

## Hope and Perseverance

As we think about our reason for existence as a group, it seems that this topic of hope and perseverance is vital in both stimulating our desire to finish well in the Christian race and to increasing our resilience and ability to do so.

The apostle Paul tells us that those without Christ are ‘...without hope and without God in this world’. David Jackman describes our culture in this way ‘It should come as no surprise if the smiling, optimistic public face of popular culture masks a deep seated cynicism and despair, which is characterised at its most extreme by hopelessness....That may be why materialism continues to grip us, because it offers us our only hopes.’ He sees the regaining of hope both outside and inside the church as an urgent need.

The word ‘Hope’ can be drained of its meaning when it becomes little more than wishful thinking, as part of a greeting on a birthday card or a desire for good weather for our holidays.

But how do you feel about hope? As Paul Mallard writes ‘When was the last time that you heard a sermon about hope? Have you ever heard a Christian say that it is impossible to live for Christ if you do not live in hope? Who were the great men and women of hope in the Bible? It is possible for hope to feel like a bit of a poor relation. We give it lip service, but it doesn’t really figure very much in our thinking.’

I found this illustration by Tim Keller very helpful in understanding the vital nature of hope:-

‘Human beings are hope-shaped creatures. The way you live now is completely controlled by what you believe about your future. I was reading a short story some years ago about two men who were captured and thrown into a dungeon. Just before they went into prison, one man discovered that his wife and child were dead, and the other learned that his wife and child were alive and waiting for him. In the first couple of years of imprisonment the first man just wasted away, curled up and died. But the other man endured and stayed strong and walked out a free man ten years later. Notice that these two men experienced the very same circumstances but responded differently because, while they experienced the same present, they had their mind set on different futures. It was the future that determined how they handled the present.’

The New Bible Dictionary has a very good summary overview of Biblical hope, which would serve to get us started before looking at some elements in more detail. The following is most of it, with some omissions:-

“Hope, it would seem, is a psychological necessity, if man is to envisage the future at all. Even if there are no rational grounds for it, man continues to hope. Very naturally such hope, even when it appears to be justified, is transient and illusory; and it is remarkable how often it is qualified by poets and other writers by such epithets as ‘faint’, ‘desperate’, ‘trembling’ and ‘feeble’. The Bible sometimes uses hope in the conventional sense – the hope of reward for our labour (1 Corinthians 9:10). But for the most part the hope with which the Bible is concerned is something very different; and by comparison with it, other hope is scarcely recognised as hope. The majority of secular thinkers in the ancient world did not regard hope

as a virtue, but merely as a temporary illusion; and Paul was giving an accurate description of pagans when he said that they had no hope (Ephesians 2:12), the fundamental reason for this being that they were 'without God'.

Where there is a belief in the living God, who acts and intervenes in human life and can be trusted to implement His promises, hope in the specifically biblical sense becomes possible. Such hope is not a matter of temperament, nor is it conditioned by prevailing circumstances or any human possibilities. It does not depend on what a man possesses, upon what he may be able to do for himself, nor upon what any human being may do for him. There was for example nothing in the situation in which Abraham found himself to justify his hope that Sarah would give birth to a son, but because he believed in God, he could 'in hope, believe against hope' (Romans 4:18).

Biblical hope is inseparable therefore from faith in God. Because of what God has done in the past, particularly in preparing for the coming of Christ, and because of what God has done and is doing through Christ, the Christian dares to expect future blessings, at present invisible (2 Corinthians 1:10). The goodness of God for him is never exhausted. The best is still to be! His hope is increased as he reflects on the activities of God in the scriptures (Romans 12:12; 15:4). Christ in him is the hope of future glory (Colossians 1:27). His final salvation rests on such hope (Romans 8:24); and this hope of salvation is a 'helmet', an essential part of his defensive armour in the struggle against evil (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Hope is 'a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul', penetrating deep into the invisible eternal world (Hebrews 6:19). Because of his faith the Christian has an assurance that the things he hopes for are real (Hebrews 11:1); and his hope never disappoints him (Romans 5:5).

There are no specific references to hope in the teaching of Jesus. He teaches His disciples not to be anxious about the future, because that future is in the hands of a loving Father. He also leads them to expect that after His resurrection, renewed spiritual power will be available to them, enabling them to do even greater works than He did, to overcome sin and death, and to look forward to sharing His own eternal glory. The resurrection of Jesus revitalised their hope. It was the mightiest act of God wrought in history. Christian faith is essentially faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead (1 Peter 1:21). This God, towards whom the Christian directs his faith, is called 'the God of hope', who can fill the believer with joy and peace, and enable him to abound in hope (Romans 15:13). Because of the resurrection, the Christian is saved from the miserable condition of having his hope in Christ limited to this world only (1 Corinthians 15:19). Jesus is his hope for time and eternity (1 Timothy 1:1). His call to be Christ's disciple carries with it the hope of finally sharing His glory (Ephesians 1:18). His hope is laid up in heaven (Col 1:5) and will be realised when his Lord is revealed (1 Peter 1:13).

The existence of this hope makes it impossible for the Christian to be satisfied with transient joys (Hebrews 13:14); it also acts as a stimulus to purity of life (1 John 3:2-3) and enables him to suffer cheerfully. Hope in the N.T. is often associated with patience and steadfastness. This virtue is vastly different from Stoic endurance precisely because it is bound up with a hope which is unknown to the Stoic (1Thess 1:3; Romans 5:3-5)

The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 are also beacons of hope. Hope is also associated not just with faith but with love. This triad is found in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Galatians 5:5-6, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Hebrews 6:10-12, 1 Peter 1:21-22. By its connection with love, Christian hope is freed from all selfishness. When a believer loves his fellow men, he hopes that they will be recipients of the good things he knows God longs to give them. Faith, hope and love are thus inseparable. Hope cannot exist apart from faith, and love cannot be exercised without hope. These three are the things that abide and together they comprise the Christian way of life (1 Corinthians 13:13)”.

### **Defining Hope**

Vines Expository Dictionary: – Hope = Elpis (in the Greek). Hope is to do with the unseen and the future. It is a favourable and confident expectation; the happy anticipation of good. Hope depends upon the ground upon which it is based and the object upon which hope is fixed. Hope is often associated with trust.

John Piper (Future Grace) - Hope is a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will.

Paul Mallard (Invest your suffering) – Hope is a sure and confident expectation about the future, based on a trust in God’s sovereignty and a confidence in His faithfulness. True hope is future orientated and grounded in the character of God and the fact that He has committed Himself to us in the form of His unbreakable promises.

Hunt (The Hope of Glory) – Hope is the present enjoyment of a future blessing – it brings the future into the present.....Hope is the peaceful anticipation gained through a relationship with someone who is trustworthy.

Greg Laurie (Hope) - The hope to which we cling is neither wishful thinking nor blind optimism. It is quiet confidence and it is a supernatural certainty. True biblical hope is a strong and confident expectation.

Nancy Missler (Hope against hope) – Hope is knowing that God will do exactly what He has promised, in His way. It is the patient, disciplined and confident waiting for and expecting the fulfilment of all God’s promises, in His timing.

David Jackman (Teaching the Christian Hope) – Hope is believing that there is a living God who has made the world and who is always active in that world – God who is sovereign, who is working out His best purposes, which are good, gracious and loving for His people – and that our future is certain.

### **Where do we place our hope?**

As human beings we instinctively want to put our hope in something, especially for those things that we cannot control or for the future that is uncertain and unseen. The Bible tells us of some of the things we are tempted to trust in, but which ultimately are futile, such as material wealth, financial security, human resources, power, strength or understanding.

“A man without God is trusting in a spider’s web. Everything he counts on will collapse. If he counts on his home for security, it won’t last.” Job 8:14-15 Living Bible

“No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love,”  
Psalm 33:17-18

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” 1 Timothy 6:17

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

This last reference is interesting since the root word for hope and trust are very similar and in fact are used interchangeably. This helps to shine light on the reason why they are so closely linked in our experience – you cannot put your hope in someone you don’t trust.

The scriptures emphasise that our hope must be in God alone:-

“We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and shield. In Him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in His holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you” Psalm 33:20-22

“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him”. Psalm 62:5

“The Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love”.  
Psalm 147:11

“This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance, we have put our hope in the living God, who is the saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe”.  
1 Timothy 4:10

“Through him (Christ) you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God”. 1 Peter 1:21

### **So what does it mean to put our hope in God alone?**

Nancy Missler describes it like this – “So ‘hope’ means confidently stepping out on God’s promises and being assured of His trustworthiness, even though we can’t see how His promises will be fulfilled or when they will be answered. Hope is knowing that God will be faithful to keep his word, no matter what we see or what we feel. Hope is knowing that God will do exactly what He has promised in His way. It is the patient disciplined and confident waiting for and expecting the fulfilment of all God’s promises in His timing”.

She goes on to suggest that there are really two types of hope in the Lord. First there is an ‘eternal’ hope, or some would call it ‘ultimate’ hope, that involves His phenomenal promises for the future; but there is also an earthly, ‘temporal’ hope that involves our day to day personal trust in Him here and now. This temporal hope is often where many of us struggle.

We may be confident in our hope of Christ's return, bringing with Him His kingdom and fulfilling all His glorious promises, but in day to day living we struggle and get confused when our circumstances don't play out as we expected they would. In difficult situations we grasp hold of God's promises and translate them the way we want to understand them. But when those promises don't come to pass in the way we thought they would, we can lose hope and thus our endurance to make it through.

### **Hope in God's promises based on His character**

Hope in God seems to be trusting Him unconditionally on the basis of who He is, His character, His attributes and all that He has accomplished in the past and all that He has promised for the future.

Jerry Bridges cites three truths that enable us to trust God and to hope in Him, even in adversity. They are:-

- God is completely sovereign
- God is infinite in wisdom
- God is perfect in love

"God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about." Unknown author quoted by Jerry Bridges.

**God's sovereignty-** "Confidence in the sovereignty of God in all that affects us, is crucial in our trusting Him. If there is a single event in all the universe that can occur outside of God's sovereign control, we cannot trust Him. His love may be infinite, but if His power is limited and His purpose can be thwarted, we cannot trust Him." Jerry Bridges

Margaret Clarkson in her book "Grace grows best in winter" writes about the sovereignty of God from the position of suffering – "The sovereignty of God is the one Impregnable rock to which the suffering human heart must cling. The circumstances surrounding our lives are no accident: they may be the work of evil, but that evil is held firmly within the mighty hand of our sovereign God...all evil is subject to Him, and evil cannot touch His children unless He permits it. God is the Lord of human history and of the personal history of every member of His redeemed family."

Paul Mallard writes about what it means to trust in the sovereign God amidst suffering and trials- "What was important was that a sovereign God has a perfect plan and that He would work out everything for His glory and our good. I was worried about tomorrow - I didn't need to be. All I had to do was to focus on the God who had plans for today and tomorrow and for all eternity. O.K. I may not understand His ways – but I don't need to. What He calls me to do is to surrender all my concerns into His hands and trust Him with my future."

"The Lord foils the plans of the nations; He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations."  
Psalm 33:10-11

This scripture speaks of an all- powerful God who is totally in control and does just as He pleases, whereas the following scripture speaks of a loving Heavenly Father who knows and cares about every intimate detail of our lives. We need both these aspects of God's sovereignty to trust Him with all of our life.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." Matt 10:29-31

**God's wisdom** – "God's sovereignty is also exercised in infinite wisdom, far beyond our ability to comprehend" (Jerry Bridges)

Isaiah 55:8-9 expresses just how far God's wisdom is beyond ours "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

The apostle Paul stood in awe of God's infinite wisdom – "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgements, and His paths beyond tracing out!" Romans 11:33

The New Bible Dictionary explains that wisdom in its fullest sense belongs to God alone. His wisdom is not only completeness of knowledge pervading every realm of life but also consists in His irresistible fulfilment of what He has in mind.

"When we stop and think about it, we know in our heart of hearts that God does not make any mistakes in our lives or in the villages of South Wales or anywhere else. God does know what He is doing. God is infinite in His wisdom. He always knows what is best for us and what is the best way to bring about that result." Jerry Bridges

"God's wisdom is fathomless, His decisions are unsearchable, His methods are mysterious and untraceable. No one has ever understood His mind, let alone advised Him on the proper course of action. How futile and even arrogant for us to seek to determine what God is doing in a particular event or circumstance. We simply cannot search out the reasons behind His decisions or trace out the ways by which He brings those decisions to pass. If we are to experience peace in our souls, in times of adversity, we must come to the place where we truly believe that God's ways are simply beyond us and stop asking Him *why* or even try to determine it ourselves." Jerry Bridges

**God's Love** – "There is no doubt that the most convincing evidence of God's love in all the scriptures is His giving His Son to die for our sins . (Jerry Bridges) He goes on to quote the following verses:-

"This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10

Tim Keller speaks of the suffering sovereign – "If God has not suffered, how can we trust Him? It is because God is all-powerful and sovereign that His suffering is so astonishing. If

God were somehow limited or out of control, His suffering would not be so radically *voluntary* - and therefore not so motivated by love.”

“Because God is love, it is an essential part of His nature to do good and to show mercy to His creatures. Psalm 145 speaks of His “abundant goodness,” of His being “rich in love” and “good to all,” of having “compassion on all He has made,” and of being “loving toward all He has made” (Jerry Bridges)

Jeremiah, the prophet, moved from despair to hope as He came to grasp the extent of God’s love and faithfulness: –

“My splendour is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord. I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:18-23

“God loves you! And because He does, whatever He does or allows to happen in your life as His child has been filtered through and is motivated by that love. God says in His Word, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (Jeremiah 31:3). He loves you.” (Greg Laurie)

“Dutch sisters Betsie and Corrie ten Boom were arrested by the Nazis for protecting Jewish people fleeing from the Holocaust. The sisters were thrown into Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. Corrie survived but Betsie didn’t. However they both testified to the presence of God with them in one of the darkest places on earth. Before her death, Betsie told her sister that, if Corrie survived, she must tell others about the faithfulness of God; ‘there is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.....in the darkness God’s truth shines most clear.’” (Paul Mallard)

These are three aspects of God’s character which are vital if we are to trust His promises and put our hope in God alone. There may be other attributes of God that also help you, personally to hope in God, such as God’s faithfulness, His goodness, His compassion and so on.

### **Faith, hope and love**

You may remember that the New Bible Dictionary summary noted the frequent association in the scriptures of hope with both faith and love. In 1 Corinthians 13:13 this triad of qualities are seen to have eternal value “and now these three remain faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Colossians 1:5 says “-the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in Heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth.” It is as if without our eternal certainty and hope, faith and love lose their motivation.

1 Thessalonians 5:8 relates these three virtues to the spiritual armour “....putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” Notice that hope is the helmet i.e. it protects the mind, probably because of the assurance of our salvation.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is worth noting that this letter is written to a young church undergoing persecution for their new found allegiance to Christ, and it is hope that inspires them to endure. Missler writes “so hope is what gives us the power to remain sure and steadfast to the end of the race. It is what allows us to ‘see Him who is invisible’ in the middle of our trials.”

### **How does hope differ from faith**

David Jackman speaks to this with an unattributed quote “Hope is listening to the music of the future, and faith is dancing to that music in the present”. He goes on to say “Faith and hope are very closely related and at times seem interchangeable.” He describes it as a symbiosis and quotes John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* on the subject:-

“In the one word hope is nothing more than the expectation of those things which faith previously believes to have been truly promised by God. Thus, faith believes that God is true, hope expects that in due season he will manifest His truth. Faith believes that He is our Father, hope expects that He will always act the part of a father towards us. Faith believes that eternal life is given to us, hope expects that it will one day be revealed. Faith is the foundation on which hope rests, Hope nourishes and sustains faith.”

Faith cannot continue to exist without hope and hope cannot exist without faith in God’s promises and in the faithful God who will fulfil them

“Think of faith as believing in and depending upon God’s Word, whereas hope is trusting in and relying upon God’s Spirit to perform His Word.” Also “Faith comes from hearing God’s word, but hope comes from knowing God’s character and experiencing His faithfulness.”  
Nancy Missler

Nancy Missler would also say “We don’t die if we lose our faith, but we do die if we lose our hope.” She would evidence this with the number of Christian believers who express their “eternal hope” in Christ and trust in His salvation, but who have lost “temporal hope” in the struggles and hardships of their lives now. She would say that if we think that the only goal of our Christian life is having the eternal hope of salvation, then we will not be sufficiently motivated to keep going and will give up in the tough times. It’s not only the conviction that God’s promises are true, it’s the confidence and the security to withstand and endure the struggle (and the wait) between receiving the promises and their fulfilment in our lives.

### **What difference does hope make to our lives**

***Eager expectation about the future*** – Hope is filled with expectancy and anticipation, like children on Christmas Eve awaiting the joys of Christmas morning. 1 Corinthians 1:7 says “as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”

“God has drawn back the curtain and shown us, at least in a measure, what He is going to do. We are expectant about it. It is exciting and it motivates us. So much has been already

fulfilled in Christ and the gospel, as God's kingdom has broken into our world, and yet so much still awaits fulfilment." Jackman

Romans 8:19-25 describes how creation itself "waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed." And that "...we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope you were saved."

Hunt suggests that waiting expectantly provides vibrancy to our daily walk and quotes from Isaiah 40:31 "Those who wait for (hope in) the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not get weary."

***Trust and dependence on God and His promises*** – "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope..." (2 Corinthians 1:8-10) Perhaps we often need to get to the end of our own resources before we truly know what it means to totally rely on God and set our hope on Him alone.

Paul Mallard writes "I hardly need to remind you that suffering undermines our self-reliance. It injects a healthy suspicion of our own gifts and wisdom and resources. I am not talking about some form of unwholesome negativity. But suffering drives us to our knees in the awareness that our own resources are inadequate. And it does not leave us there, but brings us to that place where we know that we have to trust God alone."

***Perseverance and steadfastness*** – "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what is promised" (Hebrews 10:36) and "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1) These verses were written to a church experiencing persecution and hardship, but their real threat was the tendency for some to want to settle for an apparently easier life with the old forms of their Jewish religion.

Jerry Bridges writes – "Perseverance is the quality of character that enables one to pursue a goal in spite of obstacles and difficulties. It is one thing to simply bear up under adversity. This in itself is commendable. But God calls us to do more than simply bear the load of adversity. He calls us to persevere (to press forward) in the face of it. The Christian life is meant to be active, not passive. The Christian is called to pursue with diligence the will of God. To do this requires perseverance." He goes on to describe the Christian life as a marathon race combined with an obstacle race, which has an endless variety of unexpected obstacles added along the way. He observes that it is no wonder that "few Christians finish well."

"And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so; but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character 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." (Romans 5:3-5) this passage speaks of the growth in perseverance, character and hope that are produced in

times of suffering and they are the very qualities that enable us to endure such times and to finish well.

**Hope in God is “the anchor of our soul”** – Throughout the years there have been many Christian hymns and songs using this metaphor of an anchor to describe the stability and security that hope in God brings to our lives.

Hebrews 6:18-20 “God did this so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie (i.e. His promise and His oath), we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us has entered on our behalf.”

“The harbours were quite shallow in the Mediterranean Sea. Hence a ship could not enter a harbour when a storm threatened, because the hull would shatter when the ship was tossed in shallow water. Furthermore, the Mediterranean floor was sandy and would not provide a secure anchorage. Therefore to secure the ship, the anchor was put into a shallow boat and this smaller boat was rowed into the harbour, where the anchor was secured.” (Hebrews, Lifechange Series, Navpress)

At this point the metaphor changes. The writer to the Hebrews portrays Jesus as the “anchorius rowing the boat” but His destination isn’t the harbour but the Temple in Jerusalem and more specifically the inner sanctuary, behind the curtain, into the very presence of God the Father, where He places the “anchor of our souls” into the secure and safe hands of God. Meanwhile, just as the ship weathers the storm out at sea held secure by its anchor fastened in the harbour, so we are held secure because our hope is in the hands of the God who made the universe.

Nancy Missler writes “This scripture is telling us that “hope” is not only the anchor that is going to keep us from going off course in our walk of faith, but it’s also the lifeline that is going to allow us to penetrate behind the veil and lay hold of God in the midst of our trials. It is what keeps us steady and enables us to “see the Lord” in our circumstances. Hope is what connects the world we are living in with the one to come.”

**An eternal perspective** – Hope keeps our eyes on Heaven’s glory and helps us to face present suffering and setbacks with an eternal perspective. The apostle Paul wrote “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18)

He also wrote “Therefore we do not lose heart (i.e. lose hope). Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). We live in a world where this is a completely counter-cultural perspective and a challenge to our own thinking every day.

As well as the great cloud of witnesses of Hebrews 11, we have our ultimate role model in the Lord Jesus Christ “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who

for the Joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:2-3)

One of the greatest benefits of the eternal perspective that hope gives us is in the area of injustice. The injustice that we ourselves or our loved ones sometimes experience and those that happen on the wider canvas of society and the world. Greg Laurie writes about injustice and inequality “One day in eternity, God will right all wrongs. All of those unanswered questions will be dealt with, and the unfair happenings of life will be resolved. Pain will be replaced by comfort, and tears will be replaced by joy and laughter. In heaven, all of the losses and sorrows will be more than compensated for. Remembering this will give us a better perspective on the struggles of life.”

**Growth in Christlikeness-** This is another ‘now and not yet’ effect that is a result of hope in our lives. Paul Mallard writes about this “When God saves us, it is his purpose to transform us. The moment that we believe, God sets us aside to belong to Him. He adopts us as his sons and daughters. Then he spends the rest of our lives changing us so that we begin to display the family likeness..... God is at work in our lives, making us like Jesus, a continuous process that will never be completed in this life.”

He goes on to describe that on the day that Christ returns, we will be instantly transformed into the likeness of Christ – “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been known. But we know that when He appears we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3)

Greg Laurie writes “If I have the hope of the Lord’s return – the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13)- burning brightly in my conscious thoughts, it should affect the way I live. It should cause me to want to live a godly life in recognition of the fact that God loves me, has chosen me, and has so much waiting for me in heaven.”

So hope motivates us both to live a godly life now, growing in Christlikeness and to set our hope on that day, when we shall truly be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.

**Hope brings joy and peace into our lives** – “May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13) We see again the linkage between trusting in God and the hope which results in joy and peace.

We are most likely to be robbed of joy and peace when our circumstances are difficult and we don’t understand why. “An unreserved trust of God, when we don’t understand what is happening or why, is the only road to peace and comfort and joy. God wants us to honour Him by trusting Him, but He also desires that we experience the peace and joy that comes as a result.” (Jerry Bridges)

“Peace with God inevitably follows acceptance of His way.....our peace with Him relates closely to our trust in Him.” (Hunt)

Although not specifically mentioning hope, this quote implies an attitude of hope in God “Joy is the spontaneous overflow of a heart that has experienced God’s grace and knows that, in everything, God means us well. We have seen that suffering can drive us to God or it can drive us from Him. When we chose to allow it to drive us into His arms, we discover great joy as we contemplate His glory.” (Paul Mallard)

Peter wrote of the possibility of being able to rejoice even in the midst of trials because of our ‘living hope’ in Christ – “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil of fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” (1 Peter 1:3-6)

### **Restoring our hope in God**

***Knowing God loves us-*** “the absolute core foundation of our faith and the only way our hope will be restored is the knowledge that God loves us.” (Nancy Missler). She explains that this is not just thinking in your head that God loves you, but seeing it with your own eyes, seeing the handprint of God’s love everywhere. She goes on to say that it is impossible for us to trust God with our lives completely, unless we first know without a doubt that He loves us and will be faithful to us. Love is the basis of our trust.

***The encouragement of the scriptures*** – “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4) Also the psalmist wrote “You are my refuge and my shield; your word is my source of hope.” (Psalm 119:114 NLT).

Paul Mallard speaks of how he and his wife were helped to sustain hope through the scriptures “In our darkest times, these biblical convictions sustained Edrie and me. The strength we needed to persevere and prevail over pain flowed from our knowledge of the truth. And it was the truth that set us free – free to see pain as part of the tapestry of life that a sovereign and all wise God was weaving for us.”

“So faith to trust God in adversity comes through the word of God alone. It is only in the scriptures that we find an adequate view of God’s relationship to and involvement in our painful circumstances. It is only from the scriptures, applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that we receive the grace to trust God in adversity. (Jerry Bridges)

***Meditating on the Truth*** – “We must be disciplined in our *thinking*. You must meditate on the truth and gain the perspective that comes from remembering all God has done for you and is going to do. This is not forcing yourself to feel in a certain way but rather directing your thoughts until your heart is sooner or later engaged. Much of the thinking and self-communing that we must do, has to do with Christian hope. Heaven and the resurrection and the future perfect world are particularly important to meditate on.” (Tim Keller)

Jeremiah discovered this in Lamentations 3:19-23 “I remember my afflictions and my wanderings, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast

within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Jeremiah moved from despair and hopelessness to faith and hope in God as he chose to meditate on the truth.

***Focus on God's character and attributes*** – "I understood that hope is the peaceful anticipation gained through a relationship with someone who is trustworthy. I began to understand that I realise hope by centring on God's personality and character. When I focus on Him, I gaze into dependable love and stability. Hope is related to the future in that He holds the future." (Hunt)

We thought earlier about God's sovereignty, wisdom and love as primary attributes to help us to trust and hope in God but there are others that might help us – His goodness, faithfulness, grace etc. that we could focus on.

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

***The encouragement of other believers*** – "And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Gordon McDonald in his book "A resilient life" emphasises the importance of relationships to believers "A careful study of the bible will lead one to realise something many of us were not adequately taught when we were young: that the bible is about relationships and that no one is a complete human being apart from the context of those relationships." He goes on to quote Nelson Mandela's book "Long walk to freedom" –

"The authorities' great mistake was to keep us together, for together our determination was reinforced. We supported each other and gained strength from each other. Whatever we knew, whatever we learned, we shared and by sharing we multiplied whatever courage we had individually. That is not to say that we were all alike in our responses to the hardships we suffered. Men have different capacities and respond differently to stress. But the stronger ones raised up the weaker ones, and both became stronger in the process."

If we are going to finish well we need to encourage one another!

The words of the last verse of the Stuart Townend song "O church arise":-

"So Spirit come, put strength in every stride,  
Give grace for every hurdle,  
That we may run with faith to win the prize  
Of a servant good and faithful.  
As saints of old still line the way  
Retelling triumphs of His grace,  
We hear their calls and hunger for the day  
When, with Christ, we stand in Glory."

## Points to Ponder

- Do you agree that “hope” is a poor relation and that we don’t speak or think about it enough? If so, why do you think that is?
- Tim Keller wrote “that the way you live now is completely controlled by what you believe about the future”. Do you think that is true? How would you illustrate that from your own life?
- Which definition of hope best encapsulates what hope means to you?
- We know that we should put our hope in God alone but what are the issues and pressures that cause you to struggle? What is your “default setting” when that happens?
- Do you agree with Nancy Missler’s assertion that there are two types of hope – temporal and eternal? How are the two different in your experience?
- Do you think it is possible to have a sure faith and conviction of your eternal hope, while struggling with hope in present suffering and adversity?
- Why is it so important that our hope is based on God’s promises? What are the promises of God that have helped you in the past?
- Which aspects of God’s character help you to have unconditional trust in Him and His promises?
- How significant is the difference between faith and hope? What do you think about the statement that “We don’t die if we lose our faith, but we do die if we lose our hope” (Nancy Missler)? (By the word ‘die’ I think she means give up spiritually)
- How does hope in God help you to persevere and to seek to finish well?
- What encourages you about the metaphor of hope as “the anchor of our soul”?
- How does the eternal perspective that hope gives help you in dealing with the frustrations and suffering of life now?
- 1 John 3:3 speaks about our eternal hope being the motivation to go on growing in holiness, purity and Christlikeness? Is that true for you?
- Has hope in God, both temporal and eternal, become more significant for you as you have grown older?
- What helps you personally to keep on living in hope?
- How can we encourage one another to finish well?
- Spend some time reading and meditating on the following passages from the book of Revelation 7:9-17, 21:1-4 and 22:1-5. What encourages your hope of glory from these passages?

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