



# SERMON SERIES STUDY GUIDE

QUARTER 4, 2025

FOLLOWING THE PATH THAT LEADS TO LIFE

# **THE WAY**

## **Sermon Series Study Guide**

### Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Week 1: Jesus is the Way - Adam Southwood	2
Week 2: Jesus is the Way - Truth - Sally Agostino	5
Week 3: Jesus is the Way - Life - Lance Blythe	8
Week 4: The Way of Jesus - Love - Tim Spencer	11
Week 5: The Way in the Midst of Evil - Lance Blythe	14
Week 6: The Way in Times of Hardship - Adam Southwood	17
Week 7: The Way in Celebration - Sally Agostino	21
Week 8: The Way of the Humble - Lance Blythe	24
Week 9: The Way of Rest and Reflection - Adam Southwood	27
Week 10: The Way Up - Abide - Sally Agostino	31
Week 11: The Way In - Belong - Phil Gaudion	34
Week 12: The Way Out - Serve - Beth Jackson	38



# Introduction

## **THE WAY Sermon Series: November 2025 to January 2026**

The Way is about more than a set of beliefs, it's an invitation to live with Jesus, walk in His truth, and follow His pattern of life.

Across three months, we'll discover what it means to centre our lives in Him. In November, we begin with *The Way of Jesus* as He reveals Himself as our guide, truth, and life. In December, the Christmas story brings *The Way into our world*, showing how God meets us in both hardship and hope, and how His kingdom turns things upside down. Then, as a new year begins, January invites us to practise *The Way through rhythms of prayer, community, and mission*.

In this series we'll learn how to live in the presence, love, and power of Jesus — today and into the year ahead.

### **The Way Sermons**

Watch or listen to the sermons for this study guide at:

<https://nhbc.churchcenter.com/channels/16420/series/75243>



# Week 1: Jesus is the Way — The path to the Father and the model for our lives

## Adam Southwood

9 November 2025

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

The early church called themselves “followers of the Way.” It wasn’t about ascribing to a certain set of beliefs or religious affiliation—it was about living a new kind of life shaped by the presence, love and power of Jesus Christ. And that invitation continues for every one of us today.

In this new series, we’ll explore what it truly means to follow the way of Jesus as we live with Him, walk in His truth and follow His pattern of life.

### Read John 14:1-6 & Psalm 86:11

Jesus is in the upper room celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples. He’s washed their feet, spoken of betrayal, and talked about leaving. The disciples feel unsettled. Yet into their confusion, Jesus speaks comfort and clarity: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled... I am the way.”*

This group of young Jewish men had grown up memorising Scripture like Psalm 86:11 and navigating life through the lens of the law. For them, *the way* was the path of righteousness: a life shaped by obedience to God, faithfulness to the covenant, and commitment to the law. That was their frame for understanding what it meant to live close to God, and how to remain in right relationship with Him.

But Jesus is inviting them into something deeper and far more personal. Not a law. Not a ritual. Not a system. A relationship. The way to the Father isn’t a rulebook—it is a person—Jesus Himself.

1. Why do you think Jesus’ words “I am the way” would have been so confronting for the disciples? What do these words stir in you?
2. Jesus invites us into a relationship, not just rituals or checklists. Are there any discipleship habits or routines that have become more about “ticking the box” than about *walking with* Jesus and connecting with Him?



## Read Matthew 7:13-14

In ancient Jewish cities, the large main gates were bustling places full of traders, locals, travellers, noise, crowds, and activity. They were obvious, convenient and always open.

The narrow gates, on the other hand, were small side entrances—used for servants, late-night arrivals, or quiet access to private courtyards and homes. They weren't obvious. You had to *know* they existed, and choose them deliberately.

Jesus' audience would have immediately pictured both types of gates. They would have remembered the busy, noisy marketplace entrances—and the quiet, tucked-away courtyard doors you used only when invited. And Jesus uses these images to make a clear point: there is only one way that leads to life and it's narrow.

Wide gates are easy. Easy to enter. Easy to follow. But they lead us away from God and the full life He desires.

The narrow way may require more effort. It may involve intention, discipline and surrender. But it leads to life—deep, abundant, lasting life.

Each day, we are invited to surrender our plans and preferences, trusting that Jesus' way is better, even when it's costly or countercultural. It often means letting go of control, comfort and our own definitions of success, but it is also the place where we discover the joy and freedom of walking closely with God.

1. What “wide roads” do you see most clearly in our culture? And what does the narrow way look like in ordinary, everyday life?
2. Is there an area of life where you've drifted onto the wide road without realising it?

## Read Psalm 32:8-9

Following Jesus is less like having a detailed Melways and more like trusting a GPS to guide us step by step. We often want to see the whole journey laid out before us so we can plan, interpret and execute every turn, but God rarely gives us the full picture. Instead, He invites us to trust Him with each next step, believing that He knows the way even when we don't.

When we're walking the narrow way, we don't need full clarity. We need simply to trust that the one who sees it all is faithful to lead us exactly where we need to go.



1. Where in your life do you feel uncertain about the next step? How can you practice trusting God's guidance today, even if you can't see the whole path?
2. Can you recall a time when you felt God gently "rerouting" you? What did you learn from that experience?

## Closing Activity (Optional)

Choosing to follow the way of Jesus isn't a one-time decision, but a decision made over and over again—every morning, every moment, every crossroads.

Each day we choose: Will I take the wide road today—comfortable, crowded, convenient? Or will I take the narrow way—intentional, surrendered and shaped by Jesus?

Drifting toward the wide road often happens quietly: through complacency, distraction or pride. Yet Jesus never stops inviting us back. His call is steady: "Walk with me. Follow my way. Choose life."

Take a moment to pause and reflect honestly with the Lord:

- Am I walking in your way, Jesus?
- Have I drifted into comfort or distraction?
- What is the next faithful step you are inviting me to take?

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Lord, lead us. Guide us. Show us the way. Give us the courage to choose it. And make us a light for others as we walk it. Amen.



## Week 2: Jesus is the Way — Truth

### Sally Agostino

16 November 2025

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

Most of us would profess a love of truth. We want to know what is right and real. We want honesty, clarity and transparency—until it confronts us and challenges our comfortable versions of reality.

This week, we explore what happens when we “bump into” the truth of Jesus and face a choice: to walk away unchanged, or to let His truth unsettle assumptions, name what's hidden, and set us free.

### Read John 14:6 & Jeremiah 17:9

The Greek word for truth is *alētheia* meaning “unconcealed”. Jesus is the embodiment of this kind of truth—the pure, unveiled reality of God's heart. We, on the other hand, have “salesman's hearts” which are experts at selling us ideas that prioritise and protect our own comfort and self-image.

Scripture warns that “the heart is deceitful above all things,” and history shows how even sincere believers have rationalised injustice and twisted God's truth to fit their preferences.<sup>1</sup> We can't assume we're immune. In fact, we almost certainly have cultural assumptions and moral leanings that future generations will shake their heads at. It is easy to believe we are right when we are blind to our own biases.

Jesus desires to expose our blind spots and lovingly realign us to His truth. This is what true discipleship looks like. It's not about defending our own version of truth, but surrendering to Jesus—the way, the truth and the life—and letting Him reshape us from the inside out.

1. Where do you notice your “salesman's heart” trying to justify something in your life?
2. Why is it so difficult to see our own blind spots and how can we invite Jesus to help us stay open to His truth rather than resisting it?

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<sup>1</sup> Further reading on the topic of justifying our beliefs:  
[zondervanacademic.com/blog/the-curse-of-ham-and-biblical-justifications-for-slavery](https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/the-curse-of-ham-and-biblical-justifications-for-slavery)



## Read Matthew 16:13-23

Peter was passionate, fiery and politically charged. As a Zealot, he longed for revolution and desperately wanted freedom from Rome. He believed the Messiah would bring this freedom through power and force, and he believed Jesus was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

So, when Jesus explained what the Messiah would actually do—suffer, die and rise again—Peter’s response was shock and denial. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you.” Peter was bumping into truth and it was uncomfortable. It didn’t fit his expectations or align with his assumptions.

The truth of Jesus will love us *and* undo us. It challenges our blind spots and calls us to a kingdom that is upside down from the world’s ways. Peter wrestled with this truth, and over time, it reshaped him deeply. We too are invited to let Jesus confront us, and allow His truth—not our version of it—to set us free.

1. Where have you tried to fit Jesus into your own preferences or agenda? Ask God to show you one way you can let the truth of Jesus challenge and reshape your perspective this week.

## Read John 8:1-11

Jesus is teaching in the temple courtyard when a group of religious leaders drag in a woman caught in adultery. They shame her publicly, using the law of Moses as ammunition. But Jesus refuses to become a pawn in their trap. When He finally speaks, His words slice through the scene with surgical precision: “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.”

For the Pharisees, this moment is a collision with truth. They believed they were protecting holiness, but Jesus exposed their motives and their misuse of Scripture as a weapon. Knowing Scripture is vital, but it must be paired with the Spirit’s guidance and a posture of love. Truth and love cannot be separated in Jesus. He holds them together perfectly as He invites the woman into restoration and hope: “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Truth is not a tool for exclusion or judgment. Instead, we are invited to let truth draw us and others into deeper relationship with our Saviour.

1. Is there someone in your life you are tempted to judge or exclude in the name of “truth”? How can you approach them with both honesty and compassion, following Jesus’ example?



## Read Matthew 19:16-22

Our final story is about the rich young ruler—moral, successful, and spiritually earnest. He approaches Jesus wanting assurance of eternal life. He has followed the commandments, done the right things, lived respectably. But Jesus sees the deeper issue.

Like a divine pharmacist mixing a personalised prescription, He identifies this young man's blockage—his attachment to wealth—and delivers a tailored treatment: "Sell your possessions, give to the poor, and come follow me."

It's not a universal instruction for all people, but a specific treatment for a specific heart condition. The man walks away sad, unable to release his grip on the comfort and security of wealth.

We all have different blockages. Whether it's comfort, ideology, career, reputation, or something else that takes God's place in our lives. Following Jesus will require us to lay down our crowns and count the cost. But Jesus doesn't confront us to deprive us. He confronts to transform and free us so we can have life to the full.

1. What might Jesus identify as your "blockage"? Is there a comfort, ideology or habit that you hold too tightly?
2. Why do you think surrender can feel scary, even when we trust God?
3. What is one step you could take this week to loosen your grip on something that's holding you back spiritually?

## Optional Closing Reflection

Take time to consider this question and discuss together:

**Which of the three biblical stories challenged you the most? Why?**

You may also like to join Sally in reading the Gospels over the next few weeks (Mark is a great starting point). As you read, look at how Jesus confronted blind spots, disrupted comfort zones and restored freedom. Don't just study Jesus. Bump into Him. Let His truth shape you. Then bring your reflections to share with the group the next time you meet.

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Jesus, show us the truth about You and about ourselves. Give us courage to listen, humility to receive, and faith to follow wherever You lead. Amen.



## Week 3: Jesus is the Way — Life

### Lance Blythe

23 November 2025

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

There is more to living than being alive. This statement is simple but true. We know there is more to living than a beating heart and breathing lungs, but what does “more” actually look like?

This week we explore Jesus' invitation to have “life to the full” and consider what it means to move from thief thinking to an attitude of abundance, where God's grace and generosity are the foundation, and our humble obedience is the call.

### Read John 10:7-11

Jesus sets Himself in contrast with “the thief”—the one who steals, kills and destroys. He is speaking not just about evil forces, but directly to the religious leaders who were trapping people in moral scorekeeping and comparison. They believed this was the way to be blessed. But Jesus says they aren't leading people toward abundance. They're stealing it.

“Thief thinking” is a worldview built on the assumption of lack. It tells us there's not enough of God's goodness to go around. It pushes us to judge, strive, perform, or compare. Thief thinking says:

- *I need to climb over others to secure my place.*
- *I need to judge or diminish you so I can feel okay about myself.*
- *I must earn what God gives.*
- *I get what I deserve — nothing more, nothing less.*

Too often, we absorb thief thinking long before we realise it—from our workplaces, families, culture, or even church habits. It might look tidy. It might sound sensible. It can even appear righteous. But Jesus calls it what it is: a thief of joy, grace and freedom. And He offers an entirely different way to abundance.

1. Having “life to the full” is not about possessions, achievements or even moral rule-keeping. Why do you think it's so easy to fall into the trap of measuring life by these things?



2. Thief thinking is a mindset of scarcity and comparison that can be subtle and at times deeply rooted. Can you think of some examples of thief thinking in your life? How does this mindset affect our relationships with God and with others?

## Read Matthew 20:1-16

In God's kingdom, there is no scarcity of love, no hierarchy of value, no competition for blessing. Instead, there is large-hearted generosity, where the goodness of God flows freely and equally to all.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard helps us identify and dismantle thief thinking. The workers who laboured all day believed they deserved more because they had done more. But the landowner insists on generosity—that everyone receives beyond what they earned. This is a picture of God's kingdom: grace spilling over, not merit stacked up. A kingdom where the first are last, the last are first, and every person stands before God as an equal co-heir of grace.

But while this sounds beautiful, it is deeply countercultural. Most of us have grown up in systems—families, workplaces, societies—shaped by comparison, competition, and scarcity. We have breathed in thief thinking our whole lives. And shifting out of it doesn't happen by willpower. It takes the help of a Saviour.

1. The parable shows us that God's generosity is not based on effort or seniority. Does this idea feel unfair to you? Why or why not? How might it change the way you view others in the church or community?
2. Have you ever experienced comparison robbing you of joy? Where might Jesus be asking you to celebrate others' blessing rather than measure yours against theirs?

## Read John 9

In this miracle, which immediately precedes Jesus' teaching, the man born blind becomes a living example of how God invites people from a place of lack to abundance.

The disciples ask a question that many still wrestle with today: "Who sinned—this man or his parents—that he was born blind?" They're trying to make sense of suffering, and their framework assumes suffering must be a punishment for sin. It's thief thinking disguised as theology. Jesus rejects it instantly and offers the man healing that will reveal God's work.



The pool of Siloam symbolises *living water*. Not delivered by human hands or efforts, but by the gracious provision of God. It is here that the blind man has his eyes opened for the first time. Abundance begins with God's work, not ours.

But, the man only received his sight because he obeyed. He walked the path. He washed the mud. He trusted the instruction. Grace is God's gift, but the opening of our eyes often comes as we take humble, surrendered steps. These two truths create a beautiful complementing contradiction: *It's never all up to me. But I'm still invited to participate.*

1. What stood out to you about Jesus' interaction with the blind man?
2. Which of these two truths do you find easier to lean toward — "It's all God" or "It's all up to me"? How does holding both together help us grow in healthy discipleship?
3. How have you experienced moments where obedience led to greater clarity or spiritual insight? And where do you sense Jesus inviting you into a step of humility or obedience at the moment?

## Optional Closing Exercise

Moving from blindness to seeing is what it looks like to move from thief thinking to abundance. Jesus tells the religious leaders that although they claim to see, they are actually blind. Meanwhile, the man who knew he was blind becomes the one who truly sees.

You may like to close the study with the listening exercise from Lance's sermon. Invite the group to sit quietly for a few moments and imagine Jesus standing before each of you, smiling with compassion. He mixes mud in His hands and gently places it on your face. Then, with complete tenderness, He wipes it away with a towel.

As you picture this, ask Him: **'Jesus, what do You want me to see?'** Wait, listen, and pay attention to whatever He brings to mind. Encourage people to journal or share what they sensed.

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Gracious God, Thank you for the way you open our eyes and invite us into a life of abundance. Where we have been caught in comparison, fear or striving, would you gently lead us into freedom. Teach us to recognise your voice, to trust your goodness, and to walk in humble obedience each day. Lord Jesus, help us to see as you see, love as you love, and follow wherever you lead. Fill us with your Spirit as we go, and let your grace shape everything we do. Amen.



## Week 4: The Way of Jesus — Love

### Tim Spencer

30 November 2025

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

Love is the most important thing. It is a non-negotiable of the Christian life—active, costly and open to all. Jesus shows us what it looks like: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.” 1 John 3:16

This week we reflect on the heartbeat of God's love, and the invitation to receive this love afresh—letting it fill and overflow from our lives, so that the world might see Christ through us.

#### Read 1 John 4:7-21

Love always begins with God. Before anyone had done anything to deserve it, before humanity even asked for it, God loved.

His love does not increase when we behave well or decrease when we fail. It precedes our efforts and doesn't depend on merit. It motivates our obedience and is the source of our love for others.

God is love. Down to His very nature, His very character, His very essence. God is pure love. Everything else flows from that.

1. The reading from 1 John 4 is full of beautiful, profound truths about what love is. Did anything stand out to you as something the Holy Spirit might be wanting to highlight?
2. Are you ever tempted to think of God as angry and removed, looking down with disappointment on our brokenness? How does knowing God loved you before you ever loved Him, impact your thinking?

#### Read Genesis 15:1-21

This passage from Genesis 15 is strange to modern ears, yet it reveals something breathtaking about God's character and faithfulness.



A covenant promise has been made between God and Abraham, and here we see the picture of an ancient ceremony formalising the agreement. Animals are cut in half and the pieces are arranged opposite each other, creating an aisle for two parties to walk through. It symbolised a solemn commitment to the agreement and the consequences of breaking it: *“If either of us breaks this covenant, may we become like these slaughtered animals.”*

In situations where there was a greater and lesser party—such as two kingdoms of unequal power—the lesser party would walk the pieces alone, accepting the weight of the consequences if the covenant failed. But in Genesis 15, something remarkable happens. God causes Abraham to fall into a deep sleep, and then He alone—symbolised by the smoking pot and flaming torch—moves through the pieces. God takes the responsibility onto Himself, effectively saying, *“If either of us breaks this covenant, may all the consequences be on me.”*

Of course, humanity didn’t uphold their end of the covenant. Abraham didn’t, Israel didn’t, and none of us have. Yet, even knowing this, God chose to bear the cost.

1. How does God’s willingness to “walk the pieces” alone and take responsibility for both sides of the covenant, show you more about His character and commitment to us?
2. How does this ancient covenant picture help shape the way you understand Jesus’ sacrifice?

## Read 1 John 3:16 & John 3:16-17 & Romans 5:6-8

Just as God walked the pieces alone for Abraham, Jesus walked the path of sacrifice for us and laid down His life. This is how we know what love is. And this is how the world will know that we are His followers. Not by our perfect theology, worship style, or church attendance—by the way we love.

Our culture often flattens love into mere acceptance or tolerance. But love is not passive, it is active, costly and open to everyone. To love like Jesus loves means moving toward the broken, not away from them. It draws near to the hurting, shows up when it’s hard, and refuses to leave people as it found them.

But the work of loving others begins with being loved and filled by Christ—*“We love because He first loved us.”* It is not a task of willpower but of seeking, receiving and overflowing. God’s love is a well that doesn’t run dry. His invitation is always open: *come and receive My love again.*



1. What makes God's love distinctive from the way love is often expressed in the world around us?
2. How would you describe the difference between *trying* to love others and loving out of the *overflow* of love that God has given you?
3. If someone were to watch your life this week, would they see Jesus "poking out" everywhere? Is there anything you want to change so that Jesus' love is more visible through you?

## Optional Closing Reflection

If possible, allow time for prayer in smaller groups or pairs. Encourage people to share where they feel dry, overwhelmed, or longing for more of God's love. Invite the group to pray that each person would be "rooted and established in love" and filled with the fullness of God.

## Suggested Closing Prayer

You may close with Paul's prayer from Ephesians 3:16–21.

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."



## Week 5: The Way in the Midst of Evil

### Lance Blythe

7 December 2025

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

At the end of another busy year, we're often eager to retreat into the warmth, wonder and nostalgia of the Christmas season. But the Gospel of Matthew reminds us that the full story of Christmas is much more than just a cosy stable scene. It's disruptive, confronting and deeply honest about the reality of evil in the world and in the human heart.

Into the middle of this reality, Christ enters and invites us to choose a different way. This week we reflect on what it means to live as people of wisdom and courage in the midst of a broken world.

### Read Matthew 2:1-18

Matthew's telling of the Christmas story doesn't shy away from the presence of evil in the world. It's the M15+ version, confronting us with violence, murder and deceit. And Herod is the main villain.

Known throughout history as a ruthless ruler consumed by scandal, paranoia and violence, Herod represents undeniable evil, but he also reveals something about evil's subtlety.

*"Let me know where he is so I can go and worship him too"* (verse 8). It's a harmless request. Reasonable. Non-threatening. Even friendly. And no one seems to see the evil intent lurking behind it.

Like malware slipping quietly onto a device, evil works beneath the surface long before anyone notices, and this same dynamic plays out today. We are very good at recognising evil at its endpoint—murder, corruption, abuse, and injustice. Yet, too often we fail to recognise its starting point. Evil rarely begins with horrific actions. It begins with attitudes, justifications, excuses and small internal compromises that are much closer than we like to admit.

1. Where do you see subtle forms of evil at work in your own life—perhaps through attitudes, habits, or reactions you usually justify?



2. Community is a safeguard against deception and blind spots. Who in your life helps keep you accountable, grounded, and spiritually alert?

## Read 1 Peter 5:8

This imagery is vivid—a prowling lion, moving quietly, strategically. And Peter doesn't say, "Stay alert because you're good at spotting evil." Rather, he urges believers to be humble and awake to the fact that evil can outsmart us. It can justify itself. It can appear wise. It can disguise itself as a good idea or a necessary choice. This is why alertness and sober-mindedness matter so much. Without them, we are at risk of drifting into complacency and being devoured—like the religious leaders in Matthew's Christmas story.

In his fury, Herod orders the baby boys of Bethlehem to be killed, and the religious leaders stay silent. There is no protest. No argument. No action taken against this evil. Perhaps this is because standing up to Herod would put too much at risk—their religious freedom, their physical protection, their temple. And so, they look past the wrong, choosing instead to justify their inaction for the "greater good".

This is a human trait. It is in us too. Evil thrives when we allow it—when we look past practices and behaviours that take advantage of the weak, and turn a blind eye to the evil that's in our midst, and in our own hearts. But Jesus invites us to choose another path.

1. Challenging the evil of Herod's rule meant risking the benefits he provided (temple rebuilding, religious freedom and protection). When have you seen this happening in our world today, where "benefits" blind people to injustice?
2. Where do you sense God inviting you to live differently—to step away from patterns that mirror the world and step toward the way of Jesus?

## Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

In the Christmas story, the odds are stacked in favour of evil. A ruthless king with military power stands against a teenage couple and a baby. The situation looks hopeless. But God intervenes.

He speaks through dreams to the magi and to Joseph. He redirects their paths and disrupts Herod's schemes. He provides a way out.

God may not remove the evil we face, but He is faithful to show us another path. It may come as a quiet thought, a moment of clarity, a prompting, a word from



Scripture, a lyric in worship, an unexpected insight or a conversation with another believer. The challenge is this: will we take the way out?

When the magi received the warning from God, they followed it. They didn't try to outsmart Herod with lies or manipulation. They didn't play the game of evil, even with good intentions. Instead, they took another path home.

The way to defeat evil is not to outplay it but to refuse to participate in its systems. Like the magi, we are invited to “take the other path home”—to choose ways of living that are radically different from the schemes of evil and deeply reflective of the heart of Christ. Sometimes this means putting distance between ourselves and something harmful. Sometimes it means confronting evil with courage but doing so with a completely different posture from the injustice we resist.

With wisdom, courage and faith, we live opposed to the schemes of evil in this world. This is the way of Jesus. And this is the path the Christmas story invites us to take.

1. Can you recall a time when you sensed God offering you a “way out” of a temptation or difficult situation? Did you take it? Why or why not?
2. What might it look like to “take another path home” in a situation you're currently facing? Does it involve distance, courage, forgiveness, or a different posture?
3. Think about the “still small voice” or the prompting that warns or redirects you. How do you discern whether a prompting is from God, instinct, or fear? What safeguards help clarify that prompting?

### Questions for further reflection & study (optional)

1. How does Luke's nativity (Luke 1-2) contrast to Matthew's version (Matthew 2)? How does each telling reveal different aspects of God's character and redemptive plan?
2. Where in the New Testament do we see Jesus modelling “taking another path” instead of following the ways of the world? (As a starting point, consider Matthew 5-7.)

### Suggested Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, give us eyes to see the early signs of evil and injustice; ears to hear your gentle warnings and prompts; and courage to choose your path. Help us care for the vulnerable, support one another in truth, and follow the way you show us. Amen.



## Week 6: The Way in Times of Hardship

### Adam Southwood

14 December 2025

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

Most people know what it's like to receive *that* call—the message that suddenly changes everything. Sometimes it brings joy. Other times it brings heartbreak. Either way, those moments have a way of flipping our worlds upside down.

The Christmas story begins with exactly that kind of disruption. But in the midst of unexpected calls and interrupted plans, comes the promise of hope and an invitation to surrender, obedience and trust. This week we reflect on the story of Mary and Joseph, and consider what faith looks like when life doesn't unfold as expected.

Read Luke 1:26-38

**Faithful *surrender* sounds like: “Lord, I’m yours.”**

You know the moment when life rings and everything changes. Mary knew it too. Told that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of God, this angelic announcement arrived while she was betrothed—a status that carried serious social and legal implications. Her pregnancy could mean shame, exclusion, and even danger. Yet she received God's word with a simple, brave yes. *“I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.”*

Mary doesn't know how the story will unfold. She simply trusts the One who is calling her. Her response offers a powerful picture of faith—not as blind optimism, but as surrendered trust in the character of God.

1. Can you recall a moment when your plans were unexpectedly disrupted? How did you respond?
2. What emotions do you imagine Mary felt when she received this news? How is her response different from simply ignoring fear or pretending everything is fine?



## Read Matthew 1:18-25

### **Faithful *obedience* takes a step, even when the path is hard.**

When Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant, he assumes she has been unfaithful. As a lawful man, he knows he cannot proceed with the marriage under those circumstances, but his decision to quietly break the betrothal reflects a desire to protect Mary from unnecessary harm. Faced with betrayal, Joseph chooses compassion. Before he has clarity, Joseph acts with integrity. And when God speaks through the angel, Joseph responds with obedience.

It wasn't easy or convenient. Obedience will cost Joseph his reputation, comfort and the life he assumed he would have, but *“Joseph did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.”* No argument. No conditions. Just obedience.

1. What stands out to you about Joseph's response to his situation?
2. Can you think of a time when obedience to God felt costly or uncomfortable? What helps you take a step of obedience when the outcome is uncertain?

## Read Luke 2:1-7

### **Faithful endurance means *trusting God's got you.***

If two divine interruptions weren't enough, Mary and Joseph soon face a third, and this one comes without angels or heavenly reassurance. The decree for a census forced Joseph and a heavily pregnant Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This journey was no small inconvenience. Roughly 150 kilometres on foot through rugged terrain, it would have taken at least a week, likely longer. This was not a scenic stroll, but a physically demanding and potentially dangerous journey.

Many scholars suggest they travelled through the Jordan Valley, passing places steeped in Israel's history: the Plains of Jezreel, Beth-shan, the Jordan River crossing, and eventually the Jericho Road, notorious for danger and hardship. Each location echoed stories of battle, loss, rescue, and God's faithfulness across generations. Mary and Joseph were walking through the very landscape of God's promises—with the fulfilment of those promises growing within Mary herself.

Mary and Joseph walked hard miles they didn't choose, carrying promises they couldn't yet see. That is often how endurance feels: ordinary feet on a long road, guided by a faithful God. When the journey is steep, rehearse the stories that steady your soul and let memory become fuel for trust.



1. Where are you experiencing a “long road” season that requires endurance?
2. How does remembering God’s past faithfulness shape the way you face present challenges?

## Read Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus’ time in the wilderness echoes the same pattern seen in Mary and Joseph’s story. Faced with hunger, temptation, and isolation, Jesus chooses surrender, obedience, and trust. He refuses shortcuts and remains faithful to God’s way.

Scripture makes it clear: faith does not promise ease, but it does promise hope. The manger cradle in Bethlehem points to a cross and an empty tomb, where hope took on flesh, suffered, rose, and now reigns. In every twist and turn of life, our hope in Christ holds us firm. It allows surrender when plans fall apart, obedience when the cost feels high, and trust when the road is long.

1. What does hope mean to you right now?
2. How is Christian hope different from optimism?

## Optional reflection activity

Christmas can amplify grief, memories, joy, pressure, and exhaustion all at once. In those moments, the invitation is not to have everything together, but to bring the whole experience—joy and heaviness alike—before God.

Is there a grief or a “what should have been” lament you are carrying? Try writing it in a sentence and bringing it before the Lord. As you listen for His voice, ask Him:

- Where are you calling me to surrender?
- Where are you inviting me to obedience?
- And where do I need to trust that you are faithful, even when I cannot see the outcome?

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Lord God, Thank you for your faithfulness through every season.

We bring before you the unexpected parts of our lives—the interruptions, the disappointments, and the long journeys that we did not choose. Help us, like Mary,



to say, “Lord, I’m yours.” Give us courage, like Joseph, to obey even when it costs us comfort or certainty. And teach us to trust you when the road feels long and hard.

Remind us that you are with us, that you are at work even when we cannot see it, and that your promises never fail.

In Jesus’ name,  
Amen.



## Week 7: The Way in Celebration

### Sally Agostino

21 December 2025

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

Christmas is often wrapped in imagery of brightness and cheer—with twinkling lights, familiar carols, joyful gatherings, and cute nativity plays. Yet, the Christmas story does not happen in a calm, safe or glowing world. It happens in a time of darkness. And the recent acts of violence at Bondi, remind us that the darkness is still present today.

So why celebrate? Why sing and laugh and look for joy this Christmas season? Because Jesus came into our dark world—the Light which shines in the darkness “and the darkness has not overcome it.” Wherever Jesus is, there is true light and enduring joy. This is the heart of Christmas.

#### Read Isaiah 60:1-3

Isaiah spoke to a people who knew darkness intimately. They were displaced, living in exile, grieving the loss of land, identity, and security. His words did not deny their reality, instead, he named it honestly. Yet embedded in the darkness was a promise: light was coming.

Jesus is the light. Born into a time marked by oppression, violence and uncertainty, His presence brings hope into the darkest places. Our world still feels fragile and shadowed, and many carry grief in one hand and hope in the other. That's okay. We do not have to rush past sorrow to reach joy. We can bring our sorrow to the Light who will not be overcome.

1. Where, specifically, do you feel the “thick darkness” right now, and how can you ask Jesus to meet you there with His light?
2. How does it help to acknowledge the darkness and bring it before a loving and sovereign God, rather than pretending it isn't there? What does it mean for you personally that darkness does not get the final word?

#### Read Matthew 2:1-12 and Luke 1:39-45



Not everyone recognized the Light. Herod guarded his power, and religious leaders who could map the prophecies would not move their feet to follow them. But Elizabeth rejoiced, an unborn baby leaped, shepherds hurried, and outsiders from afar followed a sign they scarcely understood.

Seeing the Light still requires humility, attentiveness, and the courage to act when God nudges. Faith often begins with movement, not mastery. So, take the next faithful step, however ordinary, and you will find joy meeting you on the way.

1. Why do you think some people recognised Jesus while others missed him?
2. Can you relate to following God without fully understanding where He is leading? How does this challenge the idea that faith requires certainty?

## Read John 1:1-5 and John 8:12

Happiness can come from many good things: watching a nativity play, opening gifts, sharing meals, or enjoying festive traditions. Yet happiness is often mixed with stress, complexity, strained relationships, and the pressure of consumerism. It rises and falls with circumstances.

Joy goes deeper. It is not erased by difficulty. It is anchored in relationship—knowing you are loved, forgiven and not alone. Followers of Jesus still experience loss, anxiety and uncertainty. The difference is not the absence of darkness, but the presence of light within it. Wherever Jesus is, there is light. And where there is light, there is joy—joy that endures.

1. How would you describe the difference between happiness and joy?
2. Which part of your daily rhythm most crowds out awareness of Jesus' presence, and how could you turn that exact moment into a simple act of turning toward His light?

## Read Matthew 5:14-16, John 14:16-17 and Ephesians 5:8-10

Jesus promised a helper, the Holy Spirit, so His light would live within His people. When someone turns towards Christ, it is like a light switching on. Our call is to carry that light into dark places—being careful not to hide it, drift from it, or forget its source.

Christmas serves as a reminder that this is only part of the story. We are waiting with great anticipation for the day when Jesus will return and end darkness for



good. Until then, we will let our lives shine before others, that they may see the Light and give glory to God.

1. In what ways can you carry the light of Jesus into the everyday places and relationships of your life?
2. What can make it difficult to live openly as people of light? And how can this group support one another in following Jesus faithfully?

## Optional Activity

Christmas reminds us that light does not wait for darkness to disappear. It enters it. And wherever Jesus is, light and joy follow.

Light a candle and allow a moment of silence, reflecting on areas of darkness that need God's light.

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Jesus, you are the light of the world. Thank you for stepping into darkness and offering us life, hope and deep joy. Help us to keep following you, even when the way is unclear. Fill us with your light through your Spirit, and send us out to shine in the places you have called us. May we live as people of joy, love, and faithfulness. Amen.



## Week 8: The Way of the Humble

### Lance Blythe

24 December 2025

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

Imagine, for a moment, that your heart is an empty photo frame. If you could take everything you're carrying this Christmas season—your emotions, memories and hopes—and place them inside that frame, what would it look like? There might be relief at having made it through another year, or excitement about what lies ahead. For others, the picture may be very different. There may be loss, unanswered prayers, or the quiet ache of another Christmas that doesn't quite feel complete.

God is passionately invested in the contents of your heart. As we come to this Christmas you are invited to wrap it all in humility and bring it to God, because whatever you see inside that frame, it matters to Him.

### Read Luke 1:46-55

In this passage, often called *Mary's Song* or *the Magnificat*, a young woman gives voice to the contents of her heart. Mary has just received the astonishing news that she will carry God's Son. Overwhelmed with wonder, fear and joy, she responds with worship, and her song captures the very essence of Christmas. It speaks of God's faithfulness, His mercy, His justice, and His care for those who are overlooked and forgotten. Mary's song beautifully articulates the profound truth of God's kingdom: He brings down the powerful and lifts up the humble (verse 52).

God's kingdom does not operate the way the world expects. Power is redefined. Success is reframed. What makes this even more remarkable is that Mary is not looking back on Jesus' teachings or reflecting on His ministry. She hasn't yet heard about loving enemies, serving others, or the first becoming last. She is simply responding to what God has done for her and in doing so, she becomes the first person in Luke's Gospel to articulate the upside-down kingdom of God.

1. Mary brought the contents of her heart before God. When you consider the "photo frame" of your heart, what specific images or feelings are you carrying right now that you sense God is inviting you to share with Him more openly?



2. Where do you find yourself clinging to worldly ideas of power or success, and how might God be inviting you to embrace His "upside-down" kingdom instead?

## Read Luke 2:1-7 and Philippians 2:5-8

Mary does not claim worthiness. She recognises her humble state and marvels that God would work through her. Likewise, the Christmas story shows that humility is not just something God values. It is something He embodies. The Creator of the universe humbles Himself to become a baby. Not a child born into wealth or influence, but one wrapped in cloth and laid in a feeding trough.

Throughout the life of Jesus, this upside-down kingdom is lived out again and again. A King who serves rather than demands. A Messiah who washes feet. A Saviour who lays down His life. God's ways are marked by humility.

1. When you consider the profound humility of God becoming a baby in a manger, how does this image challenge or deepen your understanding of His power and love for you personally?
2. What would it mean for humility to shape the way you move into the year ahead?

## Read James 4:10

God is not primarily interested in status, achievement or wealth. Those things are often outside human control anyway. What God is after is the one thing every person *can* influence—the contents of the heart.

A humble heart creates space. Space for others. Space for grace. Space for God to work. Yet, the more self-sufficient we become, the easier it is to centre life around ourselves. When that happens, humility struggles to find space.

True humility is about thinking *of yourself less*—not about thinking *less of yourself*. It's not about self-criticism or low self-esteem, but a posture of surrender that lets God's mercy, forgiveness and peace flow.

1. What does true humility—not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less—look like for you right now?
2. Are there areas where comfort, success or self-reliance may be crowding out humility?



## Closing Group or Take Home Activity

Christmas is an invitation to let humility become the lens through which life is seen. To allow it to reshape how joy and sorrow, success and struggle, are understood. To open the heart to the embrace of a God who comes not with force, but with love, gentleness and true humility.

So once more, the question remains: *What's in the frame?* What stories, images and emotions are you carrying this Christmas? And what might it look like to bring them before God and allow humility to gently reframe them?

Invite the group to silently reflect or journal for a few minutes. You may like to provide blank paper and encourage people to draw or write words that describe their “frame”.

- What image would best represent the current state of your heart?
- What would it look like for humility to become the lens through which you see that image?

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Gracious God, We thank you that you draw near to us in humility and love. As we reflect on the gift of Jesus, would you shape our hearts to reflect His ways. Help us to release pride, self-reliance and fear, and make space for humility, grace and trust. May the frame of our hearts be filled with your character, and may our lives reflect the upside-down kingdom of Jesus. We pray this in His name. Amen.



## Week 9: The Way of Rest and Reflection

### Adam Southwood

4 January 2026

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

There is something about the beginning of a new year that feels different. Time seems lighter, a little less rigid. The calendar has not yet filled up, routines are not quite locked in, and many people find themselves unsure what day of the week it even is. It is a season marked by rest, reflection and reset—a space to breathe before life speeds up again.

In the Christian tradition, this moment can be understood as more than just a holiday lull. It can be a *kairos* moment—a God-appointed time that sits outside ordinary clock time. A moment when God invites his people to slow down, pay attention, reflect honestly and respond intentionally. This is the gift of Sabbath.

### Read Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11

The Greek word *kairos* describes a decisive or opportune moment when God breaks into the ordinary flow of life. It may come through Scripture, a conversation, an interruption, a sense of conviction, or simply the gift of slowing down enough to listen.

The start of a new year naturally creates space for this kind of attentiveness. The danger, however, is that conviction alone does not lead to transformation. Reflection without response changes very little. God's invitation is not just to notice these moments, but to respond to them. And in his grace, God provides a practice that creates space for exactly this kind of reflection and response—a gift given right at the beginning of the biblical story: Sabbath.

In Genesis 2, the creation story pauses. After six days of work, God rests, not because he is tired but as an expression of delight. He steps back from his work, declares it “very good”, and blesses the day. Sabbath is not an afterthought, it is a rhythm woven into creation itself.

So important is this rhythm that God later enshrines it in the Ten Commandments. In Exodus, the command to remember the Sabbath takes up more space than almost



any other commandment. It is not presented as optional, but as essential. A gift given for our good.

1. Where do you notice natural *kairos* moments in your life?
2. How does it change your perspective to see Sabbath as part of creation, not just a command?
3. What messages about work, productivity or worth have shaped your life? Do you tend to see rest as something you earn or something you receive?

## Read Luke 6:1-11 and Mark 2:27-28

In Luke 6, Jesus challenges legalistic understandings of Sabbath by prioritising compassion and restoration over rigid rule-keeping. The Lord of the Sabbath reminds us: "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Sabbath is not primarily a legal burden but a created provision that orders life around rest and relationship with God. Its purpose is our flourishing and its invitation is to live in step with divine priorities instead of cultural ones. Recognising Sabbath as a gift changes the posture from duty to gratitude, and reshapes our time so that work serves worship rather than the other way around.

1. What do Jesus' actions on the Sabbath reveal about God's character?
2. In what ways can religious practice lose its heart and become burdensome?
3. Where might you be tempted towards either legalism *or* neglect when it comes to spiritual disciplines like the Sabbath?

## Read Leviticus 23:1-3

Ironically, in trying so hard not to become like the Pharisees, many modern Christians have swung to the opposite extreme of neglecting Sabbath altogether. For many followers of Jesus today, Sabbath remains one of the least understood and least practised spiritual disciplines. But Scripture gives us a helpful framework.

Before outlining Israel's sacred festivals in Leviticus 23, God begins with the Sabbath as the foundation upon which all other holy days rest. From this passage, five essential elements of Sabbath emerge.

### **Stop**

The Hebrew word *Shabbat* simply means to stop, to cease, to be done. At its core, Sabbath is about stopping ordinary work in order to rest before God.



This is often the hardest part. Even when paid work pauses, it can be all too easy to remain busy. Emails are checked. The week ahead is planned. Chores are squeezed in. And screens fill every quiet moment.

Sabbath is rarely broken by doing bad things. It is crowded out by doing very reasonable ones. But we are called to stop as an act of trust—trusting that the world will keep turning, that productivity is not ultimate, and that God is still at work even when his people rest.

1. What fears surface when you think about truly stopping?

### **Worship**

Leviticus describes Sabbath as a “day of sacred assembly” reminding us that worship sits at the centre of Sabbath. Jesus himself consistently gathered with God’s people, even when relationships were strained with the religious teachers.

Today, gathering with the Church remains a core expression of Sabbath—a reminder that life is lived in community with God and others.

1. How might God be inviting you to engage more deeply with the “sacred assembly”, and what practical step could you take this week to foster this?

### **Rest**

Sabbath rest is deeper than sleep or collapse after exhaustion. While physical rest matters, Sabbath points to something more holistic. Jesus’ invitation in Matthew 11:28-30 captures this beautifully: real rest is found in walking with him and learning his rhythms.

Sabbath rest addresses body, mind, soul and spirit. It is rest from striving, from worry, from constant hurry. It is resistance against a culture that measures worth by output and possessions. Each week, Sabbath draws a line in the sand and declares: *Work matters, but it is not everything.*

1. How does Sabbath rest challenge cultural definitions of success?

### **Delight**

Beyond stopping and resting, Sabbath also means delight. When God rested on the seventh day, he delighted in what he had made. To delight is to notice what is good, beautiful and true, and to enjoy it with gratitude.

Delight might look like sharing meals, laughing with friends, walking in nature, enjoying music or art, telling stories, playing, celebrating and giving thanks. Sabbath is not meant to be grim or restrictive. It is meant to be life-giving.



1. How might delight be a spiritual practice, not just a personal preference?

### **Intentionality**

The final element is intentionality. Many people already stop, rest, worship or delight in some form on weekends. But Sabbath is not accidental. Without intention, it easily becomes another blurred day filled with leftover work and distraction.

Intentional Sabbath requires planning, conversation and commitment. It asks: *What will help us truly stop? What practices will lead us to worship, rest and delight?* Without intentionality, even good activities can cause the heart of Sabbath to be missed.

1. What might need to change in order for Sabbath to become intentional rather than accidental?
2. Which of the five elements feels most life-giving for you right now? Why?
3. Which feels most difficult? Why?

### **An Invitation for the Year Ahead**

As the new year begins, the question is not simply *What will I achieve?* but *How will I live?*

Sabbath is not just about one day; it shapes how we live the other six. God's gracious invitation is to resist hurry, embrace trust, and rediscover the promise of Isaiah 58:13-14—*those who call the Sabbath a delight will find joy in the Lord.*

- What might it look like for you or your household to practice Sabbath more intentionally this year?
- Share it with the group or write it down as an act of commitment

### **Suggested Closing Prayer**

Read **Isaiah 58:13–14** aloud together.

Close by praying that the group would learn to call the Sabbath a delight, find joy in the Lord, and walk more deeply in the way of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.



## Week 10: The Way Up - Abide

### Sally Agostino

11 January 2026

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

At the beginning of a new year, there is often a sense of fresh possibility. New calendars. New plans. New rhythms. Yet alongside that optimism sits a familiar pressure: the feeling that life is already noisy, demanding and overwhelming before the year has even properly begun.

It's not possible to strive our way into peace, but Jesus offers a different way. As we continue our series on "The Way", we pause to consider His call to come and abide.

### Read John 15:1-8 and Psalm 127:1-2

The world has no shortage of voices competing for attention. Relentless news cycles. Personal pressures. The constant sense of needing to "get it right". Jesus never promised an escape from the pressures of life. What he does offer is something far more radical—a different way of living *within* it. A way that is not driven by performance, productivity or pressure, but by connection.

This journey begins with cultivating a deep, personal relationship with our Creator. To abide. To dwell. To remain. Jesus repeats this phrase eight times in the eight verses of John 15:1-8. It's about living with an upward perspective, even amidst the chaos and pressures of daily life.

The world trains us to strive—to do more, achieve more, prove more—but Jesus offers a different way: staying connected to Him as the source of life. A branch doesn't strain to produce fruit. It simply stays connected to the vine. And we are invited to do the same.

1. In what specific ways does the overwhelming nature of the world challenge your ability to maintain an upward focus on your relationship with God?
2. Where do you notice "striving" showing up in your faith—trying to be good enough, faithful enough, or useful enough?
3. What words or images come to mind when you hear the word *abide*?



## Read John 14:16-23 and 1 Corinthians 6:19

For first-century Jewish listeners, Jesus' words carried profound significance. God's presence had always been associated with a specific place—the temple. In Exodus 25, God instructs the people to build a sanctuary so that he might dwell among them. The temple was central to spiritual life and if someone wanted to know where God dwelled, they knew exactly where to go.

Yet Jesus flips this understanding completely. Through the Holy Spirit, every follower of Jesus becomes a dwelling place for God's presence. Every follower of Jesus becomes a living temple. This means God is not distant or reserved for "holy places". He is present in ordinary moments, everyday routines, and imperfect lives. This is both humbling and deeply affirming: God chooses to make His home with us.

1. How does it change your perspective to think of yourself as a dwelling place for God?
2. Are there times or places where you find it easier or harder to believe God is truly present with you?

## Read Zephaniah 3:17

It can be challenging to truly abide with God if we carry the unspoken fear that He disapproves of us or that we must earn His favor. Yet, the liberating truth is that God deeply loves us, rejoices over us, and is pleased with us, not because of our performance, but because of what Jesus has already accomplished. This profound, unconditional love clears the way for a healthy and freeing relationship, allowing us to approach Him with confidence and abide with Him in joy.

1. How have past experiences shaped the way you think God feels about you? When you imagine God looking at you right now, what expression do you picture?
2. What difference might it make to your prayer life if you believed God delights in you?

## Re-Read John 15:2

Jesus also speaks about pruning—a process that can feel painful or confusing. Yet pruning is not judgment; it is loving formation.



When we know we are deeply loved and indwelt by God, seasons of loss, correction or difficulty can be received differently, and we can trust the good Gardener to shape us. Pruning strengthens what truly matters and brings forth the richest fruit.

1. Have you experienced a season that felt like pruning? What fruit, if any, came later?
2. What might God be gently inviting you to release right now?

## Closing Reflection

We are called to live with an upward perspective. This is not a ladder to climb, but a relationship to abide in. As you close, spend some time reflecting on this invitation from the One who delights in you.

1. **Awareness** – becoming conscious of God’s presence.  
Imagine a place where you feel at ease. Picture God present with you there, attentive and pleased.
2. **Release** – placing burdens, pressure and striving into God’s hands.  
Silently name what you are striving to carry and imagine placing it in God’s hands.
3. **Remaining** – choosing to dwell in God’s love.  
Speak to God in the quiet of your heart and express your desire to remain in His love.

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you that you choose to dwell with us and in us. Thank you that because of Jesus, we are deeply loved and fully welcomed. Help us let go of striving and learn to remain in your love. Shape us through your gentle pruning and produce fruit in us that brings life to others. Teach us to live from connection, not performance. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



## Week 11: The Way In - Belong

### Phil Gaudion

18 January 2026

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

The Christian faith is deeply personal, but it was never meant to be lived in isolation. From the earliest days of the church, followers of Jesus gathered together to learn, pray, eat, serve and grow. In a world that values independence and convenience, Scripture calls believers back to proximity, shared life and mutual transformation.

This week we reflect honestly on our relationship with Christian community—its joys, challenges and its role in shaping our discipleship.

### Read Acts 2:42-47

In the early days of the church, believers devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, prayer and shared meals. They met together regularly—both in large gatherings and in homes. They shared their possessions, supported those in need, and lived with glad and sincere hearts. And as a result, God added to their number daily.

It's tempting to dismiss this passage as idealistic or outdated. After all, that was 2,000 years ago. Life today is faster, more complex, and far more individualistic. And yet, despite video calls, messaging apps, social media and more ways to stay connected online than ever before, people remain deeply lonely. Screens can keep us connected, but they rarely make us feel *close*. There is no substitute for being in the same room face to face.

The early church understood something that remains true today: proximity matters. Shared presence creates depth. Community shapes hearts in ways that convenience never can. And following Christ was never meant to be a solo pursuit.

1. Why do you think independence is so appealing in our culture today? Looking at your schedule this week, is there one digital interaction you could replace with a face-to-face meeting, such as a coffee or a shared meal, to foster deeper connection?
2. Where do you see the tension between personal faith and shared faith in your own life?



## Read Hebrews 10:24-25

These verses offer both encouragement and warning: believers are urged to spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, but encouraging one another all the more.

There are times when people drift from community. Sometimes it happens intentionally—taking a break, feeling hurt, or deciding to do things differently for a season. Other times it happens quietly and gradually. But stepping away from community into isolation creates vulnerability. Doubts can grow louder. Discouragement can deepen. And subtle lies can take hold: *You don't belong. They don't understand you. You're better off on your own.*

Scripture names Satan as the father of lies (John 8:44) and isolation is often the environment where those lies thrive. We don't need to be afraid, but we do need to pay attention and recognise God's good design for spiritual community, which provides protection, perspective and truth.

1. What tends to pull you away from Christian community—busyness, disappointment, fear, or comfort?
2. Which "whisper" or lie about your place in the church community has felt most believable lately, and how does the truth of God's Word specifically answer that lie?

## Read Matthew 18:19-20 and Proverbs 27:5-6 & 17

When the early believers gathered in the temple courts, they came together for teaching and worship—much like modern church services. But they didn't stop there. They also gathered in homes, sharing meals, conversation, prayer and everyday life. Both settings mattered then, and both still matter now. Large gatherings inspire, align and remind people that they are part of something bigger. Smaller gatherings create space for honesty, listening, accountability and care.

Small groups, in particular, have a unique capacity to surround people in seasons of joy and celebration, as well as seasons of doubt, grief and hardship. People laugh, cry, debate, disagree and grow. Small groups often become places where loneliness loses its grip and spiritual family is formed.

But community isn't only about encouragement and comfort. At times, it also involves challenge. Proverbs reminds us about the importance of accountability and loving speaking into each other's lives. This kind of sharpening isn't harsh or critical. It's rooted in love and mutual commitment. Sometimes it's a gentle question. Other



times it's a timely reminder. Occasionally, it's a loving challenge that stings a little in the moment, but ultimately leads to clarity and growth. We need this more than we realise. It's easy to overlook blind spots or justify unhelpful habits, but a community that genuinely wants the best for one another is a wonderful thing!

1. How has community encouraged or sustained you during a difficult season?
2. How can accountability be offered in a way that feels safe and life-giving?

## Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and John 13:35

God's goal isn't to create impressive individuals, but a transformed people. Theologian C.S. Lewis observed that private religion often becomes distorted. When faith is detached from community, it can slowly be reshaped into something more comfortable, more individualistic, and less Christ-like. But community acts as a corrective, grounding believers in shared truth and love.

After all, the Church is the Body of Christ—made up of many parts, each dependent on the others. No part is unnecessary. No one thrives alone.

Unity, however, does not mean uniformity. God doesn't erase individuality. Instead, he weaves diverse people together, shaping them into something greater than the sum of their parts. And this shared life does something powerful: it becomes a witness. Jesus said that people would recognise his disciples by their love for one another. When believers commit to deep, healthy community, it becomes visible—and compelling—to the world around them.

1. How do you think authentic Christian community appears to those outside the church? In what ways could deeper unity strengthen our witness?
2. How might your perspective on church change if you viewed your attendance not just as a personal spiritual boost, but as a vital contribution to the unity that helps others see Jesus?

## Closing Reflection

The call to community isn't about trying harder or doing more. It's an invitation to participate in what God has already designed. For those who have been hurt or disappointed in the past, this invitation may feel risky. Healing takes time, and grace is needed. But even there, God can do new work—replacing reluctance with hope, and isolation with belonging.



Where might God be inviting your group to step more fully into community? You may like to consider one or two of the following together:

- A simple step towards deeper connection (shared meals, prayer partners, intentional check-ins)
- A commitment to consistency in gathering
- An openness to encouragement or accountability
- An act of generosity or service done together

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Lord God, Thank you that you have designed us for relationship with you and with one another. Help us to resist isolation and choose connection, even when it feels vulnerable. Teach us to encourage one another, to speak truth in love, and to walk together with humility and grace. Heal places where community has been difficult or painful, and form us into a people who reflect your love. May our shared life draw others towards you as we follow Jesus together. Amen.



## Week 12: The Way Out - Serve

### Beth Jackson

25 January 2026

Visit the [NewHope Teaching](#) page to find this week's sermon

What does it really mean to follow Jesus—not just believe in him, admire him, or agree with his teachings, but to shape an entire life around his call?

This week we have the privilege of hearing from guest speaker Beth Jackson, Head of Mission Catalyst and Ordination at the BUV, as together we explore our call to be participants in God's work in the world.

### Read Matthew 4:18-22

The first disciples followed Jesus before they fully understood who he was. They hadn't heard his teaching. They hadn't seen his miracles. They certainly didn't yet understand him as Messiah. Yet something about Jesus compelled them to drop everything—their nets, boats and family ties—because following Jesus wasn't an add-on, it was a whole way of life.

Discipleship, in its simplest form, is not about having all the answers. It is about responding to Jesus' call with trust and openness.

But in a world full of distractions, it is easy for faith to become a peripheral interest rather than the center of our worldview. We are invited to look Jesus in the eye and ask if we are truly following him or just observing from a distance. Because faith grows as we walk with Him and relationship is built when we abide.

1. What do you think made Jesus' invitation so compelling for those fishermen?
2. What is one "net"—a source of security or a routine—that you find yourself clinging to when you sense Jesus calling you toward something new? What would it look like to loosen your grip on it today?

### Read John 15:1-8

In the early 18th century, a community of Christian refugees formed. They came from different denominational backgrounds and while they shared faith in Christ, their differing theological emphases and spiritual practices quickly created tension.



Their leader, Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf, watched as relationships fractured and unity eroded. Rather than giving up, he chose the slow, costly work of pastoral care—going from home to home, praying and teaching about unity. Eventually, hearts softened and the community made a profound decision: they signed a covenant committing themselves to love one another, seek God, and live in unity. It was an act of humility. And it changed everything.

Only three months later, the Holy Spirit moved powerfully among them in what would become known as the Moravian Revival. This once-divided group of 600 people became hungry for God and out of that hunger emerged a prayer meeting that began in 1727 and continued unbroken for over 100 years.

What's striking is what flowed from this life with God. Within 30 years, this small refugee community sent 200 people—one third of its population—into vocational ministry and mission, locally and globally. They didn't do this through strategic planning or guilt-driven appeals. Mission became inevitable because time with God reshaped their desires. Jesus says the same in John 15: fruit flows from abiding. When we are deeply connected to Him, service and witness follow naturally.

1. The Anabaptists, contemporaries of the Moravians, asked, “Are you following Jesus?” rather than “Are you saved?”. How does that shift the focus of faith for you?
2. How do you personally experience the connection between time with God and outward service and witness?

## Read Matthew 28:18-20 and John 20:21

To follow Jesus is to be *sent* by him. Christian mission has sometimes been expressed through harmful, coercive, or imperialistic methods. That history must be acknowledged and lamented. And yet, the call itself remains true. Every believer is called. Every believer is sent. Not all in the same way, but all as participants in God's work in the world.

Most people long for lives of purpose and significance. We want faith that is integrated, meaningful, and active in the everydayness of life. Theologian Frederick Buechner captured this beautifully when he wrote: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

This is not only an individual question, but a communal one that calls us to discern our deep gladness as a church community and join God in meeting the world's deep hunger together.



1. Consider these questions individually and communally: Where do you see “deep gladness”—the gifts, passions, or experiences God has given you?
2. Where do you see “deep hunger” in your workplace, neighbourhood, or relationships?
3. Where might those two things intersect—for you personally and also for the community of believers?

## Optional Closing Reflection

Picture yourself standing on the shore, looking into the eyes of Jesus, and hearing His call: “Follow me.”

Just like the disciples. Just like the Moravians. Ordinary people. An extraordinary invitation. And a choice, still before us today. It is a call that moves people beyond comfort, beyond caution, beyond what feels sensible. But it is also a call to a life that is deeply worth living—full of hope, peace, joy, and purpose.

So, what might it look like for you to *follow* Jesus more intentionally in this season?

You may like to share your thoughts with the group and/or take note of what Jesus is saying to you in this moment and return to it in prayer throughout the week.

## Suggested Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, as we imagine ourselves on the shore, hearing you say “Follow me”, help us to respond honestly. Show us what we need to lay down, and what we are being invited to take up. Draw us closer to you, and lead us where you are already at work. Amen.