



GOD'S MISSION
■ has a church ■

Sermon Growth Guide

March 2, 2025
Never Give Up



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Never Give Up - Hebrews 12:25-29

Key Verse: Hebrews 12:28

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.”

Big Idea: This life is unstable, but we belong to an unshakable Kingdom, so let us worship with reverence and awe!

Foundations

As we wrap up our “God’s Mission has a Church” series, we have a moment in Hebrews 12:25-29 to reflect on the temporary and “shaky” nature of this world and the “unshakable” kingdom to which we ultimately belong. We know that this world began with a miraculous act of creation but soon moved to a “fallen” state. It is through Christ’s reconciling work that we are carried towards Redemption and receive a promise of full Restoration. That restoration is the coming Kingdom of God, a promise on which we can firmly stand.

The proper response to the news of Christ’s reconciling work and the coming kingdom is worship. In the face of unstable ground, storms of life, brokenness and pain, we stand firm on the promises of the Lord, and re-orient ourselves through worship. May we be a people who are not quick to give up our faith, but are renewed through passionate, authentic, and full worship individually and corporately!

Understanding God’s Word

Read Hebrews 12:25-29 together. Verse 25 warns us not to “refuse him who speaks.” How do we sometimes ignore or resist God’s voice in our lives today?

The passage contrasts “what can be shaken” with “what cannot be shaken.” What are some shaky foundations we tend to trust in rather than God?

The sermon spoke of the grand salvation narrative (Creation – Fall – Redemption – Restoration). How does knowing where we are in God’s story impact our faith?

Applying God’s Word

What are some practical ways we can encourage each other to remain faithful during life’s “shaky” seasons? The early church has faced many challenges, yet it has remained unshakable.

How can we learn from past generations of believers? How does worshiping together with other Christians help us stand firm in our faith?

Witnessing God’s Word

The hymn, “It Is Well with My Soul,” was composed out of tragedy. How might we demonstrate faith and peace to those around us, even in hardship?

How can we help people who feel like their world is shaking find stability in Christ?

The sermon concluded with a call to “never give up.” Who in your life needs encouragement to keep running the race of faith, and how can you be that encouragement?

How many of you have lived through an earthquake? Earthquakes are a consistent reality in many parts of the world. So much so, that we've developed "Earthquake-Resistant" architecture. Amazing! Again, not all of us have lived through something like the images we just looked at, but we've all been on shaky ground in this life at one time or another. Maybe through volatile markets. You think you have financial stability through investments, only to have swings in the market drastically change your plans. Maybe in your health. You exercise and eat well but then get hit with an unexpected diagnosis that changes everything. Maybe in raising kids. You finally figure out a good naptime rhythm with your four-year-old, and then things change. Or you finally feel confident raising an eleven-year-old, and then puberty hits! We stand on shaky ground in this world. So we ask, is it possible to build an "earthquake-resistant" life? Again, we live on shaky ground. So, how might build an unshakable life?

First survey the landscape. To navigate life, we must first understand the terrain we face. Much like studying tectonic plates and fault lines in an earthquake-prone area, we need to comprehend the current state of our world.

Our passage begins by describing people seeking to "escape." But escape from what? We know that the world began with an act of miraculous creation, but it soon fell into a broken state. In Genesis 3, humanity turned away from God, embracing pride and introducing sin and brokenness into the world. This severed the relationship between God and creation, resulting in death—this is what we call "The Fall."

In Hebrews 12, the people are trying to escape death and eternal judgment. Some, like the Pharisees, tried to follow the Mosaic law perfectly. Others, like the Sadducees, built their lives on social status, political power, and wealth. But these are not the paths to eternal life. As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The way to eternal life is Jesus. So, we have Creation, Fall, and now Redemption in Christ.

Later in this service, we'll celebrate the Lord's Supper together. The traditional liturgy for the Supper walks us through this narrative:

"Eternal God, holy and mighty, it is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise... You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. You made us in your image and called us to be your people. [Creation] But we turned from you, leaving sin and death to reign. [Fall] Still, you loved us and sought us. In Christ, your grace defeated death and opened the way to eternal life. [Redemption]"

Creation, Fall, Redemption in Christ—now we look forward to the full Restoration and Consummation. This is the landscape of human history. Redemption is available to us. That's why the author of Hebrews urges us not to ignore the Lord as some have. Those who rejected Jesus when He walked the earth did not escape judgment or death, and neither will we if we ignore the risen Christ. So, do you know Him? Have you turned to Him? Have you experienced His reconciling work in your life?

Second, set a good foundation. Last month, I was browsing camping gear online, and soon after, Google and social media began bombarding me with ads for "survival" gear. I went down the rabbit hole, and now my feeds are filled with prepper and survivalist content for the apocalypse!

There are people completely dedicated to preparing for the worst—tools, bug-out bags, food reserves, and more. While there is wisdom in being prepared for power outages or natural disasters, some go to extreme lengths with over-the-top, paranoia-driven prepping.

This is one temptation we all face. We often try to build our lives on self-sufficiency—whether in the prepper/survivalist realm, through our savings and investments, or by establishing our social status. But building a life on status and wealth is not wise; it's placing our trust in the things of this world, which, as we know, is temporary and shaky.

Another temptation is to build on the foundation of "moralism." We might try to live by a vague notion of being a "good person." But that too is a shaky foundation.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shared a parable about a foolish man who built his house on sand and a wise man who built his house on rock. When rains, floods, and winds came, the house on rock stood strong, while the house on sand collapsed. Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like the wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24).

We lay a strong foundation by putting Jesus' words into action. We're called to lives of discipleship, growing in Christ day by day, month by month, and year by year. As we walk with Jesus and live out His teachings, submitting to the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts and minds, we build a foundation that can withstand life's storms.

Are you in a Life Group? Are you connected with people who challenge you to grow more into the likeness of Christ each week? Let us help you build a firm foundation!

Third, remember God's Faithfulness. Throughout history, Christians have

faced great trials, yet God has remained faithful. Time and time again, people have predicted that the church would be wiped out, but it has endured.

In the first three centuries of its existence, it seemed persecution would stamp out the fledgling Jesus Movement. From Emperor Nero to Diocletian, Christians were relentlessly hunted and executed by the state. And yet, the church grew.

In the mid-20th century, when communism took over China, there were about 4 million Christians. Despite years of severe persecution, the Christian population today is estimated to be between 30 million and 60 million. The church grew.

Today, in the United States, we've seen worship attendance decline sharply after COVID. We've witnessed an alarming number of pastors and priests accused of abuse, and our political landscape has become increasingly volatile. And yet... God is faithful. He does not abandon His people.

Despite the difficult seasons Christians have endured over the last 2,000 years, Christ has always sustained the church. God continues to work through His people. So, we can be encouraged and strengthened as we look back and see God's faithfulness.

Fourth, look to the coming kingdom. Hebrews 12:26-28 says, "At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' The words 'once more' indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain."

It's as if the Lord is grabbing creation by the scruff of the neck to refocus, restore, and reset it on the path He intends. I think of buying a Christmas tree at a lot—where they hook it up to a large shaker that removes dead or loose needles before it's brought into the house.

The Lord has promised His people that He will shake things up to restore all things through a new heaven and earth. This is what we see in Revelation 21:1-4:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"

This world will come to an end, but there is an eternal Kingdom—a good and beautiful Kingdom without death, mourning, crying, or pain. We know that this world is unstable and shaky, but we also know that there will be a restored heaven and earth—a coming Kingdom to which we belong.

When we keep our eyes open, we catch glimpses of this Kingdom. As the Family Ministries Pastor, I'm privileged to have a front-row seat to this through our Next Generation.

First Presbyterian has served under-resourced families in Colorado Springs for over 50 years through Get Set Preschool. Many from this congregation have volunteered to read to children, cook meals, and serve these families in various ways. In the past month, our preschool director, Elsie, has walked alongside a mother experiencing homelessness, helping her get back on her feet. Week after week, with the support of deacons and Sunday communities, Elsie, representing FirstPres, is loving like Jesus and sharing Christ's love with a family in great need. That's a glimpse of the coming Kingdom.

In January, a group of our Young Adults traveled to the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. They participated in Faith and Film workshops while wrestling with God's call to be "Culture Makers" (or in our values language, to "Make Beauty"). These 20-somethings are seeking to engage culture with their faith at the forefront, aiming to communicate the coming Kingdom to our city.

We've just re-launched the Kids Choir on Wednesday evenings (they'll help lead us on Palm Sunday). The other week, I watched as Rachel, Adam, and Chris O showed our children that music is a gift from God we use to glorify Him. My own children came home describing how music helps us worship the Lord and focus on Him. Another glimpse of the coming Kingdom.

Last weekend, I was at Sky Ranch in Westcliffe with our youth team. I witnessed high-school-aged student leaders guiding middle schoolers through discussion groups, helping them process the messages from each session and understand God's love for them. I also heard the testimony of a courageous young woman who has survived the death of a parent, a horrific car accident, and many other challenges in recent years. Yet, she stands strong, saying that the Lord has walked with her and sustained her through it all.

Church, a generation is rising up to carry the faith into a new season. There are glimpses of the Kingdom breaking through, and it leads us to...

Finally: Worship! Let's read the final verses of our passage together:

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'" (Hebrews 12:28-29)

In the face of unstable ground, storms of life, brokenness, and pain, we stand firm on the promises of the Lord and are reoriented through worship. We know that shaking will come in this life, but we belong to an "unshakable kingdom." This verse presents worship as the solid place to stand. Worship is one way we are replenished so that we can carry on to the end of God's mission.

It reminds me of the story of Horatio Spafford. Spafford was a lawyer in Chicago in the late 19th century, and his family was no stranger to the shaky ground of life. In 1871, he and his wife, Anna, lost their son to pneumonia. That same year, the Great Chicago Fire destroyed most of their real estate business. Still, they continued in life and faith and rebuilt their business.

Two years after the fire, Spafford sent his wife and four daughters to Europe for a vacation while he stayed behind to finish some business. Several days into their voyage across the Atlantic, the ship carrying his family collided with another vessel. Within minutes, the ship sank, killing 226 passengers, including all four of Spafford's children.

Anna survived and sent a telegram to her husband: "Saved alone, what shall I do?" Horatio immediately boarded the next available ship to join his wife. As they passed the spot where his children had died, the captain called him up to the deck. In that moment, Spafford found words of comfort and hope, and he wrote down a poem attempting to capture his feelings. The words have since become the beloved hymn:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
it is well, it is well with my soul.

Incredible. Worship and surrender to Christ during one of the shakiest moments imaginable.

May we also be a people who don't give up our faith easily, but who are renewed through passionate, authentic, and full worship—both individually and corporately!

Friends, we come to the table of the Lord this morning. This meal is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet (Revelation 19:9). It offers another glimpse of the Kingdom that is to come—a Kingdom where we are sustained by the Lord, in right relationship with Him and with one another, where we feast and celebrate in the presence of

the King.

This meal should also remind us of another earthquake. In Matthew 27, as Jesus was on the cross:

"50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split, 52 and the tombs broke open... 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:50-52a; 54)

With an earthquake, the Son of God gave up His spirit for you and for me.
With an earthquake, the Son of God died for the sins of you and me.
With an earthquake, the Son of God made a way for us to have eternal life in the coming Kingdom.

And then, a few days later...

"After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen...'" (Matthew 28:1-6a)

With an earthquake, the stone was rolled back, death was defeated, Jesus Christ overcame the powers of darkness, and the coming Kingdom drew ever closer.

When we're tempted to give up or despair... when our world is shaken... when we're asking, "When will this end?!?" We rest assured on the promise that, in the end, God is victorious. It has been sealed in the blood of Christ and witnessed in His resurrection.

So, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus... (Hebrews 12:1-2) And let us NEVER GIVE UP worshipping Him with reverence and awe.