

# “What is Hope?”

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## **Scriptures:**

Romans 4:18-19, 5:1-5, 8:24-26; 1 Corinthians 13:12-13

*Romans 4:18 Hoping against hope, he (Abraham) believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.*

*Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand... knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit...*

*Romans 8:24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words...*

*1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

## **Sermon:**

This morning's theme on hope is via request. From time to time I do take requests so keep that in mind if there is a particular topic you would like me to address. Now I can't promise that I can get around to all of them but sometimes it's good to have some ideas on hand when I'm stuck on what to preach on next.

But since this request is from a key member of the fellowship who had a particular tough year last year and needs a sermon full of hope to get them headed into another tough new year. I figured I'd better respond.

And they are likely not alone? I must admit this is quite a daunting task to come up with the definitive explanation of hope. But I suppose it is my job to be the source of, and the inspiration for the hope of my little flock? But is it really my task to be the source of anyone's hope?

This raises the larger question of where exactly does hope come from?

Now it certainly make sense that hope is on our minds as we begin another new year. It may only be a mere turning of another page of the calendar, but this time a whole new year begins and with it the chance at a fresh start; so yes, it can be hopeful.

And with this turning of a page comes many hopes. Likely we all hope that this year will be better than last year. Hopefully our lives will be just a little less stressful. Maybe we hope that our partners will finally mend some of their most annoying habits?

We hope that this year our children will be smarter, better behaved, and more successful at navigating life. Maybe we hope that our boss and co-workers will finally treat us with the respect we deserve?

And, I suppose, for those of us who loved every aspect of our job, and who have wonderfully well-adjusted children, and life partners who are perfectly attentive to our every need . . . well, we probably hope that the status quo, at least, won't change?

But, I hope, that all of us hope as well, at least as individuals, to also be more compassionate, loving, patient, kind, and to act as instruments of God's peace in our world. We also hope that more folks in our world will also seek these things.

We hope and pray for wars to cease, the environment to be healed, the hungry to be fed, the homeless housed and that the poor will certainly hear the good news of true justice!

Yes, I believe that even the most cynical among us still hope for a whole lot of things each and every new year, and sometimes I'm sure most of us wonder if our hopes are all in vain?

But what exactly is hope? Is it a feeling? An emotion? Is it constant and consistent and always on an upward trajectory? Or does it ebb and flow, rising up and then down at times?

Is hope also an action something we decide to believe - a thing that needs not only our intention, but even great effort? Maybe it's part of our genetic code and so some of us are simply born with a greater capacity to embrace it? Or is our ability for hopefulness nurtured in us from our mother's womb and our family of origin? Is it affected by whom we hang out with?

I'm sure you too, like me, are all aware of folks who have had numerous really horrible life experiences but who still remain constantly and genuinely hopeful about the future. Similarly, I think we all likely know of folks who have had nearly every advantage in their life but who are seemingly always unhappy, pessimistic, and hopeless about the future.

As your pastor (from the Spanish word for shepherd if you didn't know), I try to interpret current situations in light of what the Bible has to say. And vice-versa. Hopefully this is helpful?

And so, in my deep study and research this past week, I went to bible.com where I learned that in the NRSV of the New Testament, the word "hope" is used 69 times! Only three times is the word "hope" found in the four gospels; while 51 times, the word is used in the letters accredited to Paul. Hmm... interesting don't you think?

Now the Apostle Paul never met Jesus, as we say, "in the flesh." He never heard him preach nor saw him heal the sick or walked alongside him as he trod those dusty roads of Palestine. He did, of course, "meet him" one momentous night in a blinding vision that literally knocked him off his horse. Paul's faith, then, was somewhat similar to ours since it was mostly based upon second-hand information, as well as that extraterrestrial experience.

It makes sense then that hope, for Paul, was pretty important. For Paul it seems, hope was necessary for the faith that sustained his very existence as a follower of Jesus. And though Jesus might not have used the word hope specifically, we know that many of the stories that he told were full of hope.

I immediately think of those many agriculturally based parables where shepherds protect and even search for lost sheep and of planters sowing seed joyfully and with wild abundance! And maybe that is an apt metaphor

for hope - a seed that is planted in each one of us? Or maybe it's a piece of our genetic code placed in each one before birth that we neither choose nor deserve?

It is a gift, but like any seed, it needs to be nurtured and cared for so it will grow and flourish, and eventually produce even more seeds.

I guess what I am trying to say, as someone who is supposed to be herding God's sheep, is I don't have a real definitive answer for what exactly hope is or even much certainty for where your source of hope should come from.

**So maybe you should tell me? What is hope? How do you define it?**

Seriously I want you to unmute yourself and briefly tell the rest of us how do you define it? What is/are the sources that give you hope? And what specifically do you do to nurture that seed of hope in your everyday lives?

I will include your comments in the printed sermon, so if you do not get a chance to share during the Zoom service, please respond via chat or e-mail later.

**Here are some of the sources of hope that folks mentioned:**

- For Keith Mullett, it's "getting outta bed some mornings."
- Renee finds hope in the verse: "We walk by faith not by sight." We are given the choice to see things as hopeful or discouraging.
- Marie finds hope in reading the Bible.
- For Martha, hope is not limited to what we only see. She likes to stay off of social media and seek out good news from good sources like "Yes" and the "Smithsonian" magazines.
- Rachel tries to stop and just enjoy the "simple things of life" and to be grateful for them. She also loves this quote: "If the sight of the blue skies fills you with joy, if a blade of grass springing up in the fields has power to move you, if the simple things of nature have a message that you understand, rejoice, for your soul is alive." – by Eleonora Duse
- Mary agreed that spending time in nature is hopeful and renewing.
- And Annie added, she finds hope in the daily dose of wonder!
- Steve also mentioned that a caring and supportive community always fosters hope.