

[1 Thanksgiving -> Christmas Map] Here we are, about to close out another calendar year. Thanksgiving was just a few weeks ago, and Christmas is a few weeks from now. These are 2 days out of the year that we celebrate by gathering with family, sharing stories and laughing, and most importantly, stuffing our faces with food. And we do so, well beyond the point of full to i don't know if I can get out of this chair right now and move over to that other chair.

But many of us understand this concept, and we give ourselves a bit of a break because we know that once new years hits, we're gonna get back on that eating right train. We have a list of things we want to change this year, and almost always there is one on there about our weight. We're gonna eat healthier, we're gonna eat all organic, we're gonna count calories, whatever it is. We've looked in the mirror and we're gonna make a change, and we're gonna get back into those jeans that have been hanging in our closet for the last 3 years.

I've got a few pairs of pants like that. I even have a pair of pants that i've wanted to get from Express for the last 4 years, but they don't make the size that I am now, so I will have to lose weight to fit in them. I always tell myself that I can lose the weight, it's no big deal, just put your mind to it, but man. I just haven't had success in sticking with it for a long period of time.

I know that I can lose weight because I've done it before. But when I've had success has always been in a competition with some money on the line. I got all the way down to 196 when we first moved here because I wanted to beat Meagan's family for most percentage loss. There was a goal, a reward in mind, that kept me moving forward. But after the competition was over, I went back to mostly the same habits that I had before and since, even though I have a goal weight, and a goal pair of pants, I can't seem to stay on track.

I think we can all relate to this right? We're all bad at this. And not just with weight loss or eating, but with other things as well. Relational things, how we parent, or how we treat our significant others, or our friends. We all can point to something in our life that needs to change. And we've tried and tried, but we haven't had much luck staying the course.

Knowing that something needs to change, even agreeing to make the change, is easy, but actually making the change, that's the hard part.

Over the past few months, we've been dreaming about what the future of Catalyst might be. We know that change is coming, even if we don't know exactly what it's going to look like. Which is perfect for the season that we are in now, Advent. A season of anticipation. This season is for people on the cusp of a change, people who can't tell the future, who know they have to move but don't know where they're going. Advent is for people who refuse to stay safe and comfortable.

And that's why we've called this series "What To Expect When We're Expecting" because much like a family makes preparations when they know a child is on the way, so we must prepare ourselves for the continuing arrival of heaven in the here and now.

[2 Map Week 1 & 2] The first week JR invited all of us to go on this journey of discovery, to find out what God has for us. The first step is to WANT to go to there. We have to desire it before we can be ready for it. Then last week, Shelley shared that in order to reach that future change we have to take the first step, and then the second step, and then another step. It's the small changes that we make along the way that results in a big change down the road.

But as we said before, we can want to change, and have really great intentions to change, we may even begin to make some small steps toward change, but eventually we're gonna hit a difficult spot. It's gonna get tough, and when it does, it'll be easy to quit. We need something, we need an ingredient in our diet, that will help us stay on target.

[3 Thank You Note] What I want to propose today is that ingredient is gratitude. Gratitude that is grounded in our anticipated future keeps us moving forward when change is hard. Gratitude grounded in our anticipated future.

[4 Graduation] Being thankful for what hasn't happened yet sounds crazy i know. Imagine this... A young lady is pregnant and her friends have decided to throw her a baby shower. She accepts and is really excited to see all the decorations and gifts that her thoughtful and creative friends have prepared for her. When she gets there all the decorations seem a little...off. There's caps and gowns, and little rolled up papers with ribbons tied around them. The gifts that she unwrapped aren't diapers and wipes but books like "chicken soup for the college soul" and "the purpose driven life for the graduate." and the letters that are hanging from the wall don't spell out It's a Girl, but instead spell Happy Graduation.

That would be confusing, right? The baby isn't born yet, but everyone came to the party celebrating that child's graduation from high school. You may think that's what I'm telling us to do.

And you'd be right.

As weird as it sounds, that's exactly what I'm asking us to do, because it's in the Bible.

[Scripture slide] If you have a Bible, turn with me to **Zephaniah 3**. If you grabbed one of the free bibles from the back, it's on **page 659**. And if you don't have a bible of your own, please keep it as our gift to you. At this point in the story of God's people, they are not being faithful. They have turned from God and their greatest cities have become dens of evil. But Zephaniah tells them that a day is coming when God will rescue them. Pay attention to what he calls the people to do in the meantime. This section comes at the end of the book, starting at v 14.

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter Jerusalem!  
The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,

he has turned away your enemies.  
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;  
you shall fear disaster no more.  
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
Do not fear, O Zion;  
do not let your hands grow weak.  
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,  
a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness,  
he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing  
as on a day of festival.  
I will remove disaster from you,  
so that you will not bear reproach for it.  
I will deal with all your oppressors  
at that time.  
And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.  
At that time I will bring you home,  
at the time when I gather you;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes, says the Lord.  
(Zephaniah 3:14-20, NLT)

That is a song of great celebration right? A pep rally of ... biblical ... proportions. According to Zephaniah, God will bring victory, God will rejoice over us with singing, that's pretty amazing. That feels real good to the soul. Not only do we sing to God and rejoice over His love, but God sings and rejoices over us. That was mind boggling the first time I heard that passage.

I also find it interesting that when Zephaniah describes all that God will do, these things that represent this anticipated future, this "on earth at it is in heaven", they are super tangible, this-world things. God will remove disasters, and end oppression. The sick will be healed, and the outcast...welcomed and brought home, and not only that, but will turn these outcasts and pushed away into a beacon of hope to the world.

That all sounds amazing, but there's a small problem. All of these things are going to happen... *in the future*. Did you catch that? All the phrases are future tense, "I will.." do this and "I will..." do that. So, that's great and all but what are we supposed to do in the meantime?

It's found in the first line, "Sing aloud... shout...rejoice!" And those are all present-tense, imperative, commands. But what are we rejoicing in? What God is going to do in the future. Rejoice now, be thankful now, for the anticipated future.

[5 Map Thank You Past] But that's not how we normally think of gratitude right? Gratitude isn't something that we normally see as future-oriented. It's past oriented. When someone does something for us, after they've done it, we say thank you. Take the baby shower for instance, we don't send thank you notes out with the invitations right? We send them after the party. after the gifts have been opened.

But if gratitude only works in the past tense when it comes to our journey of discovery, then we will never change, we'll never grow. Because when it comes to change, it almost always gets worse before it gets better. We'd like change to work like a ladder, we just move up a rung. But real change, real progress happens more like a snow ski jump. [VIDEO - Ski Jump Clip] You start here [hand at chin then swoop], and you have to go down before you can fly.

I mean, this was a part of Israel's history. They were slaves in Egypt [hand at chin] and God rescued them and led them to the land that was promised to their ancestors. But the road to the promised land was not an easy one. They needed [hand moves down] water, which is a very legitimate complaint, so God gave them water. They didn't have enough food, [hand moves down] which is a very legitimate complaint right. So God gave them food. They still were unhappy, saying, "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death." (Exodus 16:3 NLT)

Doesn't that seem a little ungrateful? You were slaves. But we had meat in our pots. But you had to work on the hot sun all day long. But we had a roof over our head. [6 Quote] *How easily we forget how bad it was when the road to better gets hard.*

Their journey to the promised land culminates when after sending some guys to check it out, they get scared to the point they decide to [hand moves down] leave. After all the signs and wonders and fulfilled promises of God, they still were not convinced that God would come through for them. Their mindset hadn't changed yet. They still had the mind of a slave, not a free person.

But friends, all change is hard. All change is hard. Even good change. Even freedom from slavery. Even having a baby. Even graduating. Even getting married. Even getting a promotion. Change no matter what kind, good or bad, is hard. ...at least we had meat in our pots.

What keeps us on the road to discovery is gratitude, and the Israelites didn't have it, and so they weren't ready for what God had for them...yet.

But Zephaniah knew this story, every Israelite knew this story, to this day every Jew knows this story like the back of their hand. They know what happens next. They spent [hand moves way down] 40 years in the desert. Which is just awful right? But what begins to happen over

time is that they begin to have faith. [hand moves up slowly while speaking these sentences] They begin to trust. They learn time and time again that this God can be trusted. And so they learn what it means to be grateful. And their minds and hearts begin to change. So that when they arrive at the edge of the Land again, they are ready to enter. Being grateful formed them into the people that were ready to embrace the promise of God.

[7 Map Thank You Future] It works the same way for us. Gratitude forms US into people that are able to embrace God's call. Gratitude IS future-oriented.

I know what this can sound like right? It can sound like, "no matter what crap you're going through, just put a smile on and be happy about it!" That doesn't sound like very good news. And a certain type of reading of some of our worship songs could end up sounding like that, too. "Thank you for the wilderness..." "thank you for the troubled times..." Right? Just whatever you're going through thank God for it.

But, that's not what we're saying. We're not telling you to be thankful for the crap. What those songs, and what we're saying today, is be thankful for who God is forming us to be THROUGH the crap. **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28 NIV)**

God doesn't cause everything, but works through everything, to form us into the people He wants us to be. So our gratitude is for the anticipated future... person, church, community, world that God wants us to be. And if that means going through a desert, then we be grateful THROUGH the desert... because where we are headed is better than where we've been, thank God.

I know that all this may seem pretty abstract. It may be a little hard to see how we really live this way. So I've got a video of a friend, someone that is fairly new to Catalyst, who I began seeing post these pictures on facebook, and I was fascinated by it. So I'm gonna let her tell her own story.

#### [VIDEO - Red Faced Diaries](#)

There's something that happens when you, in the middle of the mess, give thanks for what this crappy time in life might do in the future. Imagining that this really difficult season will have a positive outcome. Not because all bad things turn out good, but because of how God is going to form us through it. You don't have to be thankful FOR it, but you are called to rejoice in the midst of it. Gratitude... grounded in the anticipated future keeps us moving forward when change is hard.

And I know it's not natural. It's easier to complain and be pessimistic. It's easier to shrink back, to dig in your heels and say it's too hard. Because it will be hard. It will be difficult. Any change worth making is going to cost something. Like the Israelites leaving Egypt [hand motions] for the desert before the promised land, our road won't be all sunshine and rainbows. The question is,

can we allow the wilderness to be a place where God can form us into the people that we need to be to embrace that future.

This change that we are talking about isn't arbitrary, it isn't change just for change's sake, it's not just an excuse for us to do something different out of boredom. The change that we are anticipating is a change that God is going to do in us. He has called Catalyst forward into the future. And because of that we know that it can be trusted. Because the one calling us is good, faithful, and trustworthy.

[8 Week 3 Map] In order to be ready for the future that is coming, according to Zephaniah, we need to practice gratitude. The people of God had no idea what the future held, but they knew that a Messiah was coming. They knew that hope was on the way. But it hasn't arrived yet. And that's why we need Advent. It gives us a chance to recognize that, and to embrace it, and specifically today's message is meant to help us see what to do in the meantime, while there's this gap between the way that the world is and the way that God wants it to be.... be grateful for the future that God is bringing into the here and now.

Catalyst is on the road of discovery. We know that the future God has for Catalyst is good, even if we don't know the details. We know that change will happen as we create spaces where everyone can embrace their God-given calling. We know that we need to change and that it's good change. But we also know that at some point it will get difficult, it will be hard. So on your seats when you came in today was a card with some questions that are to help us be thankful every day. Put this card somewhere that you're gonna see it, and let's begin our days thanking God for what is coming. Gratitude is that extra ingredient that will keep us moving forward when the change gets hard.

Imagine what would happen if we all did this. If when struggle and trials hit we became people who chose to show gratitude for what this trial will form us into. It's okay to grieve, it's okay to get frustrated, but what if at the core of our selves we were people of gratitude. How would that change our stress level? How would change the way that we talk about our situation in person or online? If at the core of our being we were grateful in every situation, how would that change our church, your family, your workplace.

Be thankful.

## **COMMUNION SETUP**

Today, we're going to respond by taking communion. This is a meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. One where he took the elements of the story of Israel's Exodus, and reframed them to be the story of humankind's Exodus. Jesus endured the pain of the cross for the redemption of the entire world. He told us that he would not share in this meal with us again until the End comes. By participating today, we enter into this waiting with Jesus. We anticipate his coming reign, and we anticipate with gratitude. This meal is the reminder to us that God is not done with

us. Redemption began at the cross but will culminate in an anticipate future where all these things that Zephaniah said can take place.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to take communion. If you are willing to trust God's promises, to wait faithfully and expectantly, to respond with gratitude as you wait, then you are invited to the table.

Let's pray.