

## The Soul's Search for Hope by Harry Metzger

The topic in our first presentation of *Hope4HeavyHearts* is simply ... hope, specifically, *The Soul's Search for Hope*. Medical and religious leaders agree that maintaining and fostering hope is essential for a purposeful and fulfilling life. A life without hope is a life that is struggling and often seemingly empty.

The pandemic that we are currently facing has brought changes to all our lives. For many, these unexpected changes can easily make us feel discouraged and seemingly helpless and hopeless. We all have expectations and goals for our life, our relationships, our future, our finances, etc. In the pandemic, our circumstances have changed, leaving many with fears and uncertainties about the future. However, hope allows us to maintain a sense of optimism, faith, and even enthusiasm about our lives and our futures.

So what is hope and why is it so important?

Before we define hope, let me share with you a couple of instances to show how essential hope is. Some of the cruelest circumstances ever endured by humans were the ordeals faced by people in the German concentration camps during World War II, the infamous death camps. Studies were made of those that survived the concentration camps. One of the main things that researchers were able to isolate in the lives of the survivors, opposed to those who did not survive, was the importance of maintaining hope. I remember reading about one prisoner who was a college professor before being placed in the camps. He was able to survive the horrors he endured by maintaining his hope. He did this by envisioning himself as teaching his students once again after he was released from the concentration camp. He actually pictured himself standing before his students in the future. He believed he could use the hardships he experienced in the concentration camp as instruments to better teach his future students about life and its meaning.

Two of the most famous concentration camp survivors were Viktor Frankel and Elie Wiesel. Both wrote about their experiences in the concentration camps, realizing the necessity of maintaining hope even in the darkest days. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankel wrote, "The one thing you can't take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance." Thankfully, we are able to choose our attitudes even in trials and difficulties and sorrows. A hopeful attitude is something that can help us to overcome those difficulties and sorrows.

Wiesel wrote about gratitude, a key ingredient to maintaining hope. "When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost be defined by his or her attitude toward gratitude."

One of the more well-known passages in the Bible tells us why hope is so important in our daily lives. Part of Ecclesiastes chapter 3 became popular when the words were put to music and performed by *The Byrds* and *Peter, Paul and Mary*. The song was entitled *Turn, Turn, Turn*. Here are the words of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

*There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—*

<sup>2</sup> *A time to give birth and a time to die;  
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.*  
<sup>3</sup> *A time to kill and a time to heal;  
A time to tear down and a time to build up.*  
<sup>4</sup> *A time to weep and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn and a time to dance.*  
<sup>5</sup> *A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;  
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.*  
<sup>6</sup> *A time to search and a time to give up as lost;  
A time to keep and a time to throw away.*  
<sup>7</sup> *A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;  
A time to be silent and a time to speak.*  
<sup>8</sup> *A time to love and a time to hate;  
A time for war and a time for peace.*

These verses tell us that, in this world, there will be good things that happen to us and also difficult things that will happen to us. It is especially true that we need to maintain hope in the midst of those difficult things (*"a time to die, a time to give up as lost, a time to weep"*, etc.).

So, again, what is this essential virtue of hope, and why is it so important for you and me? In the Bible, the apostle Paul in the Book of Romans says that we are to continually rejoice in hope. (See Romans 12:12.)

If you look up the definition of hope in a dictionary you will find definitions such as the following. "Hope is a feeling or desire for something." "Hope is confidence in the possibility of the fulfillment of something good."

So, let us look at rejoicing in light of these definitions, because we are to rejoice always in hope. How do we rejoice in "a feeling or desire for something"? How do we rejoice "in confidence in the possibility of the fulfillment of something good"?

The problem is that we have lost the power, meaning, and purpose of hope. In our culture, hope seems to be little more than wishful thinking. We hope that we will have a nice day in the park. We hope that we will get a promotion. We hope for a sunny day. (Or, others hope for a rainy day to help nourish their vegetable gardens.) In our society, hope has become little more than wishful thinking. Where is the power, where is victory, where is the optimism, where is the faith in such wishful thinking?

I maintain that we need to rediscover the power of hope as seen in the Bible. Hope is not merely wishful thinking, nor is it some faint desire for an impossible situation to be realized.

I would like to propose to you a different definition of hope, one based on teachings of the Bible. In this definition there truly is power and optimism and victory- in short - hope. Here is my definition: **Hope is the joyful and confident assurance of the goodness and protection of God, in this life and in the next life.** Or, we could say that hope is the confidence that God's promises will be fulfilled. In the Bible, hope

is not so much a confidence in some future event, but, a confidence in God. In the Psalms, which is the “song book” of the Bible, we find this confidence and assurance in God expressed several ways. Here are a few of them.

*“I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.”* (Psalm 27:13) In this Psalm, it is especially important to note that King David saw himself in a very trying situation. At the beginning of the Psalm, King David pictures himself being surrounded by a host of an enemy army. Even in this situation, he believed that he would see the goodness of God.

*“Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.”* (Psalm 42:5) D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a famous British pastor refers to Psalm 42 as “soul talk.” By this he means that the Psalm is an example of the need for people to give their inner persons an occasional pep talk, calling our souls to remember to maintain a hope in God.

*“For You are my hope; O Lord God, You are my confidence from my youth.”* (Psalm 71:5)

Hope is not an expectation in a future event, or for circumstances to change. Hope is a confidence in God, believing in His protection and kindness.

Here are some practical steps to foster hope in your daily life.

First, **Look for opportunities to serve.** One of the quickest ways to develop hope, in your difficult circumstances, is to look for opportunities to serve someone else. An acquaintance of mine, working in a medical facility in Chicago, found that the spirits of the patients were greatly lifted by giving them simple tasks to do, such as sorting the mail, or keeping the hallways clean. These acts of service brought hope and encouragement to the patients. Who is the person that you know that needs help, or an encouraging note, or a friendly phone call, or simply a word of blessing or kindness. Many people have found that in looking to serve others they have found that their spirits have been greatly blessed and lifted. Great benefits can come to you as you look to assist others. This can bring hope to you.

Secondly, **Develop gratitude.** It is difficult for discouragement, sadness, or hopelessness to dominate a life that is truly thankful. People have found their spirits are lifted by simply making a list of things for which they are grateful. I usually encourage people to make sure it's not a simple list of 10 items or so. I would encourage you to strive to write down at least 25 specific things for which you are grateful. In the book, *One Thousand Gifts*, [Ann Voskamp](#) tells her story of writing down 1000 specific things for which she was thankful. The first 20 or 30 items were fairly easy, but as she got up into the hundreds, it became much more difficult. As she got closer and closer to the 1000 items of gratitude, she found her life was truly changed. Genuine gratitude, even in the most simple and mundane things of life, is the seed that can transform your life and bring hope and encouragement.

In addition, **Recognize the good that may result from your difficult trials.** In the Bible, suffering and trials seem to be the normal experience for God’s people, rather than the exception. While we are in

this life, we must overcome. The difficulties we experience can help us grow. We can rejoice in difficulties, not because we like the pain, but because we know that God can use it to build our character. Note the progression from difficulties to a changed life that we see in Romans 5:3-5. "We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint," The end product of our trials is **hope**. In trials and sorrows, our patience is often tested every day. But, the end product of that testing can be hope.

Fourthly, **Share your burdens with a friend**. We were never meant to carry our burdens and sorrows by ourselves. In the Bible, it tells us that we are to bear one another's burdens (see Galatians 6:2), and that God Himself will bear our burdens (see Psalm 68:19). We are also told to "Cast your burdens upon the Lord and He will sustain you" (Psalm 55:22). If you are uncertain about with whom you can share your burdens, please consider contacting your local church. Or, if you would like, please contact our ministry, *Hope4HeavyHearts*. We are always looking for opportunities to serve and encourage people in our communities.

Our final practical step to developing and maintaining hope is to **Draw near to God**. If it is true that your hope is found in God, then it is important for you to draw near to Him. You can do this by reading your Bible. I like to encourage people to begin reading the Gospel of Mark so that they can see who Jesus truly is and understand the help that He can bring to people. (If you do not have a Bible, please contact us and we would be happy to give you an easy-to-read translation of the Bible.) You can also draw near to God by simply pouring out your heart to Him, telling Him of your needs and desires. I truly believe God is pleased when we are open and honest with Him. The third way to draw near to God is to enjoy friendship and hospitality with others. Again, please contact your local church, or contact our ministry. We would be happy to try to encourage you in any way possible.

And so, in conclusion, please remember that hope is ultimately found in God and in His promises. A hopeful life is essential for a fulfilling life. But, hope can be, and must be developed and maintained.

Thank you for listening/reading. Please let us know if you found this information helpful. If you have any questions, or if there are specific ways in which we can be of service to you, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We will look forward to bringing more helpful material to you next week. Our next topic will be forgiveness. In all my marriage counseling situations, I have had to help people understand and learn to live with a spirit of forgiveness. We will be providing you with a link to a podcast entitled "What Does Real Forgiveness Look Like". In this episode, three people from the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation, Andrew Ray, Cecelia Berhardt, and Winston Smith talk about forgiveness and its importance for our lives and relationships.

We trust you will have a great, and hopeful, day!

