

Anchoring My Life In Hope

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:5)

Life is filled with deep disappointment, unbearable loss, excruciating pain. Where is this loving, caring God of ours? The Bible says God would be the first to agree that things are not the way they are supposed to be. This is not the world of peace and harmony that God long envisioned and first made. Since Adam and Eve's stumble in Eden, **all creation has been "subjected to frustration" and in "bondage to decay"** (Romans 8). Has God, then, lost control of His world? Far from it. Even though this is not the world that was to be, God will make things right.

Life can be the pits. But hope is faith's answer to the "God is good but life is hard" problem. Hope holds stubbornly to the belief that—by God's grace—what should be is what will be. Imprisoned in a concentration camp during World War II, a Polish Jew wrote: **"I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when I am alone. I believe in God even when He is silent."**

Hope is that sense of "longing mixed with anticipation" familiar to anyone who has ever had to wait for a birthday or the circus. -- desire and expectation all rolled into one. Because we hope with confidence and expectation we can endure temporarily difficult circumstances with patience and joy. It is God's work in us but our responsibility to nurture and guard: We are challenged to take hold of, be sure of, and hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.

The writers of Scripture caution us against putting our hope in anything short of God. Any hope short of God Himself will fail to satisfy our needs and longings. **"Put your hope in God!"** the Bible sounds out again and again (Psalm 42:5). Negative circumstances are equally adept at crowding out our view of deeper realities. When illness strikes, we cannot look beyond the pain. Grief blocks the view when a loved one dies, embarrassment clouds our vision when we are fired from a job, weariness and resentment get in our way when we care for an aging parent, and loneliness crowds the window when an engagement falls through.

Despair comes when we believe what our eyes tell us: that when difficult circumstances play their hand, the game is over; there is no trump card, no other hand to be played. Holding fast to hope means being unwilling to let circumstances have the last word. Despair says

circumstances tell us what is true about God. Hope says God tells us what is true about circumstances.

How do we strengthen our grip on the hope that threatens to slip through our grasp? Close your eyes to the obsessive pull of circumstances. When circumstances crowd out your view of God, stop looking at them. Shut your eyes.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Romans 12:12

Quit believing that life stops when pain starts. God insists that pain has a place in His redemptive work. He uses it for great good in us: finishing portions of our interior that until now have only been roughed in, cleaning up the stain of sin, molding us into a portrait of His Son, drawing us into His loving embrace, reminding us of the things that matter most, and so much more. If we run from pain, we may miss out on important growth God wants to produce in us.

Remember the goodness of God. The greatest temptation in hard times is to believe that God is not up to the task. Not so. Look behind you at past evidence of God's loving purposes. Sure life is hard, but when has God failed you or forgotten you? When has He overlooked your difficulties or left you alone to face them? When has your pain proved barren? God is always good. Lay hold of His loving character. We may not know His purposes, but we do know His heart.

Live with one eye fixed on heaven. Our senses scream that this is all there is—that life is the sum total of profession plus possessions, and death ends it all. When we believe this, we invert life as God intended it and start caring about all the inconsequential things: status, wealth, looks, power, control. Inevitably, this life's allurements will disappoint us. Pascal reminds us what is really true: "Eternally in joy for a day's training on earth." On my harder days, I find sighs escaping my lips, sighs of hope that say, "One day, one day . . ." This world is neither our home nor our hope. Both wait just round the corner from this life. Hope is letting God have the last word.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23

Adapted From: Hope: Anchoring Your Heart To A Sure And Certain Future by David W. Henderson, Discipleship Magazine, Issue 114, Nov/Dec 1999