

Finding Hope



in a
Hopeless World

Life is filled with enigmas, those unanswerable questions that have long since been left for poets and philosophers to decipher for us. In his letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul actually puts three of these enigmas together in one verse: “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). But what exactly is love? Mankind has tried for millennia to define it. Even the experience of it, however, has somehow left men scratching their heads as they try to explain exactly what “it” is. What about faith? How do you explain a life-governing belief that is sometimes without any evidence at all and certainly without proof? And that brings us to hope.

Hope is one such mysterious concept. Even though we may have experienced it, explaining it seems to be a different story. In the fourth century BC, the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle tried but failed to expand our understanding when he said, “Hope is a waking dream.” Nineteenth century writer Robert Ingersoll didn’t really help either when he commented, “Hope is the only bee that makes honey without flowers.”

One of the most famous of such “hope quotes” comes from 17th century poet Alexander Pope. In his “Essay on Man,” he penned the famous line that has been quoted so often, today it is considered a proverb or an adage: “Hope springs eternal in the human breast.”

Over the centuries, thousands of such words have been written on the subject as great minds struggled to discover what hope really is and where it comes from. In all the confusion, however, everyone agreed on one thing: the *importance* of hope. Well-known Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote, “To live without hope is to cease to live,” and renowned evangelist Billy Graham couldn’t have made it clearer when he wrote, “Perhaps the greatest psychological, spiritual and medical need that all people have is the need for hope.”



Without Hope...

Today, psychologists have weighed in on the subject, suggesting that being without hope actually leads to mental illness.

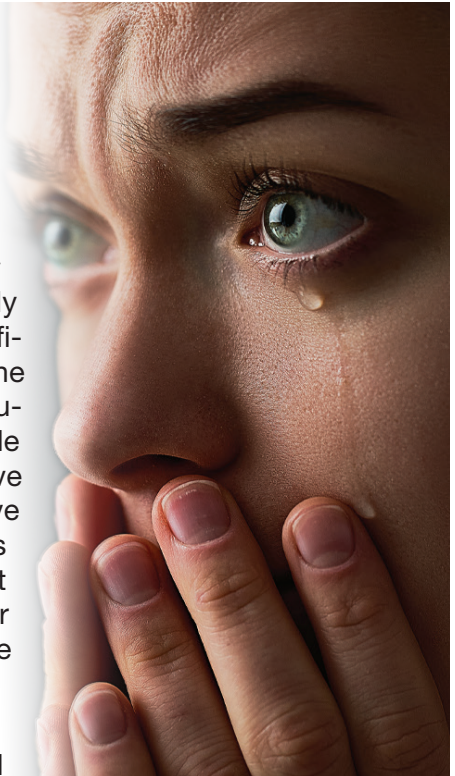
The opposite of hope, they say, is not simply hopelessness but despair, a deep despondency that for some leads to suicide.

Research has shown that people without hope are more likely to lead unhappy lives, struggle socially, perform poorly academically and are less likely to be able to cope with the difficult issues of life. Without the ability to picture the brighter future that hope provides, people often give up on trying to improve their lives because they believe they are helpless to make things better. People who are without hope often withdraw, no longer able to interact with or contribute to their communities.

Unfortunately, the world today is facing what is being called a crisis of hopelessness. Numbers of people suffering from depression and despondency are increasing all over the globe, as many feel engulfed by an ugly and uncertain world that they have no power to affect.

But With Hope...

Those same psychologists tell us that Graham was right: hope is an essential ingredient in a person's mental and physical health, and overall well-being. Hopeful people are able to maintain a positive outlook despite the difficulties they encounter or the negative circumstances that surround them. They are more likely to be successful, do better academically and are less likely to experience anxiety or sadness. They have a higher level of self-confidence and are less likely to suffer self-doubt. Interestingly, studies have also shown that hopeful people have stronger immune systems. And if they do become ill, they are more able to cope and reach full recovery.



Hope or Optimism?



The *Oxford Dictionary* defines hope as a feeling or desire; wanting something to happen or be the case. If that is true, then hope would be no different than optimism, a passive belief that things will just get better, that the glass is half full, that every cloud will have a silver lining. It reduces hope to a desire that things will change that is not undergirded by any assurance that things will. Think of statements like “I sure hope I get that new job.” “I hope I can get a new car somehow.” “I just hope things will be all right.” They portray hope that has become wishful thinking based on uncertainty.

Pope believed that people continued to “hope” in the wake of unmet expectations because hope is programmed into the DNA of every human being. However, even though hopeful people can be found everywhere, the fact that hopelessness and despair are on the rise around the world flies in the face of some sort of genetic predisposition.

Hope in the Bible

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, renowned English Orthodox rabbi, philosopher, theologian and author, suggests that everyone, regardless of a hopeful nature, experiences those moments in their lives when they know where they are and where they want to be, but cannot see a route from here to there. That, the rabbi says, is the prelude to despair.

Those are the times, he believes, when the Bible is the only lifeline. We need only remember the stalwart men and women of God who faced the same dilemma, and we can find the strength we need to keep going.

Moses, Rabbi Sacks reminds us, suffered a “complete mental breakdown” in Numbers 11:11–15. He became so discouraged with the Israelites that he cried out to God: “*Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth...?*” And he finally takes a

step over the line from anger and depression to despair when he says, “I am not able to carry all this people alone...If you will treat me like this, kill me at once...”

And Moses wasn't the only one. David, the greatest warrior and king in all of Jewish history, wrote much of the book of Psalms where he constantly revealed his moments of despair. “Why are you cast down, O my soul,” he cried in Psalm 42:11a. His despairing heart wondered why God had forsaken him (Ps. 22:1), or left him as a man with no strength, lying in a pit, abandoned among the dead (Ps. 88:5–7). Elijah, the prophet of prophets, became so despondent he ran away into the desert, sat down under a broom tree and begged God to kill him (1 Kings 19:3–4). Hannah, the mother of biblical giant Samuel, was so despondent, her prayers were wordless, gut-wrenching moanings that sounded like one too drunk to speak (1 Sam. 1:12–13). Job suffered extreme depression as the enemy of his soul brought catastrophe after catastrophe upon him. In his despair, he cursed the day of his own birth and wished he had never been born (Job 3:1–12). There were others as well, including Jeremiah (20:7–18) and Jonah (4:3), all of whom dealt with despair. And yet they emerged, hopefulness intact, to fulfill the will of God for their lives and become examples of the power of hope to billions of Bible readers throughout time.

Hope, a rock to stand on



They were able to do so because they understood hope in its biblical sense. In their Hebraic worldview, hope was not wishful thinking or simple, passive optimism. It was not a *maybe* thing; it was a *sure* thing. Hope was confident expectation, a strong expression of faith in the God who is the father of hope. It was a rock that they could stand on. And so, our biblical heroes hoped when there was no hope, believed when believing made no sense at all. And in those moments when they gave in to despair, God was there.

And He didn't just pat Moses on the head and whisper, “Don't

worry, son, everything will be okay.” Instead, He gave Moses instruction on how to lighten his load, how to move forward and *make* things better. As Elijah stood on the mountainside in the midst of storms and earthquakes, God didn’t say, “Just think positively, Elijah. Tomorrow will be a brighter day.” He asked, “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” (1 Kings 19:13). And then he sent Elijah back to accomplish all that God had called him to do. Job was rewarded, yes, as he fathered more children, grew more crops, tended more animals. And Hannah continued to trust, to try, until at last God gave her the son she had believed Him for. These biblical characters knew the difference between passive optimism and real hope that requires tenacity, persistence and the courage to do whatever God instructed them to do to make their hope a reality.

The Jewish people today continue to follow the example of their ancient relatives, as they have for millennia. They are resilient, positive and courageous. However, after 2,000 years of anti-Semitism, persecution and attempted annihilation, not to mention the current war

they are fighting for their very existence, they have suffered too much to be optimists. They are instead realists, but with their own brand of realism. It somehow allows them to accept things as they are (realism), while at the same time believing with absolute conviction that, with God’s help, they can make things better (hope). They serve a God who has led

them, guided them, delivered them and shown them extravagant love and mercy for millennia. He has made promises and kept them, constantly pointing them forward. He is the God who is *always* there, who never slumbers or sleeps, who promised to lift them when they stumbled, strengthen them when they failed and forgive them when they made mistakes. It is fitting that *HaTikvah*, The Hope, is the national anthem of Israel, the land Rabbi Sacks

The Jewish people, a people of hope

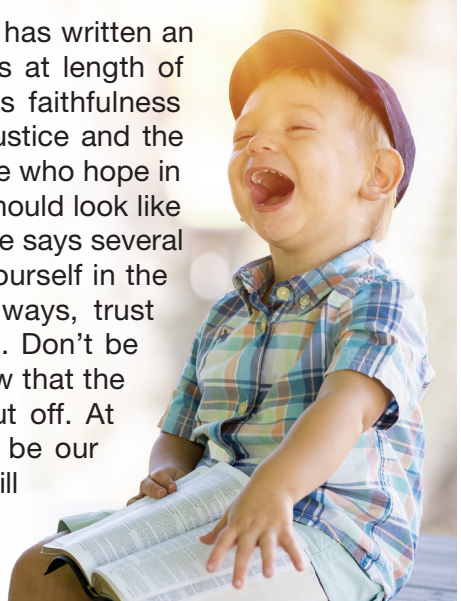


calls the “home of hope” and homeland of the people, the rabbi says, who gave birth to hope.

The Wellspring of Hope

Throughout the entire Bible, there are two words that are used interchangeably: hope and trust. Trust is defined as a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of the object trusted, leading to unshakable confidence. In essence, this is the biblical definition of hope.

In Psalm 37, I believe David has written an “ode to hope.” Here he speaks at length of the trustworthiness of God, His faithfulness to the righteous, His love for justice and the beautiful future that awaits those who hope in Him. And He tells us what we should look like as we wait on Him. Don’t fret, He says several times, or be envious. Delight yourself in the Lord, commit yourself to His ways, trust Him and wait patiently for Him. Don’t be angry, rest in the Lord and know that the future of the wicked will be cut off. At the same time, He will always be our strength in times of trouble, He will never fail to help us and deliver us because we hope in Him.



Perhaps Pope was partially right with his suggestion that God had programmed hope into human DNA. There are those who believe that the birth of hope can be traced back through time to the creation itself. As God told the story of the formation of the earth and the heavens, He could have said, “There was morning and there was evening,” a phrase that makes sense to our human minds. But He didn’t. He said there was evening first and then morning. In His narrative, we are told that twilight will come and will proceed into deeper and deeper darkness until that inevitable moment when light dawns. Then like an army on horseback, those rays will charge forth and defeat the darkness, until light prevails and all is well again, a demonstration of Psalm 18:28, “*My God turns my darkness into light*” (NIV). Every day, a living reminder of the power of hope in God.

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Scripture from the ESV Version, except where indicated otherwise

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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