



CHRISTMAS

AT NEW HOPE WINDWARD

**STAND ALONE MESSAGE:
"Two Ways to Discover What God is Up to in Your Life"
Pastor TJ (12/26/21)**

ICEBREAKER |

What is something you got that didn't meet your expectations? It could be a new car that ended up being a lemon, a fancy dinner that was just so-so, or a gift you thought would make you happy but didn't quite do that.

INTRODUCTION |

Sometimes our expectations keep us from truly seeing what God is up to in our lives. We want one thing, but God knows we need another. We pray for our situation, but don't like the answer. We expect a big "Aha!" moment, but end up with a small beginning. It's often in the little things in life that we find God's will. In this lesson, we will dig deeper into the two ways to discover what God is up to in our lives.

READ I

When expectations meet reality, we can often be let down. What we think we really want, more than anything else in life, becomes a big disappointment once we get it. And then there are the things we think are going to be too difficult, too messy, or just too small to make a difference in our lives. But then we discover that God was working the whole time to do something great.

The first way to discover what God is up to in our lives is: **Start judging situations by where they end rather than where they begin.** That means we hold off on what we truly think about a situation until we get a bit more information. God is all about small beginnings, after all. Just take a look:

*Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin...
Zechariah 4:10 (NLT)*

Many large businesses started with a small idea. A lot of big families began with just two people meeting. Great moves of God can be sparked by two or three people getting together for prayer. Don't judge your situation based solely on the beginning. Wait and see how God is going to show up.

What is something that started small in your life, but ended up with big results from God? (Example, a job that was supposed to be temporary but ended up as your dream job, a relationship with a friend that blossomed into a romance)

READ I

When you read the Christmas story, there are so many angles that you can see. In fact, reading it each year you might just find something new. One of the things that has always been surprising is how the little town of Bethlehem plays a big role. In fact, it was prophesied hundreds of years before.

The LORD says, "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel." Micah 5:2 (GNT)

When we sing, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," it's not just a nice song for kids to sing at Christmas. It's a way to remind us that our small beginnings can have a huge impact. In our own lives and the lives of others, we can discover God moving if we look at the big picture behind the small beginnings.

Do you ever feel small and insignificant, like the little town of Bethlehem? What does it mean to you that God uses the small things to make a huge impact?

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Another way we can discover what God is up to is: **Start asking God what He is up to before you tell Him what you wish He was doing.**

It's so easy for us to give our plans to God and ask Him to bless them. Instead, it's much wiser to put our own plans on the back burner and seek His will above our own.

When Jesus taught us to pray, He gave us more than just a form to follow. He showed us how to prepare our hearts for prayer. Take a look:

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 'Give us this day our daily bread. 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Matthew 6:9–12 (NASB95)

Notice that He tells us to rely on God's will – "Your will be done." And it covers both heaven and earth. In other words, in every area of your life. God has a will for you in your faith. But also in your job, your relationship, your health routine, what you read, watch, and purchase. In everything you do, God has a will that you can follow. And it begins by simply asking Him to have His way.

What is your biggest hurdle in finding God's will in your life? What are some ways that you have successfully overcome that hurdle?

READ |

It can be difficult to find God's will for our lives, even when we pray. Maybe we don't hear clearly or don't hear right away. We can become discouraged if, after praying, we still aren't sure what to do. Read the following verse about prayer:

"As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks."

Luke 11:13 (CEV)

Jesus taught us what a good Father God is. Whenever we ask, He will gladly give. And He gives through the Holy Spirit, the presence of God in each believer's life. Whenever the road ahead is not clear or the path seems dangerous. Whenever we doubt our own ability to see and hear. Whenever we remember a shortcoming on our own part or regret a bad decision. No matter what, your God is a good, good Father. And He will give you exactly what you need.

Share with the group a time when you kept on praying and got the answer you needed. Looking back, you might have doubted or been discouraged. Did that change once you received an answer?

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

As we walk into a new year, how are you preparing for it? You might be thinking about a New Year's resolution this week. You might even be planning to make some big changes. Don't forget to discover what God is up to in your life. Here's how:

- Start judging situations by where they end rather than where they begin.
- Start asking God what He is up to before you tell Him what you wish He was doing.

ADDITIONAL ACTION STEPS (Optional):

- Do at least one (1) SOAP Devotions this week
- Share with your group one of your SOAP Devotions from this past week
- Invite a friend to your small group

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, will You show us what we need to do and know to make this next year the best one yet? Give us courage to face every challenge head on. Give us peace to know that You are with us with each step we take. Give us compassion to look out for those around us. Give us joy in every situation. And give us grace whenever we might mess up. In Jesus' name we humbly pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1: “I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

Day 2: “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

Luke 16:10 (NIV)

Day 3: We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves Him. They are the ones God has chosen for His purpose.

Romans 8:28 (CEV)

Day 4: “And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Luke 11:9-10 (NLT)

Day 5: We ask God to give you complete knowledge of His will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Colossians 1:9 (NLT)