

“The Power of Hope”

Psalm 46:1-7

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Bishop William Frey has described hope as the “Cinderella Sister” of Paul’s famous trilogy in I Corinthians 13:13, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” Look on the shelves of any religious bookstore and Frey’s assessment will be validated. Volumes have been written about faith and love but the books on hope are scarce. Today, let’s change that. Let’s put the glass slipper on hope and elevate its status.

I wish I could remember where I first read it, but I cannot. I have never forgotten it, though. **“There is no situation in life that Christian hope cannot embrace and change.”** That’s a powerful statement. Bold. Ambitious. True. Helpful.

I hear this message even in pre-Christian literature and one place is Psalm 46:1-7, the passage that inspired Martin Luther to write the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is with her and she will not fall. God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall, He lifts His voice and the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

When was the last time the earth around you shifted and walls of security tumbled down? It was scary, wasn’t it? Was that the time you discovered that life was bigger than you are or had you learned it previously?

What did you do at that moment? Did you cry out for help or suffer in silence? Did you sink into depression and isolationism? Did you turn to God and ask for strength, courage and guidance? Are you still trying to decide what to do?

Our faith has a message for you today and it is this. There is no situation in life that Christian hope cannot embrace and change. God will meet us where we are and help us.

Do you have a friend that you could call in the middle of the night if you needed help? You know this person would get up from their bed and come to you, wherever you are. If so, you have a real friend, don’t you, whose friendship you cherish. God wants to be this kind of friend. It’s up to us to let Him be.

How do I know? Scripture has taught me this, in particular Psalm 46. Someone that knew both danger and fear wrote it. His security was being threatened either by an invading army or the wrath of nature. One thing was for sure, though. The very foundation of his world was crumbling. What had seemed so permanent and unchangeable was gone and replaced with chaos and confusion.

What was he to do? With great confidence, he placed his faith and future in God’s strong and eternal hands, encouraging others to do so, too. I have found his advice to be sound and his challenge rewarding.

I also learned to trust God from experience. I’ve received disturbing phone calls that shifted the foundation under me and tumbled walls around me. I’ve buried grandparents, parents, dear friends and a few dreams. All of us have. However, I do not recall a time when God’s grace was insufficient.

Some of my earliest thoughts after receiving the call of my father’s sudden death came from I Corinthians 15:55, 57. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Since I learned this verse in the King James Version, this is how it surfaced that morning.

Did you ever live in a culture where the words help and hope were interchangeable? I did but did not realize why at the time. Now I know. Hope and help are derived from the same English root. Thus some people say, “Can you hope me out?” when they are asking for assistance.

I think hope and help are interchangeable in scripture, too. There is hope because there is help and there always will be hope because God is willing to help us at all times. Maybe this is why the Jews believe that despair is the one unforgivable sin. It denies God.

In 1960, John Claypool began pastoring the Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville. He became friends with a Jewish rabbi that was forty years his senior as they worked together in the civil rights movement. After a tense and unproductive meeting one day, Claypool looked at his Jewish friend and said, “I think it is hopeless. This problem is so deep, so many-faceted, there is simply no way out of it.”

This rabbi asked Claypool to stay a few minutes after the meeting and said, “Humanely speaking, despair is presumptuous. It is saying something about the future we have no right to say because we have not been there yet and do not know enough. Think of the times you have been surprised in the past as you looked at a certain situation and deemed it hopeless. Then, lo and behold, forces that you did not even realize existed broke in and changed everything. We do not know enough to embrace the absolutism of despair. If God can create the things that are from the things that are not and even make dead things come back to life, who are we to set limits on what that kind of potency may yet do?”

Even when we know this, why are there times when we despair? Perhaps it is because God does not act on our timetable in ways we demand or expect. In our frustration, we give up on Him, not realizing, as Claypool writes, “that in any given moment, we never know the full extent of what is happening to us.”

Have you read C. S. Lewis’ book, [A Grief Observed?](#) It was written in the shadow of grief after his wife of three years died of cancer. It is a record of his feelings and fears during that period of overwhelming grief. Lewis made no effort to hide how betrayed he felt by God, accusing Him of being cruel and sadistic. As time passed, though, Lewis discovered that his sense of betrayal had been caused more by his expectations than by what had actually occurred. He was angry because God did not do what he thought He would do or should do to help him. When he realized this and “cleansed the lens of his expectations,” Lewis discovered that God had always been present and at work in his life providing comfort in ways he had overlooked.

Years later, Paula D’Arcy would write a book about her grief after the accident that took the life of her husband and eighteen month old daughter, Sarah. She concluded the diary that she began writing before Sarah’s birth that she had planned to give to Sarah on her sixteenth birthday by penning these words, “I look at what I wrote on your grave marker, ‘The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.’ How well I realize now that is true. Over all is the hand of the Shepherd. Always for me, at every moment, He was there, there when I felt His presence and equally there when it seemed I was all alone. His presence did not depend upon my feeling it or even upon the extent of my belief. God was simply there. ‘The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.’ And we are all quite safe.”

There is no situation in life that Christian hope cannot embrace and change. Because of this, we are all quite safe.