

I. Introduction

- A. The Bible compares our life with God to taking a walk. We walk with God. We walk with Jesus. Like any walk, you take one step at a time.
- B. You take your first step.
- C. And your next step.
- D. And your next step after that.
- E. One step at a time.
- F. Last week, almost 80 people in our church told us they were taking their first step with God. They turned to Jesus. They embraced Him as their Savior. They heard the gospel of salvation and sat down in the Jesus chair.
- G. Step one. We celebrate that. That ripples out in every family and every friendship circle all across the country. We're so happy for you.
- H. At the same time, we want you to know that step one is not the end. It's the beginning.
- I. There are more steps to come, and that's what I want to focus on today.

II. Here's our key Scripture:

- A. *15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: (Ephesians 1:15, 16, NKJV).*
 1. These verses record a prayer—like a transcript from an ancient mp3.
 2. One man is praying for a group of people.
 3. The man praying is named Paul. He was a missionary and a church planter. He helped these people take step one. He introduced them to Jesus.
 4. Then he helped them take the next steps too.
 5. Now, some years later, he is in prison for his faith. He thinks about his years in Ephesus. And Paul writes a letter. He reminds them of step one with Jesus—which we looked at last week in the previous paragraph.
 6. Now, he describes how he has been praying for the next steps in their lives. His prayer begins with this:
- B. *...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened... (Ephesians 1:17, 18, NKJV).*
 1. He's praying for something deep inside them—that's verses 17 and 18—a deep inside knowledge. That God would open their spiritual eyes through the Word of God, to see the spiritual realm.
 2. That's how he starts his prayer. He is basically praying for their next spiritual step after salvation.
 3. What is that step?
 4. It has three parts—three discoveries you need to make deep inside your soul.
 5. That's what I want to preach on today. Every child of God needs to make three post-salvation discoveries that will revolutionize your life. All these discoveries add up to one thing, that thing is called ASSURANCE, and we'll talk about it as we go.
 6. Here's the discoveries.

III. Assurance

- A. Discover your confidence.
 1. *v. 18: that you may know what is the hope of His calling...*
 2. What does this mean?
 3. Start with hope. In English, hope means maybe. I hope my children stay healthy. I hope the economy comes out of recession. I hope I ace my finals. I hope the Bears win the Super bowl—maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe not.
 4. That's in English. This, however, was not first written in English, but in Greek.
 5. The Greek word for hope does not mean maybe.
 6. It means the opposite. It means certainty. When you see the word hope in your Bible, don't think "maybe" think "for sure."
 7. Here's what hope means:
 - a) Hope is a settled confidence in a future good.
 8. What future good? Paul prays that you would know the hope of His calling, the settled confidence in His calling. What's that?
 9. That all the blessings of the salvation package will finally come true—you do have eternal life. You do have heaven. You do have a mansion there. You do have forgiveness of sins. You do have a spiritual birthday. You do have a new community. You do have a new name. You do have a new identity. The presence of God in your everyday life. His calling is certain and sure.
 10. Because God is not in the business of maybe.
 11. He's in the business of HOPE and hope means absolute certainty. He wants you to know the hope of your calling, the absolute certainty of your future good—that everything He promised will really come true.
 12. I'm preaching about three discoveries, but really one experience in three parts. The experience is called ASSURANCE, and confidence is how it begins.
 13. SALVATION comes first.
 14. ASSURANCE comes second.
 15. You cannot be a strong, useful, growing Christian if you always doubt your salvation.
 16. I know it can really sound arrogant, right? I know I'm going to heaven because I have Jesus.
 17. But listen to this verse:
 - a) *13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13, NAS95).*
 18. Is that maybe or is that certainty?

19. I do not remember when the first big step (salvation) in my life with God happened. I was too young. I grew up hearing about Jesus, and somewhere along the line, I embraced Him, put my faith in Him, and received salvation.
 20. The day of my salvation doesn't stand out for me. I don't remember it.
 21. But there's another day that does stand out for me.
 22. See, as a little kid growing up in the church, I had a big problem. I doubted my salvation. I worried if God loved me and accepted me and forgave me. Every time I sinned, I worried I lost my salvation, or I wasn't really saved to begin with.
 23. No stability. My whole spiritual life was a roller coaster because I never really settled step one.
 24. Until my junior year of high school—Lane Tech High school, a massive school about a mile from Wrigley Field. My gym teacher was absent, which meant we sat in the stands in the gym and used the time as a study hall.
 25. I was reading a book. I brought it with me today—the exact same book that I held in my hands 36 years ago. I found it this week, on my bookshelf. It's been sitting there forever.
 26. The last part of the book described the devil's tactic to manipulate Christ's followers through guilt. The author compared guilt to a handle attached to my back. He explained how Satan grabbed the handle, slammed me around and sent me crawling back to my half-hearted life.
 27. I sat, mesmerized, on hard wooden bleachers. My heart pounded and my palms grew sweaty.
 28. I was on the verge of something, but didn't know of what.
 29. Until the topic switched from my guilt to Christ's cross. I found the first explanation of the death of Jesus that ever made sense for me. I had heard the story a million times. But this was the first time it clicked.
 - a) The Cross of Christ became my solid rock. I took my stand, and have been standing there ever since.
 - b) Christ crucified and living again, is my creed.
 - c) At the Cross, Jesus crushed the head of evil, conquering Satan and his despicable minions.
 - d) At the Cross, Jesus absorbed the sin of the world: everybody's sins, including me.
 - e) At the Cross, Jesus took the hit I deserved. He endured not only my sin, but also the holy wrath of God against my sin, and drowned them both in the depths of His sacrifice.
 - f) At the Cross, Jesus battered down the gates of hell and unlocked the gates of heaven for all who will opt in to His amazing grace.
 - g) At the Cross, Jesus bequeathed His last will and testament—my inheritance, a portfolio of assets that provides absolutely perfect resources for every circumstance of this life, and for every promised pleasure of the next.
 - h) At the Cross, Jesus anchored my heart to God's.
 30. My book says this:
 - a) "God does not want you to dwell on our sins, but rather on your forgiveness. When you finally understand what Jesus Christ accomplished at the cross, you realize that God never stops forgiving you, even while you're in the process of sinning..." (Lindsey, p 197).
 - b) "Learning what Christ accomplished at the cross is the most important truth you will ever absorb in your lifetime. It should saturate your mind every day." (Lindsey, p 191).
 31. When I read all that about the Cross, I lived a cliché—I literally felt a burden roll off my teenage shoulders.
 32. The day of my salvation was years before that, I don't remember it.
 33. But that day reading this book in those bleachers in that gym, was the day of my ASSURANCE.
 34. And I have never doubted my eternal life since that day.
 35. Why? Because I'm a good person?
 36. No. Because Jesus is that good a Savior.
 37. I found my assurance in the promises of God, and you can find it too. It changes your life. It takes your biggest fear off the table. It settles your destiny.
 38. If you are saved, know it. Know you have eternal life. Know your sins are forgiven. Don't keep your fingers crossed, and hope so. Know so.
 39. Know it. Settle it. Don't doubt. Nail it down. Quit wavering.
 40. Be done with indecision, hesitation and vacillation. Get beyond cynicism, skepticism, and confusion. Take your stand with Jesus Christ. Quit doubting His cross, and quit diminishing His power.
 41. Saturate your soul in the Scriptures of the Cross.
 42. Point to Jesus with unshakeable confidence and tell the world, He is My Savior, and I need no other, and He will bring me safely home.
 43. Paul passionately prayed, "That you may know what is the hope of His calling."
 44. Discover your assurance.
- B. Discover your value.
1. *What are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (v. 18).*
 2. There are two ways to take this phrase, grammatically. One way means that He wants you to know your riches of your inheritance.
 3. And that's important. And you should know that.
 4. But the other way, the way that works better grammatically, is even better.
 5. Way better.
 6. He is pointing at every last person in that church and saying, do you know who you really are? Do you really get your exalted identity? YOU ARE GOD'S GREAT INHERITANCE. God chose you, God blessed you, and God adopted you. God brought you out of the mess you made by His great power.
 7. And when God obtained you, God didn't see you as damaged goods. He saw you as His own priceless treasure. You are His inheritance, His great reward. You are God's love gift to Jesus Christ.

8. What is the prayer?
 9. The prayer is that you it would finally get through your big fat skull just how incredibly valuable you are to God. Discover your value.
 10. This is the second part of your assurance. Confidence + Value = assurance.
 11. God doesn't care about gold or silver. God doesn't care about dollars and pesos and pounds.
 12. He cares about people.
 13. He cares about you.
 14. His whole redemptive plan has been about purchasing you from the devil's dark domain, and delivering you into the arms of Jesus for time and eternity.
 15. God loves you.
 16. God treasures you.
 17. God values you.
 18. You're precious to Him.
 19. He knows your darkest secrets, and even still, His heart goes out to you in immeasurable, boundless, infinite affection and love.
 20. He wants you to know that, to get that, to feel that deep inside your soul.
 21. Can we settle that?
 - a) Can we quit letting our dysfunctional families twist our perception of God all out of recognition?
 22. God is not the father who left you or abandoned you or called you names or neglected you or exploited you.
 23. Too many Christians constantly call His love into question. Don't do that. Don't shrink Him, distort Him, or reinvent Him. Let Him be who He is, who the Bible says He is. Open your spiritual eyes through Scripture to know this:
 - a) God is the father who valued you above everything but His own name, and sent His son to buy you back for him.
 24. And no matter what anybody says about you behind your back, there is one person in the universe who smiles EVERY time He thinks about you, and that is every second of every day.
 25. This is self esteem.
 26. This is self acceptance.
 27. This is self actualization.
 28. This is finding yourself.
 29. This is knowing who you are.
 30. This is the foundation of what every psychologist and counselor and pastor and parent wants you to really feel deep in your soul:
 31. That you would know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (v. 18).
 32. You are someone's treasure, and that someone made the universe.
 33. How do you feel about yourself right now? Do you hate yourself? Hurt yourself? Doubt yourself? How can you grow in the Lord if you always doubt your value to God? Your place in the family? Your seat at the banquet table of heaven?
 34. Get over those doubts. Get enough Scripture in you to make the case to your own soul that not only do you belong to God, but that God is very glad you do.
- C. Discover your power.
1. *And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come...*
 2. The third and final prayer is that God will reveal to every child of God the incomparably great power of God working in your life.
 3. Who has power over you?
 4. Where do you get your power for everyday life?
 5. For the people who first read these letters, power came from magic, from spells, from spirits, from incantations. They had to know the right words, the secret formulas, to manipulate the spirit realm.
 6. The power wasn't in them, it was out there. I've already mentioned how they were victims of forces beyond their control—the stars, the signs of the zodiac, idols, and gods. These people lived in an environment with many competing claims of spiritual power. The cult of Artemis, and over fifty other gods and goddesses ruled their lives. Magical curses were normal. They had every reason to fear the universe.
 7. So Paul bends over backwards, praying that they would embrace instruction he had given them a long time ago—about the extraordinary magnitude of God's power that is in them and available to them.
 8. Before the day of my assurance, do you know who had power over me? The devil—he accused me every time I sinned. I spent so much time living in guilt; I couldn't serve God and enjoy God much at all.
 9. The devil had me in a headlock, right where he wanted me.
 10. God declared himself my ALLY, but I declared God my ADVERSARY. That's not the way it's supposed to be. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is working inside you. The same power that set Jesus on the throne of heaven is inside you, the same power that embarrassed the devil and his demons, and set Jesus high above every last one of them.
 11. Do you get what that means?
 12. Your power is greater than any power that holds you down.
 13. Your power is greater than any power that defeats you.

14. Your power is greater.
15. You need to know your power. Or to use the Bible's words here, you need to know your incredibly great power—that you have because you belong to Jesus.
16. You are not a victim.
17. You are not anybody's pawn.
18. You are not an objectified plaything.
19. You are a living, breathing, mobile power station for the omnipotence of God, delivering God's power to a lost and needy world.
20. The devil can only stop you if you let him.
21. Evil can only stop you if you let it.
22. Our problem is never a lack of power; it's a lack of faith in God's way of working through us.
23. What does that power look like? Does it look like fireworks? Maybe, but rarely. Does it look like healings? Maybe, but rarely. Does it look like the great and mighty Oz? Maybe, but rarely.
24. The reason we miss God's power is because we're looking for the wrong thing.
 - a) We look for fireworks, He shows up in a still small voice.
 - b) We look for political upheaval, He shows up on an old rugged cross.
 - c) We look for impressive feats of strength, He shows up in humble acts of kindness.
25. We look for our desired outcomes—He shows up in outcomes that look like death, but only set up a coming resurrection.

IV. Conclusion

- A. I have been on my journey with God for many years. I have served in the church since I was 13, and first became an Awana leader. I became a full time pastor at age 20.
- B. I have seen tens of thousands of men and women and children deal with God in myriads and myriads of ways.
- C. But these two steps remain the same for all of them.
 1. Salvation first.
 2. Assurance second.
- D. Salvation makes you a Christian.
- E. Assurance makes you a secure Christian, a useful Christian, a holy Christian.
 1. Assurance = Confidence + Value + Power
- F. What is assurance? (from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)
 1. Assurance is the soul's apprehension of its complete emancipation from the power of evil and from consequent judgment, through the atoning grace of Christ. It is the exact opposite of self-confidence, being a joyous appropriation and experience of the fullness of Christ—a glad sense of security, freedom and eternal life in Him. This doctrine is of immeasurable importance to the life of the church and of the individual believer, as a life of spiritual doubt and uncertainty contradicts the ideal of liberty in Christ Jesus.
- G. How do you get it? Where does it come from?
- H. It comes from God's Word. That's the only way. You need to know your Bible well enough so that every time the devil whispers a lie, the Holy Spirit reminds you of a thousand verses to drown him out.
- I. I have two goals for this sermon today: 1) to give you permission to be CERTAIN of your salvation, 2) to give you motivation to go after God through his Word.
- J. So, let's pray for those two goals right now.