

We want to be doers of the word, not just hearers of the word. To that end, it is important that we live in hope, looking to enter into covenants wisely with those who are willing. It is easy to get discouraged, and to close ourselves off from the world. We will spread many seeds in hope, and most will not take root, but those that do will yield a harvest if we do not give up doing good. What are some practical steps we can take to obediently live in hope? How can we spread seeds, inviting others to covenant with us? Here are some practical exercises:

## Day 1

### Set the Tone

Most of us have been raised to be passive. We generally wait for others to make the first move, and only respond when we think it is safe to do so, when the risk of being rejected or looked down upon is low. Living in hope means, among other things, that we take the risk of planting seeds without knowing if they will take root or not. One way to begin to do this is to take the responsibility of setting the tone in your interactions with others. Will this interaction be fun? Warm? Reserved? Melancholy? Most of the time, often even with people we know, we will wait for the other person to let us know how the interaction will play out. We can, however, take the risk of taking responsibility for setting the tone ourselves, both with people we know and with strangers. Imagine entering a room full of strangers, it could be a waiting room at the doctor's office, discount tires, or some other place. How do you enter that room? With a smile? With eye contact? Or do you hope no one notices? When getting into an elevator do you greet others who are already in? When a new person enters the sanctuary at our church, do you greet them and start a conversation? When we try to set the tone in an interaction, we are planting a seed about how the interaction will go, and we will find most people to be grateful and will respond in kind. When we set the tone, we are taking responsibility for how the interaction will play out, doing what is within our power to see ourselves in the other person and to unite with them in humanity. Beginning a habit of doing this will increase the fruitfulness of the vast majority of your interactions, and you will find your confidence increasing. Loving others is not just something we do theoretically, but in numerous practical ways.

Verses: Matthew 28:19, John 15:8, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Peter 4:8

Prayer Topics: Courage, Responsibility, Intention, Instigating

## Day 2

### Manifest Openness

Do you suffer from resting "angry" face? When you think your face is blank, do others ask you what is wrong? Or maybe you have a resting "sad" face, or any number of other facial afflictions that say to others, "No covenant available here!" Our faces, our eyes, and our body language say more to people, especially strangers, than we might suspect. I remember very clearly being a teenager and being annoyed when people asked me if something was wrong. It was then that I knew my resting face was sending the wrong message. Along with my face, many times I am deep in thought and I do not notice those around me, even when they attempt to greet me. I could say, "that is just the way I am," or I can take responsibility for it and endeavor to make sure that my facial expressions and body language are communicating an openness to those around me. With some concentration, it is possible to manifest something other than what we do naturally. You may be tempted to protest that this will make you fake. I am not talking about acting. I am saying that we can remind ourselves to be pleasant and open in a genuine way, to think about those around us in a caring way, instead of being lost in our own thoughts and plans. Our eyes, tone of voice, facial expressions, and posture all communicate what is going on

inside of us. We can discipline our thoughts and attitudes so that what is on the outside is a manifestation of genuine love, care, and concern for others on the inside. Let us not love with words only, but with every part of who we are.

Verses: Proverbs 27:19, Jeremiah 17:10, Proverbs 17:22, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Prayer Topics: Sincerity, Consistency, Graciousness

### Day 3

#### Be Humble

I was watching a video about a famous Hollywood actor that was giving examples from interviews and other unscripted interactions of his famous charisma. What most people found charming about this particular actor was his ability to be engaging with people who were not famous and put them instantly at ease, even though they may be nervous and starstruck. The way this actor accomplished this was by showing genuine admiration about something connected to the other person, and by being humble and self-deprecating. The video claimed that this actor never teased someone unless they were famous like he was, and instead made sure the less famous were given attention for good things, all the while teasing himself and being down to earth. What this was evidence of was not just charm, but a genuine concern for others that was willing to be humble, the actor even looked down at the floor often while speaking, not in a poor me kind of way, but instead in a humble yet confident way. While most of us are not famous and so don't have to practice this sort of charisma often, we can learn the art of using humility to make others feel welcome and valued. In the interactions you have, are you trying to make the other person look and feel good, or are you trying to look and feel good? The bible encourages us to consider others more than ourselves, and meeting someone who honestly does this is a charming experience.

Verses: Philippians 2:3-11, Colossians 3:12, Romans 12:16

Prayer Topics: Modesty, Agreeableness, Character, Tone

### Day 4

#### Have Good Goals

When you talk to others, what is your goal? Is it to convey information? Get something done? Feel better about yourself? Alleviate your loneliness? The problem for most of us is this: we engage in conversations and interactions only for our own purposes, rarely for the benefit of others. It takes real sacrifice, and living in hope to forgo your own agenda and focus instead on building covenant unity with someone else by putting the needs of the other, and the relationship, first. This week, every time you have a conversation, think about a goal that would help the other person, or your relationship with them. Be intentional. Scripture encourages us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and we generally go into every interaction with some kind of goal that benefits us. So, spend some time this week loving someone else the way you love yourself. It will probably be tiring, and you may find that you forget far more than you remember to think of the other person. What can be learned from trying to put someone else first? What difference can it make in your relationships? What benefit can it bring to the other person? The first problem is trying to come up with goals that will be useful to someone else, and that struggle may yield surprising fruit.

Verses: Romans 15:2, 1 Timothy 1:5, John 15:13

Prayer Topics: Aim, Goodness, Selflessness

## Day 5

### See Others

As we walk through the world, we pass others on an almost continual basis. In cars, in grocery stores, in malls, everywhere we look there are people we usually do not notice or give a thought to. Try thinking about them. What can you tell by looking at them and seeing how they are dressed, their facial expressions, and their body language? Are they hopeful? Sad? In a hurry? We spend most of our time in our own inner world, yet in order to have interactions that lead to covenants we must first put our inner world aside to see the world around us and the people that inhabit it. Can we pray for those people as we pass by? Can we hope that their life is blessed, that they gain a knowledge of Christ, that they find His love and a faith in Him? There are innumerable sacrifices that must be made for us to enter into fruitful covenants with those around us, some of these sacrifices are visible, while many are not. The first sacrifice is to open our eyes to those who are surrounding us, and to do this we must lay down some aspects of our own lives. Without this, we can never hope to enter theirs. Will doing this yield fruit? One can hope.

Verses: 1 Peter 3:8, Galatians 6:2, Romans 8:24-25

Prayer Topics: Observation, Discernment, Hope