

Where to Find the Hope You Need
How God Meets Your Deepest Needs (Part 1)
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Today we begin a new sermon series on *How God Meets Our Deepest Needs* and the first need we are going to consider is the need for HOPE. When things go wrong, we need to know there is hope that things will get better. At the end of World War II, an American submarine was coming in to Newport News, Virginia when something went terribly wrong with the docking mechanism and the submarine sank to the bottom of the harbor. Immediately divers were dispatched to see what went wrong. While down there the divers could hear someone inside the sub knocking on the hull in Morse code. He was asking, **“Is there any hope?”** That’s a really important question. In fact, it’s one of the most fundamental questions of life. Is there any hope? Will my current situation improve? Will tomorrow be better than today?

Human beings can’t live without hope. We can go forty days without food. We can go three days without water. We can go eight minutes without air. But we cannot live a day without hope. Hope is one of the essential ingredients of life. When hope is gone, we have nothing to live for. We all need hope.

Dr. Harold Wolf, a professor at Cornell University’s medical school, conducted a study on the effects of hope on the human body. He studied 25,000 prisoners of war over an extended period of time. He discovered that out of those 25,000 POW’s there were some who seemed relatively unharmed by their imprisonment. These people had been subjected to the same brutality and torture as all the other POWs but they weren’t emotionally damaged by it. They weren’t suffering from posttraumatic stress syndrome or flashbacks like the others. When they came home, they went on with their lives. There was one characteristic that set these individuals apart from the others. They possessed an unusually high degree of hope. Their strong sense of hope enabled them to go through the worst of conditions, and come out relatively unscathed.

Hope makes all the difference. It is an essential characteristic for handling the difficulties of life. In his concluding remarks Dr. Wolf said, **“When a man has hope, he is capable of bearing incredible burdens and cruel punishment. But when hope is gone, people fall apart – emotionally, physically and spiritually.”** If God is not meeting your deepest need for hope, then all the other needs He can meet are not going to matter. You can’t live without hope.

There are many sources of hope being offered in our society. Not all of them are trustworthy. People fall for all kinds of scams. They trust in things like psychic hotlines, palm reading, astrology, mystic healers, quack cures, crystals, and all kinds of crazy things. Inevitably these things disappoint us,

leaving us worse than we were before. Nothing is more useless than an unworthy and unreliable source of hope.

On March 30, 1981 President Ronald Reagan was shot in an assassination attempt. You may recall how Nancy Reagan dealt with the trauma of that event. She contacted her psychic friends in Hollywood. President Reagan reacted very differently. While Nancy Reagan looked west, to Hollywood seers, Ronald Reagan looked up to God. The assassination attempt didn't dampen his enthusiasm. Instead, he seemed to have an even greater sense of God's hand upon his life and God's call to serve his country. His source of hope was the only worthy source of hope we can turn to. All other sources of hope are unworthy and false. The apostle Paul put it this way, "***May God, the source of all hope, fill you with joy and peace through your faith in Him. Then you will overflow with hope....***" Ro 15:13. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, who is the visible expression of the invisible God, we have real hope, for he is the source of all hope. The psalmist wrote, "***In your name I will hope, for your name is good.***" Psalm 52:9. What does that mean? How do we put hope in a name?

In the days when the psalmist wrote, a name meant something special about the person. Today people name their children a particular name because it sounds good to them. But in ancient times a name described the person. God has many names to describe his special characteristics. One of those names is ***Jehovah Shammah***, which is found at the end of the book of Ezekiel. It means, "***I am the God who is always there.***" It means, there is no place that God is not present. There is no place where God is unable to be with you. Let's look at what that means to us as a source of hope.

FIRST, it means you can have hope that His presence is always with you. The older I get the more I realize just how much of life is out of my control. I'm unable to control my future. I can't even see what lies ahead. I don't know what's coming. But that's ok because God does and he is always watching over me. He is always there with me. Isaiah 41:10 says, "***'Don't worry because I am with you' says the Lord. 'Don't be afraid, because I am your God. I will make you strong and I will help you.'***" That's a tremendous source of hope. No matter what happens, God is there. We don't have to go through the difficulties of life alone. God will be with us and He will not let go of us. His grip on us is so strong, that neither life nor death, nor anything else, can separate us from God. **That truth is our greatest source of HOPE.**

One of the worst tragedies of life is that people leave us. People walk out on us. People move away. People become ill or injured and they aren't the same anymore. People grow old and die and we're left behind to make our way without them. God never leaves us. God never changes. He is always there for us.

Not only is God with us, but the Bible says He will guide us through life.. Psalm 32:8 says, ***“I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.”*** We may not know what the future holds, but God does. God is in control of the future. He will guide us and advise us. The wisest of all the kings of Israel wrote, ***“I have hope when I think of this: the Lord’s love never ends. His mercies never cease. They are new every morning.”*** – Lamentations 3:21-23.

Many of us can look back on our lives and see times when we really blew it, times we wish never happened, and we feel hopeless because we can’t go back and change those things we did. This passage is telling us that God’s love and mercy is new every morning. Every morning we have a fresh start in life. God gives us a new beginning with each new day, a new opportunity to live the way He would have us live, according to His purpose for our lives. We don’t have to keep doing the same stupid things we’ve always done. That’s good news. I need that and so do you. This is our hope – that He is always with us.

SECOND, you can have hope that God’s purpose is always working in and through you. No matter what’s going on in your life – the good, the bad and the ugly – you can have hope that God’s purpose is working in and through you. When difficulties and problems come into your life, God may be trying to get your attention. He may be trying to get you to depend on Him. When you find yourself asking, ***“Why is this happening to me?”*** and you just don’t understand why disappointments and heartache are coming your way, stop and ask, “God, what are you up to in my life?” You see, God will not waste an opportunity to help you grow and mature in your faith. He will use those difficult experiences to help you become more like Christ – to develop Christ-like character within you.

In Romans 8:28, it says, ***“For we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose.”*** Notice first what it does not say. It doesn’t say that all things work out the way you want them to. We’d like that to be what the Bible says, but that’s not what it says. It does not say that all things will have a happy ending here on earth. Justice is incomplete in this world. Reality teaches us that not every patient gets better, not every couple has a happy marriage, not every business venture makes a million bucks, and not every problem gets resolved. All children don’t get straight “A’s” and grow up to become President of the United States.

So what does this verse say? First it says, ***“We know that God causes all things to work together for good.”*** Scripture isn’t just talking about thinking positively. It’s not talking about the power of positive thinking. It says, ***“We know....”*** Faith enables us to know with certainty that God is able to bring good out of bad. That certainty, that knowing, is a gift from God.

Through faith we have this tremendous source of hope – that no matter what happens, God is able to bring good out of bad. He is able to bless us and prosper us even in and through the difficulties

we experience. It says, “...*All things work together for good...*” Why? Because God is able to make good come out of evil. He is the grand master and designer of the universe. History is His story. There is no such thing as fate. There is no such thing as chance. The world is not a run away train heading into a cosmic Marshall Fields where it will crash. God has a plan and He will see that His plan is carried out.

Something else this verse is **not** saying. It is not saying that God causes all things to happen. He does not cause evil. He does not cause sin. He does not cause famine or hurricanes or earthquakes. He does not cause illness or disease. He does not cause cancer or miscarriages. To attribute these things to God is to say God is a monster. God is not a monster. God is not capable of sin.

These things are all signs of the brokenness of creation caused when sin entered the world through the decision of our representatives, Adam and Eve. They chose to believe a lie rather than the truth. While God does not cause these things, they are not out of His control. He can use them to bring about good. Even the most awful events in our lives can be used by God to bring about good. That truth is a source of enormous hope for us. It is not a promise everyone can claim. It says, “...*God causes all things to work for good to those who love God...*” Loving God is not something to take lightly. A relationship with God is not something to take casually. It’s not something to neglect or put off. It’s essential to being able to claim this promise.

There is another verse I want to share with you. Jeremiah 29:11. God is speaking through the prophet Jeremiah to give us hope. He says, “*I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future.*” You may think that what God is doing in your life right now is painful and disappointing, but God promises you, “*I have good plans for you...[plans] for a good future.*” You need to trust Him for that future. You need to put your hope in God to bring about that future.

This next verse is designed to give you hope even if you’re someone whose been drifting away from the Lord. Maybe you were closer to God in the past. This verse can bring you great hope that your relationship with God can improve. It’s from Philippians 1:10. The apostle Paul says, “*I ...am confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*” When God starts something in your life, He finishes it! He doesn’t just leave you hanging. If you’ve surrendered your life to Christ, He’s not going to give up on you. If you’ve asked God to make His home in your heart, He has! And he’s going to continue that good work in you.

God’s presence is always watching over you. God’s purpose is always working in and through you. There’s one more source of hope. THIRD, God’s place is always waiting for you. When things get really unbearable in this life remember: your ultimate hope is in heaven. Jesus said,

“Don’t be troubled. You trust God, now trust also in Me... I am going to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:1-2) Heaven is a place, not a state of mine. It’s not some kind of nirvana or nothingness where you just float around on a cloud. It’s a real place. Jesus is preparing that place for you.

There’s a lot we don’t know about heaven, but we can trust in this: it will be a place of great joy. 1st Peter 1:4-6 says, ***“God has reserved for His children the priceless gift of eternal life; it is kept in heaven for you.... And God, in His mighty power, will make sure that you get there safely to receive it because you are trusting Him.... So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here.”***

In heaven there will be no more fear, or pain, or sorrow; no more conflict or problems; no more illness; no more death. The Bible says, ***“He will wipe away all tears from their eyes and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. All of that has gone forever.”*** (Revelations 21:4)

The hope we are given as Christians is unmatched by anything the world has to offer us. There is only one place to get real hope and that is through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When you enter into a relationship with Christ, you receive the hope of God’s constant presence with you, His good purpose working in you, and His special place waiting for you.