



**A Guide for Nurturing a Love
for Jesus' Appearing**

Hope Fully: Nurturing a love for Jesus' appearing *The Journey from "Hopefully" to "Hope Fully!"*

Introduction

The aim of this sermon series is captured in the title. We want to nurture a love for Jesus' appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). We want to move from "hopefully" toward "hope fully" in his revealing (1 Peter 1:13).

In order for this to happen, we need the Spirit's work in our hearts from the inside out and from the outside in. Both will require pen and paper, so your first step is to locate or purchase a journal or notebook for your Hope Fully experience (if you are like me, you have a handful of barely-used journals you can utilize).

The inside out work centers on "Questions for reflection" that will be provided with each of the 12 sermons in the series. Approach these like you would the kiosk at a mall you're visiting for the first time. If you are looking for the Apple Store, then you need to locate two points on the map: the Apple Store and the "You Are Here" mark. In the same way, for the biblical teaching we cover to change you personally, you must locate where you are on the map and the steps you must take to get from "hopefully" to "hope fully." This will require more than a few words for answers, as you will need to identify motives, expectations, and other issues of the heart that sometimes get buried under the surface. So plan to spend at least 30 minutes each week reflecting and writing in response to the questions for reflection.

The outside in work is what I will lay out below in the Biblical commands to gather, fast, and rest. These are structural changes you should pray about making to the practical parts of your life such as church attendance, weekly schedule, eating, and social media and news intake. Read through each of them and pray about the specific commitment God wants you to make during the course of this series. If fasting and Sabbath rest are not part of your life, you may decide to implement one change per week. However God leads you to restructure your week, share your plan with a close friend in Christ. As we will see in the call to gather, encouragement and accountability with other believers plays a crucial role in nurturing a love for Jesus' appearing.

Along with the questions for reflection that you will address from the sermons, plan time to reflect on what you are learning from the rhythms of gather, fast, and rest. Questions for reflection will accompany each practice so you can keep track of how God is working from the outside in as you shape your life around these rhythms. If you are wondering where you will find time to do all of this reflecting and writing, consider incorporating this into your weekly day of rest.

My desire is to hear the stories of what God is teaching you and how he is nurturing in you a love for Jesus' appearing. Please let me know how your heart, life, and perspective is being changed by God's word! I want us to celebrate together a life of anticipating Jesus' return and encourage one another with stories of spiritual transformation.

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1. Gather

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24–25)

For generations, preachers have quoted these verses to convince God’s people that regular church attendance is a biblical command. While that is certainly true, showing up to church is only the beginning! We have to understand *why* we gather together, namely “to stir up one another to love and good works” and to encourage one another.

If you read all of Hebrews 10 (please do), you find that even those who radically and sacrificially follow Jesus are tempted by sin. One of God’s means of preserving us through the perils of temptation and difficulty is our life together as God’s family. Earlier in the letter, God’s people are challenged to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). Encouraging, challenging relationships with other believers is crucial to spiritual survival.

This exhortation to communal encouragement is made more urgent by the reality of Christ’s return: “and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” As we will learn in our study, this Day is both a day of judgment (for unbelievers) that should sober us and a day of blessing (for believers) that should delight us. The reality of Christ’s coming empowers us to challenge our brothers and sisters who are tempted by laziness or worry or sensuality or materialism, “Hang on! Jesus will soon be revealed and we will be with him forever! Don’t give into short-term allurements when eternal joy is in our sights!”

As you can tell, this approach to gathering challenges us to push deeper than the polite, surface-level interactions that often characterize churches. We must commit to building relationships (attending the same Bible fellowship is a great start) and in that context, we have to be appropriately vulnerable with our spiritual challenges. Stirring up and encouraging is much more than slapping the bandaid of Christian cliches on top of spiritual wounds. It means praying for one another, checking in with one another during the week, seeking or providing accountability for particular struggles with sin, asking heart-level questions, listening without judging, and pointing one another to God’s great promises, especially Christ’s return.

So as you prepare to gather with the saints at Groveton Baptist Church each week, keep in mind these questions.

Questions for Reflection:

As I think about the church relationships God has given me, what holds me back from engaging in more intentional, encouraging interactions with others? What is a next step I can take to address what holds me back? Do I have a trusted friend in Christ I can reach out to for encouragement? If not, what next step can I take to build trust with another believer at Groveton?

2. Fast

“Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.’” (Matthew 9:14–15)

The Bible contains calls to fast for multiple reasons. During this season, we want to focus our fasting explicitly on the coming of Jesus.

Fasting is intentionally abstaining from all or certain foods in order to heighten our spiritual focus. Perhaps you can recall a time when something so wonderful or traumatic or shocking happened that you were not able to eat for a season—“Who can eat at a time like this?” Fasting in anticipation of Jesus’ return acknowledges that something shocking has happened. Israel’s long-awaited Messiah came, but just after he conquered death and rose from the grave, he was taken away from us! Though Jesus’ ascension to heaven was part of his plan, it still leaves us yearning for his personal presence with us.

As you consider how to go about this, ask God to guide you toward the type of fasting he desires for you. You may abstain from all food for a 24-hour period. Like Daniel, you may decide to abstain from certain delicacies for a long period of time (Daniel 1:8-16, 10:2-3). Some cannot fast from food for medical reasons, so you may decide to fast from something else instead. As I have prayed about this, I am going to fast from social media, news, and podcasts three days a week. You might have some other leisure activity or hobby God asks you to set aside.

However God leads, the aim of fasting is not merely abstention. The aim is to nurture a heart that hungers for Jesus’ return. In the time when you would be eating (or watching, etc.), turn your attention to reading or listening to God’s word. Perhaps you could commit to reading the entire New Testament over these three months and paying careful attention to the mentions of Christ’s return. Create a playlist of worship songs that highlight Jesus’ coming. Pray for lost friends and family members you want to see trust in Christ before that final Day. Incorporate your time of encouraging one another (see “Gather” above) through prayer for and checking in with struggling believers. Practice sitting still before the Lord and imagining how everything will change the moment you see Jesus.

As you do this, take time at least once a week to write down what God is teaching you and the hunger he is building in your heart to see Jesus face to face.

Questions for Reflection:

What was difficult about fasting this week? What am I learning about how I relate to food/media/entertainment by abstaining from it? As I focus on Jesus’ return how do I pray God will change my desires over the next week? What good changes are already happening in my heart?

3. Rest

“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.” (Hebrews 4:9–11)

God gave his people the Sabbath command so that, in ceasing from work one day a week, we might remember that God runs the world, not us. The point of the day is to rest from labor, to contemplate God’s splendor, and to enjoy his gifts. In the New Testament, Jesus challenges the legalism religious leaders had built up around the Sabbath and invites all to find their rest by trusting in him (Matthew 11:25-12:14). Paul radically asserts that one day is as good as another for practicing this rest (Romans 14:5-6).

The passage above from Hebrews 4 (again, please read the broader context of Hebrews 3-4) emphasizes the reality of a future, eternal rest for God’s people. When Jesus returns, he will make all things new. Imagine how transformed life will be when God’s resurrected people live in God’s resurrected world in perfect harmony with one another and perfect communion with him. No sin, no sickness, no strife, no pain, no loss, no death. We will still be active in the sense that we will worship, create, explore, and feast. But we will not labor for survival. We will rest.

One of the aims in practicing a day of rest now is to anticipate and even partake in our final rest. While this is based in God’s seventh day rest at creation (Hebrews 4:4), we schedule our lives around this rhythm so that we can look forward to our eternal rest.

What does this look like practically? It means ceasing from your labor for a 24-hour period. This will be more challenging for some than others, but create space in your week where you can pause all your paid and unpaid work (you job, paying bills, doing chores, etc.). It may be from Saturday evening to Sunday evening or whatever day you can get off work (I practice my Sabbath rest on Fridays).

What should you do during this day? Spend time meditating on God’s word and pouring out your heart to him. Nurture gratitude for his gifts. Carve out time to reflect on your week and write in your Hope Fully journal. Read biographies of godly men and women from church history. Practice delight in God’s good gifts, whether listening to music, hiking in a park, relaxing with friends or family, or, if it brings joy and delight to you, preparing a favorite meal. Take a nap. Watch a good film. Enjoy God and the goodness of his creation.

In doing so, you can get a taste of your eternal rest with God in the New Heavens and New Earth. Receive this day of rest as a gift, not a burden. Ask the Spirit to increase your joy in the present and your longing for Jesus to return and bring the Day when all of life will be delight in God’s new creation.

Questions for Reflection:

Was any element of ceasing from labor challenging for me this week? What does this say about how I relate to God? What is one attribute of God and one aspect of his good creation I enjoyed? What am I looking forward to about the eternal rest Jesus will bring at his coming?