



EXPLORING HOPE

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Exploring Hope

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Hope has long been a virtue that is hard to get our minds, hearts, and wills around. The following is what God has shown me and has had lasting influence in my daily walk with Jesus. Hope is connected to both faith and love and helps us practice both!

Hope is what gives faith substance! Faith in part is being sure that what you hope for will come true. Hope gives faith life. Therefore, well-placed hope gives life.

Do not look for hope in your circumstance! No amount of analyzing your circumstances will create hope; because circumstances don't predict the future. Circumstances change with time. But circumstances do help shape us and strengthen our Hope commitments especially when the circumstances look hopeless and we carry on anyways. No one needs hope if they can see the future. Deciding to go forward with a goal or to quit based on current circumstances means one is not navigating through life with hope. Deciding to go forward in a relationship despite having rocky or awkward interactions means one is navigating with hope. Hope believes things can change for the better. If one has hope one has faith! Faith is what overcomes the world's obstacles.

There are different kinds of hope! Hoping that the weather will be sunny here in Vancouver is often wishful thinking! But planting a crop in a field requires more than wishful-thinking-hope...because life is at stake. The future is at stake. Both loss and gain are possible: hope involves risk. Confidence is not hope! Confidence comes from repetition that leads to mastering skills in the present. Confidence has to do with the "now" or where situations are controlled or known; whereas hope has to do with the "future" and the unknown; those places that are unfamiliar. Confidence does not get us far into the future when trials and darkness enter into the picture. Hope can.

Superstition is an enemy of hope and faith. It is also an enemy of confidence. We all know hockey players who base their careers on the foundation of eating at the same restaurant before each BIG game in town, or having a lucky loony, or having a certain ritual, or not going to a certain part of town before the BIG game. These players have superstitions because the real reason for their success is hard work, training, perfecting skills, and being able to look into the past to not always see success but to see them selves getting up after each battle and trying harder and building faith in themselves that they can overcome the challenges and adversity in the game.

People who don't practice hope and also don't have some confidence are very often needy and insecure because they seek these in their circumstances that change all the time or they seek it in people whose moods fluctuate or have other priorities or aren't the nurturing kind! True hope is anchored in LOVE that is constant, and enduring, usually in a mother or father figure or significant other; but mostly in God! The anchor is trust, healthy thinking, and a healthy way of dealing with guilt when we fall short! That allows people to know where they stand no matter what the circumstances! Good leaders can inspire hope! They are able to establish healthy relationships, and that is pivotal for hope to last in the followers when achieving group goals.

People who practice hope are usually more able to love! Because they have positive energy that pours out of them! They have healthier attitudes! They aren't as tempted to worry about what they don't have or worry about what others have that they don't have! Hopeful people aren't as easily tempted by jealousy or envy...because they are content with what they got and are committed to what is promised. Hopeful people are resilient and have their priorities set well. Setbacks don't loom larger

and larger through the moments, hours, days, weeks, years, or even decades in the way, so hopeful people don't have pity parties all the time, or are overly discouraged for long! Hope is powerful medicine in overcoming unrealistic perfectionistic attitudes that push one to having to have everything one's way immediately! So, hope helps us to be less selfish. People with hope don't fall as often into the trap of needing to control others! People with hope are easier to get along with because they are positive! People who have hope honor others, wish them the best, and often want to help them get there.

In our lives, there are hierarchies of duties starting with ones we prefer going down to those we wish we could do without! Many of us would love to jettison those duties we could do without! But once we get to jettison the worst duty the next thing we liked least gets the negative focus and often grows to the stature of what we initially disliked the most! So, we come full circle to square one! This problem exists because we want to feel good and see doing the undesirable duty as standing in the way of feeling good! Fact is we don't have to feel good all the time and putting off having to feel good until an undesirable task is done is a quality that people who have hope do have! Hope isn't needed when things are going well; hope gets us through those circumstances that challenge our goals and hope gets us to our journeys' ends!

Hope enables patience a characteristic of love. Hope helps us stay away from the "me"-mentality: or selfishness. So, it results in giving and love. Hope helps fight off envy and helps us stay away from worry; which shows that love or being loved is operative.

How does hope allow us to grow in love? It helps us because it helps us to choose differently in the present compared to what we chose in the past because of expectations that things can be different in a good way. Knowing that we don't have to be stuck every time in ruts and the awful feelings that go with those ruts (thought pathways, and heart habits) gives us power to navigate into new areas of healthy thinking/ believing/ feeling/ and relating that before may have been unimaginable. This is a slow process that comes through prayer and relationship with God...and being mindful and disciplined to not be victims in the present of our pasts over and over again. Prayer and relationship with Jesus are indispensable. Trying to hold onto permanent-life-changing-hope without God won't work. We can't make up love as we go along. Love is truth based...and requires that light expose things for what they are one thing at a time: that light is a person. Jesus exposes lies so they don't seem like truths anymore and replaces them with real truth. The only reasons we believe lies is because they look like truths and we wrongly trust the sources. Truths set people free to love. Lies can make us feel justified but a lot of baggage comes with them that destroy love; so, lies are negatives.

I remember years back going for walks to a field located somewhere in Vancouver, BC to watch little league baseball. On one occasion, I witnessed a young lad going up to bat and swinging with all his might only to strike out. Then he proceeded to throw a temper tantrum, sulk, and refuse to be comforted by his mother only to repeat his approach repeated throughout the season.

I remember thinking recently that that boy wanted to do what the pro's do but without going through a learning curve that involved training, corrections, dedication, and patience as well as the humility to accept the failures along the way.

Today I realized that I was that little boy, only I wanted to master the Christian life. I asked the Lord yesterday for a word of wisdom and the word "hope" came again powerfully like so many times before. Hope has a way of helping us practice patience which is an attribute of love. God has shown me many times what love looks like and I always felt disappointed when it was withdrawn. Now I know I don't have to feel disappointed when that happens. All good things come gradually and I need to practice hope (expecting the promises from God to come true) by picking up where I am at and practice the

love I am able to give at this time. There is much to learn, and much to exercise in order to get into the zone...and of course I still will make mistakes.

I remember my godmother Anita saying years ago that a neighbor she knew awhile back who had a little dog that was injured in the hind legs. The neighbor somehow expected Anita to fix the situation. And somehow Anita went to the little dog held it with her hands, and guiding the legs to take steps, prayed to Jesus for healing...and the dog was healed to the great comfort of its owner.

While in the bend on new roads...we don't see our destination immediately...the destination may have a name...but what its exact traits, details, and mysteries are, is hidden from us. We might have a vague general label for the destination but the details materialize and only ring true or become familiar once we get to the destination. When in the bend on the road we will have doubts, fears, confusion, and insecurities that will try to pull us back to the familiar; the easy way; to give up our journey. But thirst for less stagnant waters, with courage and the wanting of something new or better is what hope uses to draw us around the bend in the road to a new destination/ way of life/ skill set/ masterpiece/ paradigm/ way of living/ attitudes/ occupation/ usefulness/ loving/ understanding/ or a new knowing. Because in the bend we don't necessarily know much of anything...we only know that we hope something better or more sustaining will appear. The not knowing much of anything in the bend of the road is a preparation for new wisdom...new insights...and new growth of love, hope and faith.

I see in this story a parable for my life. God taking me by His hands and enabling me to learn to walk confidently, patiently, kindly, compassionately, wisely, and humbly in a gradual learning process which includes making mistakes, having wrong thinking, and falling down regularly.

What to Do with Hope?

Repeatedly I'd request urgent revelations to my predicaments from God and frantically search them out without resting in Jesus and learning from Him on how to live in the in between ness of the prayer request and the gift. Now I know I can put my time of waiting to healthier uses; I can learn to practice and focus on the here and now while waiting in hope for God to put things into play so the desired gifts or revelations come.

When I did not try to apply myself in the in between ness, then each time I'd squander the gift or revelation immediately or soon after receiving it because I was only living for the release of the revelation and not for something greater, Fuller, more practical, and wiser.

In prayer, I'm learning that learning to live in the in between ness of requests and answers is key to living a stable, healthy, gentle, humble, peaceable life that keeps me from squandering my freedoms. The power of hope and trust and seeking to love makes this possible.

This living for God's gift can turn out to be pretty selfish because it becomes what we live for. We can treat people in the same way by sending them stuff, giving them stuff, and trying to impress them only to get the same back. Real expectations and hopes are not selfish.

Learning to live in the in between moments is the key to stability, peace, patience, joy, contentment, and accomplishing things that mean special things to the people we meet. Yes, we can be asked by God to do BIG things at opportune times when they come our way...but the rest of life, everyday life is about practicing the little things. Most of life is about getting the little things accomplished...not just being bored waiting around to do great things. Getting good at the little things is where love grows, where purpose grows, where meaning grows, where confidence grows, where practical giving grows, where faith grows, and where the joy grows.