

MESSAGE FROM PASTOR DAN

February 1, 2024

Dear Church Friends,

A New Year is upon us!! We have much to celebrate and look forward to. I pray that your Advent/Christmas celebrations went well, and now that a New Year faces us, I pray it will be filled with growing in Christ. I love this verse in Isaiah 43:18-19 where the prophet writes; *"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."* Actually, the WHOLE chapter is one of amazement and wonder at God and His leading! Of course it would be easy to take these verses and assume that we are never to look back to the past. That of course is not what is being said. Instead Isaiah is telling us that we shouldn't look back in order to 'live' in or get 'stuck' in the past, always wishing for the 'good ole days...' To do this would take our focus from the present opportunities to which God has called us to be 'salt and light' for Him. To have a mind-set centered in this way, is to have the understanding that God is doing a 'new' thing... Of course in the context of the chapter this 'new thing' is ultimately fulfilled in the work of Jesus as He came and made the way back to God through the desert of our sin by His completed work on the cross.

So how are we here at OEPC looking to follow God's 'new thing?' One of our focuses for this year is in the area of discipleship... How do we pursue discipleship? Discipleship, of course, is not something that 'just happens.' It must be intentional. You and I as followers of Jesus must make the choice everyday to follow Christ, to grow in our love and understanding of who He is and His will for our lives... So how will you be intentional in cultivating a deepening of your spiritual life? Maybe you will make an effort to be consistent in your daily walk with the LORD? Maybe you'll commit to regular attendance to Sunday School and worship? Maybe you'll seek to join a small group (or start one) in order to deepen your walk and grow in fellowship with other believers? May I challenge you to pray about what will happen in your life?

Now all of that is well and good on a personal level, but what about the wider body of OEPC? How are we going to move together toward this goal? Here are a number of things that we hope will help:

- ⇒ In the coming months a booklet will appear in the pew, designed for new believers. Its purpose will help them 'walk through' the new commitment that they've made to Christ and offer 'next steps' in further growth.
- ⇒ In our membership class there will be a dedicated portion that gives a clear understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ.
- ⇒ Our plan is to compile a 'class' or 'small group' that will be offered on a regular and routine basis that will take the new believer, or those who are curious about Christianity, and walk them through some of the basic foundational teachings of the faith.
- ⇒ We are intentionally making the move to focus on families and marriages here at OEPC. As part of launching this goal, the Sunday following Easter there will be a class that will meet during the Sunday School hour using the book "Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family" by Paul David Tripp. This course will be team lead.

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These are just some of the goals that will help us grow in the area of discipleship... Of course we are thankful for the growth and connections that have been made in the areas of children (Kid's Connect), Youth (Youth Connect), Senior Fellowship, along with the women's and men's ministries.

Of course we are praying and considering God's call as we move forward regarding the results from the Feasibility Study. The ART (Architectural Review Team) has been faithfully working on a path forward. Please pray for God's clear direction and guidance as we look to make improvements to this amazing facility to which God has so richly blessed us.

May God keep our eyes always focused on His will and purpose for OEPC as the door of opportunity for 2024 is open wide.

Blessings, and I'll see you in church on Sunday!

Pastor Dan Phelps

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