.**

Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled.

**Romans 15:4 NLT**

That is a promise...Reading God's Word, pondering God's Word, gives us encouragement and hope.

Is there anybody here that's like,

*"Ah--if I get any more hope and encouragement, I'm going to throw up--I'm up to here with hope & encouragement!"*

Anybody on the other side?...(elaborate)

Here's God's promise: We get hope, when we read and meditate on God's Word. Romans 15:4

Where else do we get hope?

## **2. Embracing God in CHALLENGING TIMES.**

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, HOPE. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

**Romans 5:3-5 NIV**

Eric spoke last week about living in the tensions--in the space between joy and sorrow--in the space between here and eternity.

This verse says that when we are in times of turmoil, times of challenge, times of sorrow--that the Holy Spirit in us--Who is going through all those things *with* us--produces IN us:

Perseverance  
Character  
Hope

When we weather tough times, the Holy Spirit produces in us: Perseverance, Character, HOPE.

The world has a rough paraphrase for this verse:  
*What doesn't kill you makes you stronger ;-)*

Do you ever notice that for younger people when challenges come their way, it seems like their world is ending?

But older people kind of roll with the punches in tough times?

Why is that?

Because the more life experience we have, the more storms we have endured. And with each storm God has guided us thru, this verse rang true. We saw that as we embraced God in the storm, He created in us perseverance, character & HOPE.

We get hope when we embrace God through challenging times.

Where else do we get hope?

### **3. We get hope from GOD HIMSELF .**

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 15:13 NLT**

The NIV says, "May the God of Hope..."

This verse defines God and tells us that He is the wellspring of hope--God is the *well* that we dip hope out of. That if we don't have hope, that's ok--God has it and gives it!

So for those who are IN Christ--hope is not something we in and of ourselves have to muster or conjure up. Hope has a source--it is GOD and he makes hope available to us through Himself, thru His Word and through life's challenges.

Hope died on a cross so that we can overcome the world. HE IS OUR HOPE.

(SELAH)

When people come into the church to talk with me...for the record, it's always something heavy, serious. (It's never, "Hey take a ride on my new motorcycle!...it's ok...I'm not bitter...")

I'm listening for 1 Corinthians 13:13 in their story.

Because when we feel like we don't have an anchor--adrift-- close to losing it--it's usually one or a combination of three things that are out of whack:

We're not sure where God is in all of this (faith...)

We've been hurt by someone (love...)

We're not sure we'll really be ok again (hope...)

And in so many words, I gently remind them that God *is* faithful,

He *is* a God of love

God is the source of Hope.

Because of Jesus on the cross we CAN hope!

Just like all of architecture is made up of circles, triangles and squares---so the whole of life, of every Christ follower rides upon and should exude: faith, hope and love. Social media, conversations, work, play...

That's why it's my life verse--faith, hope and love run through all of life.  
1 Corinthians 13:13--Faith, hope & love are the circles, triangles, squares of life.

(SELAH)

Setup "*God of Hope*" by Charlie Hall from Porch & Alter  
(Explain lyric, "though you [God] slay me I will hope" from Job 13:15)