



Family Values

Virtue Realities

Hopefulness

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In some respects, Christians are incurable optimists. We remain hopeful in spite of evidence to the contrary. In the face of tragedy, setbacks and disappointment, with God's help we can still look forward to what lies ahead. Such a positive approach to life and the future is not contingent on how we feel or the cards we are dealt in life, but rather on our trust in a God who is there for us no matter what. It is founded on faith and not circumstances.

One of the figures in the Bible that illustrates this dynamic is Job in the Old Testament. Here is a man blessed with wealth, family and health. In addition, he is a man who *"was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil."* (Job 1:1b) In a heavenly staff meeting attended by Satan, God asks if he was aware of his servant Job. Satan admits that he knows of him, but is not impressed since God has protected him from adversity. God allows Satan to destroy Job's possessions and family and later his health.

In his suffering, Job despairs but he does not give up on God. Even though he believes that he is innocent and not deserving of his fate, Job continues to persevere. Ultimately he recognizes the extent of God's power and confesses: *"Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."* (Job 42:3). At the same time, his experience takes him to a more profound level of understanding: *"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."* (Job 42:5) His hope in God pays off in ways he could not have predicted.

Throughout the Old Testament, God is the source of hope for His people. The Psalmist declares: *"Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is the Lord their God."* (Psalm 146:5) It rests on God's covenant promises as summarized in Lamentations 3:21, 22: *"But this I call to mind, and there I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end."* God can be counted on so that *"surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."* (Prov. 28:18)

In the New Testament this steadfast love and endless mercy of God takes the form of a child who is called Emmanuel, which means, *"God is with us."* (Matt. 1:23b) Matthew ends his Gospel with Jesus assuring his disciples: *"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matt. 28:20) This steadfast love continues. Paul reiterates this fact when he writes: *"... hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."* (Romans 5:5) Christ's resurrection is the basis of our hope, as Peter reminds his readers: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* (1 Peter 1:3)

As a result, we can sing with confidence the familiar hymn:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness...
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my Hope and Stay
On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

The following are suggestions for practicing hopefulness:

1. **Focus on the positive.** Rather than dwelling on what is wrong, look for what is right and good and celebrate it.
2. **Rely on God for strength.** Ask that Christ continue to be a living hope within you in any and all circumstances.
3. **Share your burdens.** Rejoice in the collective hope that is present within the community of believers.
4. **Be a beacon of hope.** Reflect the source of your faith and confidence.
5. **Never give up on yourself.** Give to yourself as God has freely given to you. Be open to not only hear, but also to see

Affirmation: I have good reason to be hopeful!

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