



You Could Use This

Have You Considered the Importance of Hope to Your Well-being?

Have you thought of hope as one of the most valuable resources at your disposal? Recently a fabulous basketball player damaged his knee severely in a game and now he will have to go through surgery and a long and tough rehabilitation process. There will be many days when the pain will be too much for him and he will not want to do his exercises. He will wonder if it is worth it. You have been through times like that when what you were trying to accomplish crashed, the trouble you faced was too much and quitting seemed the best option. You already sent out tons of resumes, gave plenty of hours to studying, tried to make the marriage work, worked hard to rebuild your relationship with one of your kids. Maybe like me, with my Achilles tendon rehab you didn't put in enough effort because you lacked what was needed within to continue trying, keep moving forward, make sacrifices needed to finally have a break-through.

Hope is one of the greatest gifts you can ever receive. It catapults you past obstacles, difficulties, and pain. It is the bridge between despair and fulfillment, heartache and contentment, discouragement and peace. Without hope, you stay on the side of bitterness, disappointment, and regret. Hope is a great friend, an ally. Job, who suffered terribly from Satan's attacks wondered if there was still hope for him. "...**where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me?**" (Job 17:15 NIV) Many are without hope, without a reason to keep trying, keep living. Naomi in the Bible who lost both her husband and two sons, upon returning to her hometown and her old friends told them not to call her Naomi, but rather Mara because she was bitter and without hope. Baruch, the personal assistant to the prophet Jeremiah, was tired of running and hiding from the Jewish leaders who hated the prophecies of Jeremiah and wanted Jeremiah and Baruch dead. He saw no way out of his peril. The LORD, through the prophet Jeremiah knew how Baruch felt. "**You said, 'Woe to me! The Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.'**" (Jeremiah 45:3 NIV) One translation renders "woe to me" as "I am without hope."

You perhaps have been there or known someone who was. My close friend when I was young killed himself because he felt hopeless and trapped. Hope is what carries us through tough times and we all face them. The Apostle Paul tells us that hope is the result of suffering and he is right. **Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.** (Romans 5:3-4 NIV) It is a long string there, out of suffering comes perseverance, perseverance develops character, from character comes hope. It would seem that hope is what God provided us to cope with all the horrors that sin brings. Before Adam sinned, there was no suffering, only the joy of living with God in His perfect creation. After sin came death and suffering. Hope was God's answer to the blight of despair and depression sin generates. Imagine only having suffering and no hope to face it! You would be in a horrible state.

Let's back up just a bit. Perseverance is a forerunner to hope. To have hope, at least for hope to be a part of your personality, you must have practiced perseverance. No one likes the thought of perseverance. It requires severe effort, mental and often physical. Perseverance is not the sprint; it is the marathon. Examples of perseverance fill the pages of the Bible. There is Sarah, who went years childless but clung to a promise from God that her husband would be the father of many nations. Joseph, who languished in an

Egyptian prison for a crime he never committed. Moses who wasted the best years of his life working as a shepherd for forty years after having been raised in the palace of Pharaoh. Jeremiah the prophet faced ridicule, imprisonment, and torture for simply proclaiming the messages the Lord gave him. We don't have to search far to find those we know who have suffered for months and even years. I have a friend in Russia, one of the kindest people you could ever meet, who helped take care of my ten year old son while I taught at the college, has suffered for years from a debilitating muscular disease and now is going through cancer treatments. Suffering is throughout the Bible and in our neighborhoods. Yet what can suffering do for you? It can produce hope.

Let me share with you one of the most beautiful examples I know of in the Bible of how suffering generates hope. A woman for twelve years suffered from bleeding. Doctors who tried to cure her just made it worse. In her suffering though was birthed hope. She heard that Jesus was in town and so she worked her way through the crowd, thinking that if she just touched His clothes, she would be healed. This is what happened as she let hope take over and she stretched to tap Jesus' cloak. **Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.** (Mark 5:29 NIV) Why did this woman go to doctor after doctor despite the fact that so many of them just increased her suffering? Somehow, hope was being worked in her. Despite what seems logical, hardship and dashed dreams should have taken away her hope, it actually pushed it along. Would she have approached Jesus if she didn't have hope? Perhaps not. She might have just ignored Him as so many others did and still do. Hope however, thrust the unnamed woman toward Jesus and gave her the drive to see what could come of touching His cloak. She gained healing through her hope and much more.

Hope is the generated force that pushes you forward after trouble, hardship and tragedy strike. The prophet Jeremiah put it this way after years of persecution and rejection. **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:** (Lamentations 3:19-20 NIV) Jeremiah remembered that He had God with Him and despite the heartache, He knew God was good and would bring him through His trials. The prophet Micah faced similar suffering yet hope carried him out of depression and despair. **What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave. The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains...But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.** (Micah 7:1-2, 7 NIV)

Let me share one more example of hope springing out of suffering. You probably haven't thought of Thomas the disciple in this way but it seems helpful to notice this. He was hurting and in terrible shock over what had just transpired like all the others who followed Jesus and loved Him. In fact it was so bad that he did not join the rest in the upper room Easter Sunday. He was gone despite having spent three years with his companions. One can only surmise that it was all just too much for him. When Thomas was told by his friends that they had all seen Jesus alive and resurrected, he found it too good to be true. Thomas could not gather the emotional or psychological resources needed to accept the witness of his trustworthy and tightknit brothers and sisters. He could not believe. But he could hope. And that was what Thomas relied upon to see him through the great crisis he faced. He might not have thought it was possible Jesus was alive but he had hope enough to make sure he was with the other disciples the next time Jesus came. Hope is a great gift of God; a strength that takes us from where we are in suffering or disappointment and brings us into a real way out of it. Hope brought Thomas to the upper room and his life was never the same after that.

The Apostle Paul famously makes this point. **But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?** (Romans 8:24 NIV) Hope is not the result of getting something, it is the work of God in us when we don't have it yet. When you are facing the toughest moments, ask Christ for hope and the

Holy Spirit will give it to you. Hope is a great gift. When you don't have faith, hope will bring you there and carry you to joy and peace. Pray for hope. Faith will come in time. And so will victory.