

LIVING IN HOPE

As believers in the Almighty God, we have good hope. The Lord is the living, all-powerful God, who has a plan of salvation for his people, and so we can have a lot of hope, no matter what the immediate circumstances of life may be.

What does the Bible say about hope? Hope can be translated as to tarry, to wait, to hope for, to endure, or to long for. So hope is not just that you set your heart on something or that you look forward to something, but that you're willing to wait for it. Hope is an attitude of expectation and trust that a desire will be fulfilled. It also has a connotation of waiting patiently, knowing that God has promised help and deliverance.

In the Bible, the most common object of hope is the Lord. Time and again we are encouraged to hope in the Lord. We don't hope for eternal life in the first place. Nor do we primarily hope for health or wealth or deliverance from sin or enemies. In the first place it is about the Lord Himself. "Hope in the Lord," say the psalmists.

In Isaiah 40 the Israelites were about to go into exile, an experience that would cause them tremendous anguish, doubt and fear. God sent Isaiah to them to say, *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."* What is the source of this comfort? God Himself (vs 12f). Don't forget that God is a shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is powerful and the nations who will bring them into exile *"are as a drop in the bucket, they are counted as small dust on the scales"* (vs 15). *"He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might, he increases strength. Even the youths shall be faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who **hope** on the Lord shall renew their strength, they should mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint"* (vs 29-30). Put your trust in God, expect your help from Him because He is all powerful and He loves you.

Throughout the Bible, God teaches us that He can be trusted, because He makes promises and then keeps them. He promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Saviour to rescue His people from their sins. And then He set all of world history rolling to make his promise come true. He promised Abraham that he would have a son, even though he was 100 years old and his wife was 90. *"Against all **hope**, Abraham in **hope** believed"* (Rom 4). On the basis of that hope Abraham became the father of many nations, and through him the Saviour was born.

The Lord told the Israelites they were going to go into Egypt for 400 years, and then He would rescue them and bring them into their own land. God did exactly that and at the end of the book of Joshua it says, *"Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled"* (Joshua 21:45). The people learned to hope in God because He is trustworthy; He keeps his word. God fulfilled His promise to David that he would always have a son to rule on the throne. Later when the LORD sent his people into exile, he promised to rescue them after 70 years. When God fulfilled this promise, the people again learned to put their hope in Him.

In the NT, our hope finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection marks the beginning of a new age. When our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, He died on the cross to pay for sin. He overcame sin and was raised to a new life. He is now seated on the throne in heaven. We are now called to put our hope in Him for all God's promises are fulfilled through Him.

What does hope look like in real life?

When it comes to safety, for instance, where do we put our trust? We moved here from a small prairie town in Canada, a very safe community. People often don't lock their houses; farmers leave the keys in their machines; there are no fences around the schools. It was quite an adjustment coming here and hearing stories of houses being broken into, cars being torched, bikes being stolen, kids being assaulted on the way to/from school. In these kinds of situations, where do we put our trust? In our security alarm? Our dog? The police? The temptation is to put our hope in many different things. But only One can be trusted. If you set your hope on the living God, the Father who knows you, loves you and cares for you, then you have true and lasting hope. The Lord often tells us not to set our hope in other people or other things, but in Him alone. In Psalm 18:1-3, David says, *"I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from my enemies."* If you want protection, then set your hope in the Lord. You can call upon Him and He will be your stronghold. One of my favorite texts is Proverbs 18:10, *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."* There will be times when difficult things happen. In those times, the Lord calls us to hope in Him.

One of the difficult times is facing death. God teaches us to trust him even then. I know a brother in a previous congregation who had a lot of this hope. He had many near-death experiences. In World War 2 he ended up in a concentration camp and lived through one of the largest bombing raids in history. He and a few friends ran into one of the bunkers. But since the bunker only held 300 people and was filled with Germans, they were kicked out. The only place left was a coal mine nearby, but if a bomb landed on the mouth of the mine, they would be buried alive. They hid in the mine and stayed there for 24 hours. When he came out of the mine, he discovered that a bomb had fallen through an air duct in the bunker and killed all three hundred Germans inside.

He learned very personally about the providence of God. He experienced God's loving care after his first wife passed away from cancer and his second wife passed away from a stroke. A few years later, when he was over 90 he was diagnosed with throat cancer. A nurse sat down with him to go through a list of questions he had answered on an intake form. She said, "One of the questions here asks: how concerned are you about the fact you have cancer? You have circled '0 – not worried at all'. Do you understand the question? You have throat cancer. You could die from this." He replied that yes, he did understand the question. He told her he was not afraid of dying. "The Lord has been my God and has been faithful to me all my life. He has promised to take care of me, and if I die, I will go to be with him forever. So whether I live or die, it's going to be okay." The brother had very little anxiety because he had a great deal of hope and trust in the promises of God. That's the gift of our Father. He really inspires hope in us. As it says in Psalm 16:9-11, *"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."*

At funerals, I love to read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, *"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have **no hope**. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall*

always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." We do not have to be afraid in the face of death because we have hope in the promise of eternal life.

Another area where the LORD inspires hope in us is in the context of sin. At times sin has power in our lives; we commit the same sin over and over again, and we wonder if we will ever be set free. Some people give up hope; they feel that sin will always rule their life.

Once I was invited to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. What struck me was the way everyone introduced themselves. "Hi my name is Bob. I am an alcoholic and I've been dry for 12 years." "Hi my name is Shelley. I am an alcoholic and I've been dry for 3 months." "Hi my name is Bill. I am an alcoholic and I've been dry for 6 years." They seemed to define themselves by their addiction. That is their identity. I appreciate the fact that they understand how powerful sin can be. They are saying, "This has been a struggle in my life. I've been set free from it, but I recognize that I still struggle and am still fighting against it."

I've also committed a lot of sin in my life. But my sin does not define me; my relationship with my Saviour does. "My name is Dirk Poppe and I am a child of God. I belong to Jesus Christ. He died on the cross for my sin and He has promised to rescue me from my sins with his precious blood." Sin does not have power over you. You are not under law, as Paul says in Romans 6, because you believe in Jesus Christ. Christ will set you free from the power of sin. God wants to give us great hope that sin will not be our master because he says: you are not under law, but under grace. Sin can be a powerful force and it can lead you into terrible places. But it doesn't define you. Jesus Christ defines you. He is the one who has rescued you from your sins. God forgives us for Christ's sake and He promises to renew us with His Holy Spirit. That's the promise of baptism. You have been washed from your sins and through His Holy Spirit God promises to make you into a new person. I love 1 Peter 1:3-5: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to **a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* We have a living hope in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Set your eyes on Him and He will set you free from sin, make you into a new person and bring you into His eternal inheritance.

God also encourages us to have hope in His power to care for his creation. Many people are worried that man is destroying creation. It is true that people can and have done terrible harm to God's creation. The book of Revelation describes the ecological consequences of man's rebellion against God. Sin leads to great distress, not only in our lives, but also in creation.

But the LORD has also promised to preserve His creation. In Genesis 8:21-22 after the flood and Noah's sacrifice to God, it says, *"And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer and day and night shall not cease.'"*

Listen to what He says in Romans 8:18-21, *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it **in hope**; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."* One day God is going to renew His creation. There will be no more corruption. The word for corruption means that things degenerate and break

down so that they don't work anymore. We have the promise of a new world, where things will work and there will be no more brokenness.

Closely tied to God's care over creation is His care over us, His people. Scripture describes God as a Father who cares for us. In Matthew 7 the Lord tells us to ask him for whatever we need. We can pray with good hope because God says that he will indeed provide for you. Look at the sparrows, they don't sow or spin, yet the Lord provides for them. You can ask, you can knock and you can seek, the Lord will hear and He will answer. There are passages in the scriptures where the Lord promises these material blessings. Psalm 37:7-9, *"Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret – it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who **wait** [hope] on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth."*

This text was a real encouragement for a contractor in northern BC who put in an application to build a large building in town. He didn't get the contract because his competition slandered him. He found comfort in this psalm, knowing that the Lord is God and that he doesn't need to fret about the evil doer. The Lord will take care of us. In the end, the meek will inherit the earth. A meek person is deeply humble before God. When you are humbly dependent on God, the Lord will provide you with everything you need. In the end you will inherit the earth. It's the promise of current provision and it's also the promise of a future blessing in a new world. Blessed are the meek for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ takes the words of Psalm 37 and applies it to those who believe in Him.

There are a lot of other contexts in which the Lord encourages us to hope. I could talk about hope for restored health. We had a dear friend who at 42 years old was diagnosed with cancer – T-cell lymphoma. We wrestled with the Lord in prayer for him, praying for healing. One passage we read most commonly was Psalm 41:1-3, *"Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; you will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; you will sustain him on his sickbed."* This man was very kind to the poor, he had a big heart and did a lot of good for many people. So we prayed this prayer often and we asked the Lord that He would indeed preserve him. In the end the Lord took him home, leaving behind a wife and three teenage children. We had hoped for restored health, but God had a different plan. Does that mean God cannot be trusted? God is a loving Father who delights to give us good gifts and who often gives us what we want. But he knows things that we have no clue about, and he knows what we need better than we do. We can fully trust that whatever he sends us is for our very best. We have to remember to put our hope in God, and not the "thing" that we want. Otherwise that "thing" has replaced God. Sometimes He has a better plan for us and does things differently than we expect. Then we can humbly submit to his plan, knowing that anything else would be bad for us.

Every night for a whole year, one of our sons, 3 years old, prayed that the Lord would be with Mr. D. Then he passed away, and that night, this boy got down on his knees and prayed his usual prayer. "Dear Lord, please be with Mr. D . . ." He stopped and looked at his mom and at that moment, they both realized: God *is* with Mr D! Right now! God had answered that prayer in a way that we had not expected and we laughed with delight and wonder at God's ways that are beyond our ways.

Another context in which the Lord encourages us to hope is when we are depressed. There are quite a few passages in the scriptures where God's people struggle profoundly. The darkest psalm in the Bible is by Heman: Psalm 88. He has been abandoned by his friends, his family members, his wife. He has one foot in

the grave and is as good as dead. He is very sad and is suffering profoundly. Darkness is his closest friend, he says in the last verse. Yet in the midst of that suffering he still has hope. He still cries out to the Lord his God for help and salvation. In the dark times, the greatest comfort we have is that we are not on our own. The Lord is our God and He carries us through these things. He will walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death. He is near us, He cares for us and carries us through. That's one of the greatest comforts that scripture has for us when we are in this very dark place. Psalm 42:1-5 says, *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, 'Where is your God?' When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? **Hope** in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance."*

God also teaches us not to put our hope in the wrong things or we will be sorely disappointed. The Lord warns us not to put our hope in other people. People will disappoint you. They say things that are inappropriate, they do things that are hurtful and sinful. They don't have the power to change our lives. Psalm 118:8-9 says, *"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes."* Again in Psalm 146:3-5, *"Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose **hope** is in the Lord his God."* When you put your hope in the Lord your God, then you are happy. If you keep reading through Psalm 146 it talks about all the blessings that God gives to people in all sorts of different situations. It talks about the widow and the orphan, about people who suffer due to oppression and injustice. It talks about many different contexts where God's people need His help. The message is: if you put your hope in the Lord, He will carry you through.

Another bad place to put our hope is in wealth. In Psalm 49 the psalmist says, whatever you do, don't put your hope in wealth. It's worthless in the day of disaster. Money can't save you, it doesn't help you. Proverbs 23:5 says, *"Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle."* (NIV) We don't often think about the possibility of losing all our money. But if you are a student of history, you will know that money does not last forever. Money comes and money goes. There is a multitude of ways in which people lose their money. If you set your hope on money, you are going to be sorely disappointed. 1 Timothy 6:17 says, *"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy."*

The Lord also warns us not to put our trust in horses, in the military. *"No king is saved by the multitude of an army, a mighty man is not delivered by great strength, a horse is a **vain hope** for safety, neither shall it deliver any by its great strength."* (Psalm 33:16-17) If you put your hope in these wrong things, then you set yourself up for disaster. Instead of having hope for the future, you become cynical.

Western culture used to be a very optimistic culture. At one time, that optimism was based on hope in God. It was based on a biblical Protestant world view: The Lord is our God, we set our hope in the Lord, and with Him as our God we can scale the highest wall, we can do anything. That independent, entrepreneurial spirit was based on this faith in God. In the last 50 to 100 years our society has lost its faith in God. So what does our society have faith in now? Roosevelt told the nation to "have faith in faith." Julie Andrews in the Sound of Music says, "have confidence in confidence alone." Or Disney promises that you will live happily ever. But

people learn very quickly that bad stuff happens in life, and they don't know how to make sense of it. They have no One to go to with their pain and disappointment. They lose their optimism and they lose a sense of hope. If you put your hope in anything else besides God, you will be sorely disappointed and you will end up being cynical. If you read the news, you find a lot of this cynicism. People don't have hope and don't expect things to be better in the future.

The ten spies in the book of Joshua had a cynical attitude which came from their lack of hope in God. They spied out the land and said, "We can't do it, they are too powerful. If we try it, we will lose. They are like mighty men and we are little grasshoppers, so let's not even try." Joshua and Caleb have a different attitude. "The Lord will give us victory! He has promised it. So let's go and fight because the Lord is with us." What a beautiful picture of hope. What a contrast between a life of cynicism and a life of faith. If we put our hope in the Lord, then we can have good hope for the future.

I encourage you to grow in hope before the Lord. Learn to live in prayer. Learn to know the promises of God. What has God promised you? What has He said to you? As you know the promises of God, you can pray those promises back to Him. Use those promises to wrestle with God in prayer for the things that you need. You say 'God, you have promised to forgive my sins for Jesus' sake, so I trust you are going to do that. You have promised to renew me, so I trust that this sin is not going to have power over me in the same way for the rest of my life. God you have promised an eternal life for me, so I trust that even though I have this illness, even though it looks like I'm coming to the end of this life, that there is a future for me, that I have good hope that I get to live with you.' Read the scriptures, look for God's promises, engage with God in prayer around these promises. Ask God to do for you what He said he will do.

Know also that it is often through suffering that the Lord builds our hope in Him. When we suffer we learn to grow in hope. We learn that we cannot do life on our own and other people can't help us either. Then we cast ourselves upon the Lord, because the Lord is the only one who can make it different. Often when you suffer, the Lord is not leaving you or abandoning you, but teaching you to live in hope. He seeks to draw you close to Him. He even says that in Romans 5:3-5, *'And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, **hope**. Now **hope** does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.'* God not only tells you to have hope, He also gives it to you. Romans 15:13 says, *'Now may the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.'*

I would like to leave you with the words of 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, *'Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good **hope** by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.'*

LIVING IN HOPE

What is hope?

The Hebrew and Greek words for hope can be translated as to tarry, wait, hope for, endure, long for and expect.

Hope – attitude of expectation and trust that a desire will be fulfilled. It also has the connotation of waiting patiently, especially in difficult circumstances since you know that God has promised help and deliverance. Closely connected to faith. Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Hope provides the basis for asking God for things in prayer.

In this sense it is also closely connected with love. The basis of our hope is that God loves us. He told us in Matthew 7 to ask and we will receive for He is a good Father who loves to give us good gifts.

Hope is a really beautiful attitude. It leads to peace, security, comfort, a buoyant spirit, renewed energy, joy and laughter.

Biblical overview of hope

Hope is closely related to the character of God. Because God is the hope of the righteous, they can expect good things from Him and wait patiently for His help and deliverance. This hope is anchored in the story of what God has done for His people over history. If you don't put your hope in God, you have a false hope that will eventually come to nothing.

God instills hope in His people right after fall into sin by promising to crush the devil and rescue His people (Genesis 3:15).

Hope built up by God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 12 – great nation, land of Canaan, all nations on earth blessed through him.

Then the exodus, wilderness journey, and conquest of Canaan provide confidence in God's continuing aid and protection.

God's fulfillment of His promise to David that his son would always rule inspired great hope that all history was in God's control and He would fulfill all His promises.

In Canaan, Baal threatened Israel's hope in God. They were tempted to look to false gods instead of putting hope in living God. The people fell into this sin which led to the exile.

During the exile, it is on the basis of God's covenant mercy that the people looked to God in hope for deliverance (Jeremiah 14:8). The hope they had was not based on the improvement of the character of the people. The prophets lament the unfaithfulness and disobedience of the people. But they also voice God's determination not to destroy the people (Hosea 11:8ff). The crowning feature of the prophetic message of hope was the Messianic King through whom all God's promises would be fulfilled (Isaiah 11:1).

The New Testament concept of includes trust in God, patient waiting for Him to fulfill His promises and confidence in the future. But in New Testament hope rests on God's salvation work in Christ. Christ's resurrection marks the beginning of a new age. We hope that the God who has raised Jesus from the dead, will fulfill all His promises to us.

People who lived in hope

The Bible is full of examples of people who put their hope in God.

Abraham – Rom 4:16-22 hoped he would be father of many nations

Jacob and Joseph – Gen 49:29, 50:25 command descendants to bring bones back to Canaan, the land of promise.

David – Psalm 37:5-11, “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way. ... But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

Anna and Simeon at temple – waiting for the consolation of Israel

Hope in relation to creation

Creation suffers under bondage because of our sins. But God will uphold and renew his creation: Genesis 8:21-22; Psalm 104; Romans 8:18-25

What undermines hope?

Not knowing the promises of God

If you don't know the redeeming power of God and how God makes us alive in Christ so that we are set free from sin (Romans 6), then you will not hope for a change in lifestyle.

If you don't know about the promise of God that He will bring us into a new world, then you can lose hope in the midst of all the brokenness of this world.

Hoping for things God hasn't promised you

On the other hand, if you set your hope on things that God hasn't promised you, then you can easily get to this place where you think that God has failed you. Some foolish things people hope in:

People - Psalm 118:8-9; 146: 3-5

Wealth - Psalm 49; Proverbs 23:5; 1 Timothy 6:17

Horses (military) - Psalm 33:17

If they don't help, you blame God and get cynical.

Paul Miller in *The Praying Life* has a chapter on cynicism and defeated weariness.

How do you grow in hope?

Engage in an active life of prayer - Matthew 7:7-11

Suffering often leads to hope - Romans 5:3-5; 15:4

Know God and call His promises to mind:

Life and blessing - Psalm 37:7-11; Jeremiah 17:5-8; 29:10-14

Peace and joy in face of death - Psalm 16:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Peter 1:3-5

Joy in times of trial - Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4

Deliverance - Psalm 18:1-3; 25:1-6; 31:19-24; 33:16-22; Prov 18:10

Justice - Psalm 72; 146

Strength to weary- Isaiah 40:25-31

Comfort - Psalm 23; 42:1-5; 121

Forgiveness - Psalm 130; Lamentations 3:21-26

Other blessings of living in hope

Leads to holy life -Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 1 John 3:1-3

Offers protection in spiritual war - 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11

Leads to opportunities to witness to others - 1 Peter 3:15-16

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Do you think it is important to live in hope? Why or why not?
2. What do the people in the Bible hope for most often? What kinds of things do you hope for? Do you think that God will give them to you?
3. Are there any areas in your life where you find it hard to hope? Why is that? Does God give you any promises about that area in your life that you can draw on?
4. Are you cynical about some things? Do you think that you need to repent of that?
5. What are some blessings that you have received through hope?
6. In what areas in your life do you have great hope in the LORD?
7. How do you think that you could grow in hope?
8. Who is the most hopeful person you know? Can you tell a story about how they have encouraged you or touched your life?
9. When you talk to other people, do they walk away from the conversation with renewed hope in God and His promises?
10. Find three verses about hope that really struck you, write them down and memorize them.
11. Can you tell about a time in your life when a promise of God was incredibly encouraging to you?
12. Have you ever had your hopes dashed? Do you know why that happened?
13. Can you think of two people in your life who really need hope right now? What can you say that will give them renewed hope? Will you please do so?