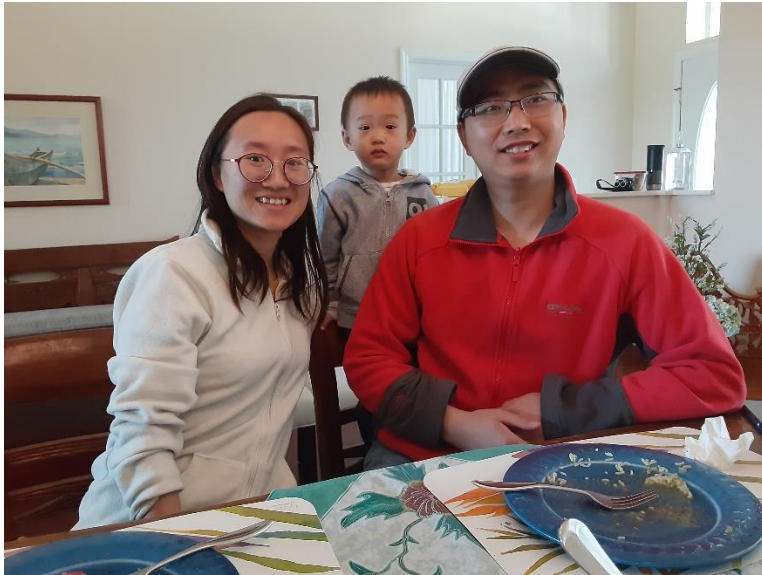


New Hope Global Fellowship Sermon – Count Your Blessings

Apologies

First, I apologize for getting this sermon out late. My time got taken up last week because our caregiver developed Covid 2 weeks ago so we spent a day last week getting tested ourselves (we all tested negative). Then there was the extra time needed to be Keith's fulltime caregiver for the past week. Finally, on Saturday we had a delightful visit all day with Bing and Emily,



Bing's father and Nathaniel. We laughed, we shared our lives and enjoyed the special blessing of being together.

Introduction

Midweek last week I was sitting with the Lord and He called my attention to all the ways He has blessed the members of our church. It was an important perspective since 2020 had been such a difficult year for all of us. But it was a wonderful exercise to go down the list of all our members and catalogue their blessings. I felt this reminder would encourage all of us, so that is the basis for this belated sermon. I recognize that these snapshots are only part of each one's story, and that only half of you are mentioned this time, but I hope the examples I do include will cause us to praise God for His faithfulness to us all in 2020. I also hope you will write out other blessings from yours or others' lives that have not been included and send them to me so we can add them to the next installment!

A Seminal Hymn – i.e., a hymn that is central to this idea.

The hymn that came to me as I wrote down God's blessings has the appropriate title: "Count Your Blessings." When I searched for it in all my hymnals, it does not even occur in recent hymnals. But I found it in my *Great Hymns of the Faith* published in 1968; both the composer for the music and the lyricist for the words lived from 1856-1920, so it is an oldie, indeed! But the words are right on. Appropriately, the hymn was found in the section of the hymnal called Challenges.

Chorus: Count your blessings, name them one by one.

Count your blessings, see what God has done.

Count your blessings, see what God has done; count your many blessings, see what God has done.

V. 1. When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,

When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost, count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done. Chorus.

v. 4. So amid the conflict, whether great or small, do not be discouraged – God is over all.

Count your many blessings, angels will attend; help and comfort give you to your journey's end.

Chorus. (words: Johnson Oatman, music: Edwin Excell)

Stop right now.

Before we go further, take the time to write down all the blessings in 2020 you can think of in your own life. It may, indeed, surprise you and will help you gain a positive perspective through God's work in the past year.

A snapshot of God's goodness for several of our members in 2020:

Evan Lature – After over a year of praying and job rejections for the positions he wanted as a resident director in a Christian College, an International student outreach in Norfolk VA agreed to sponsor Evan as a campus minister. Evan provided, with help from others, the cost to pay for his new R1 visa, and Global Student Friendship agreed to take care of his salary in Norfolk so he could stay in the States and work in Norfolk. All this finally happened just weeks before his R1 visa expired!! As of late December he is living in an apartment building on the edge of campus, and working in the multicultural community he longed for. Already he is sending reports of what God is doing in this ministry. His latest January report clearly shows the timeliness of his move to Norfolk.

Five + years ago when Evan got to know Keith, he called him his "favorite old man." **Keith Wilson** has thrived in Florida since our move here is late March. His Alzheimers continues its relentless downward progression in his brain. He has no more short term memory and very limited energy and ability to do simple tasks. But he loves the sunshine in Florida, the small pond behind our home, and the trees and clouds and flowers. He could sit out in our large lanai looking out over the pond for hours on end. When the weather turned Florida warm (think furnace hot!), we had to limit that time so he didn't get dehydrated, but he is happy in his own limited world. He enjoys living with Bruce and Becky and has been very loving and affirming toward me. His attitude is an exception for Alzheimers patients at this stage and I believe it is a direct answer to the prayers of our community for him. Thank you!!

Hanny Wuysang – Hanny has seen God's continual provision of finances and jobs in her PhD studies and work at Western Michigan University. During 2020 she became recognized as an advocate for other international students on campus and is poised to extend that influence in other universities in the US. This month, just a week before she was scheduled to teach off campus in a neighboring college, she finally received the paperwork that gave her the legal visa to do that job! She is reaching out to other internationals on campus, provides worship at our weekly church meetings and is on the worship team monthly at a church she attends in Kalamazoo.

Tsegaab Tantu – Tsegaab returned to Ethiopia after graduation last December and has been teaching and doing ministry in the capital. Like Hanny, he has gotten accepted to pursue his PhD in a university in the States. And, like Miyuki, has seen God provide donors to pay for his university fees, semester by semester. He is now in his second semester and thriving in Ethiopia with his family, work and studies.

Michiko Takahashi (in Japan) – Michiko has testified to several ways God has especially blessed her in 2020. Since last April, for the first time in her marriage, she and her non-believing husband are reading the Bible together every day. She has grown through Bible Study Fellowship, through her church, and through our renewed bi-weekly talks and prayers on Zoom. She has also been blessed by being part of our zoom fellowship. Two years ago she had heart surgery, but we learned this weekend that at her recent yearly heart checkup, her heart is fine and she is well.

Miyuki Asada – after months of searching and prayer, Miyuki and Joe have cemented their relationship and became engaged this past December. They plan an April wedding. She was also appointed as a counselor for single women missionaries with Teach Beyond and has gotten sufficient funding from donors (a major miracle for an international raising support in the US) so she could begin that ministry last December. In addition, Miyuki has designed a wonderful new graphic for our website home page. (I need someone who can help me edit that page and install it!)

Alex Zhou – Alex has thrived as a post-doc scholar in Singapore for the past two years. He graduated with his PHD in law last year from a law university in Hong Kong and has seen God work in a small Bible study he has started on his new campus, like the one he had had in Hong Kong. As he has been praying to return to Hong Kong

as a tenured professor and waiting for a job opening there, God unexpectedly brought two of the key professors in that Hong Kong university to his university in Singapore in December. Those are the connections and timing only God can arrange! This past year the book he and Dr. Mary Lou had started 3 years ago got revisited and is now basically completed. We wait for news about a potential publisher. Alex has also gotten at least one article published in an esteemed legal journal and is waiting to see if two other articles will be published.

Bing Liu – Bing has also gotten into the publishing world this year. While Emily is super busy in her PhD program at Wheaton, Bing has helped finance the family through work on line, translating English theological books into Chinese for a Chinese seminary. Several of those translated books have been published. This January he will teach a course on Daniel on line in that seminary and has prospects for other courses to teach as well. He has also seen God's strength and love to handle much of the care for son Nathaniel, who is now 2, to lessen the load for Emily. In 2021 he is hoping to start his own PHD studies on line.

Sam Lau – Sam returned to Canada for his PhD studies at the University of Toronto just weeks before Canada closed its border with the US because of Covid. He began his first semester last fall on line and continues the slow process of getting to know his cohort while all the classes are still on line. Sam continues to be part of our zoom church and has brought his wisdom, prayers and gracious spirit to all of our New Hope Global members as he did in his leadership role when we were all in Wheaton.

Finally, **Tuvsho Tsoogi** returned to her native Mongolia after graduation two Decembers ago and has seen God bring her dream for a safe house for mentoring at risk adolescents begin to take shape. The ministry is entitled H.o.ME: She writes: HoME is creating vision for AT RISK YOUNG ADULTS who have aged out of shelters in Ulaanbaabar Mongolia." Construction started in November/December 2020 and as of January 2021 she wrote: "God is providing and protecting every single step for the HoMe ministry. All three houses are up and we are working on the interiors. Please follow HoME on social medias ("Heart of Mentoring" on FB, IG, Twitter) and visualize what we are up to lately." She ended her January 2021 update: "Though world is on hold and confusion, our God is always at work." How wonderful to see practical examples of that in the creation of The Mentoring House.

Concluding Songs of Praise

These simple snapshots are of less than half of our membership. Other members' stories will be told in future sermons. But they demonstrate the reality that the Lord has been blessing our people in spite of the struggles and suffering of 2020.

Two songs come to mind to end this meditation in praise:

God is good

Chorus: God is good, all the time, He put a song of praise in this heart of mine.

God is good, all the time, through the darkest night, His light will shine.

God is good, God is good, all the time.

If you're walking through the valley and there are shadows all around. Do not fear, He will guide you; He will keep you safe and sound 'cause He has promised to never leave you or forsake you and His Word is true.

Chorus.

We were sinners, so unworthy, still for us He chose to die. Filled us with His Holy Spirit, now we can stand and testify that His love is everlasting and His mercies, they will never end. Chorus.

Though I may not understand all the plans you have for me; my life is in your hands and through the eyes of faith, I can clearly see: God is good, God is good. He's so good. God is good. He's so good. All the time!

(words and music: Don Moen and Paul Overstreet)

Good, good Father

I've heard a thousand stories of what they think You're like but I've heard the tender whispers of love in the dead of night And You tell me that You're pleased and that I'm never alone.

Chorus: You're a good, good Father. It's who you are, it's who You are, it's who You are

And I'm loved by You. It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am.

Oh, and I've seen many searching for answers far and wide, but I know we're all searching for answers only You can provide 'cause You know just what we need before we say a word. Chorus.

Oh, this Love so undeniable, I can hardly speak; peace so unexplainable, I can hardly think.

As You call me deeper still, as You call me deeper still, as you call me deeper still into love, love, love! Chorus
(words and music by Pat Barrett and Anthony Brown)

Amen. These are words of truth and praise as we go forward with faith into 2021. Blessings, beloved.

Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson, Pastor, New Hope Global Fellowship