

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Having Hope in a Faithful God

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Hi, my name is Ashley Stevens from Mountains Unmoved and today we're gonna talk about hope. There's a phrase that appears many times in scriptures that says, ***"Blessed are they who hope in the Lord."*** But what would that look like? What would it look like to really hope in the Lord in our everyday circumstances? How would that change how we handle suffering and pain? How we help friends and family do the same? I'm excited to dive into why and how we can have hope in the Lord, but before I begin, let's open with prayer.

In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. God, today I lift up anyone in need of hope. Anyone who's walking through a dark season, anyone who's struggling to see the light at the end of the tunnel, struggling to see how you'll use what they're walking through right now for good. And I just pray as we discuss how we can find that hope in you today, I just pray for that person, just that they would have hope in the resurrection, and have hope in tomorrow. It's in your name I pray. Amen. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

How do you define hope? I was asked that recently at a panel, and I went to the Catechism, and in the Catechism it says we are buoyed up by hope, or physically held up by hope. And for me, I think I also see hope as an anchor. Something that holds us up but then also keeps us rooted in hard times. And for me, one of the best ways to see hope is in the Scripture.

So if you have a Bible, let's open up to Romans eight, and we're gonna start with verse 38. It says: ***What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or the sword? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, not any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** And this is where we find our hope. This is what sustains us on hard days. This is us, what lifts us up, whether you're facing a diagnosis or job loss. If you're walking through a setback, we find our hope in knowing that absolutely nothing can separate us from God's love for our lives. We find our hope in eternal life.

But still there are so many hindrances to hope, right? There are so many things that get in the way of us having hope in Christ in our everyday circumstances. Maybe for you, it's uncertainty or the next step. Maybe it's fear that you're the right person, for that speaking gig or for that job. Or maybe it's doubt, maybe it's doubt in God,

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doubt in his goodness. I think we've all had days that we question God, why? Why, Father, why would you let that happen? Why would you let that happen to the world, to my community, to my family, to me? How can I continue to have hope in you, when you let something like that happen?

For me, one of my hardest days to find hope and to choose hope was the day I was supposed to be getting married and didn't. It was five months after a serious accident. And on that day instead of walking down the aisle, I was in my fifth month of therapy in the hospital. Instead of walking down the aisle, I lived 16 hours away from my fiancé. And that night we still had yet to reschedule our wedding. And brothers and sisters, that night finding hope was hard. That night I doubted my worth. I knew I looked different than before the accident. I knew I heard different with my deaf ear. I knew I wrote different with my impaired hands. And I felt like I was not worth marrying. I felt like that wedding we had planned and dreamed for and booked the church for would never come to be. And for me on days like that, it's hard to find hope.

But on days like that, I tried to remind myself that our God is a faithful God. He's faithful on our hardest days, He's faithful on our best days, He's faithful when we turn away from Him, He's faithful when we sin, the same sin over and over and over, our God is a faithful God. And that night, I reflected on that. And I trusted through gritted teeth, that in his faithfulness, that one day in his timing, I would walk down that aisle.

You see, we see that story of God's faithfulness over and over in Scripture. We see God's people turning away from him. The first was Eve. God gave them one rule and she broke it and turned away from him. But it continues. When the Israelites were walking across the Egypt getting free from 400 years of slavery. They fell into idolatry, they fell into sin. Even Moses built a golden calf to worship an idol. It happens over and over in Scripture. Recently, I read the book of Ezekiel, which is kind of a commitment at like 47 chapters, I believe. But that book tells the same story. It tells the story of how God's people were blessed in their youth. But then they forgot God, and they chose money over God. Then they chose relationships over God. Then they chose other idols over God, other gods over God.

And that happens over and over with different nations throughout the book of Ezekiel. But towards the end of Ezekiel, God eventually says, Enough is enough. He says, My covenant with my people is eternal. It lasts forever. And in the same way I say to my daughters, I say to them, there's nothing you can ever do, where I wouldn't love you. There's nothing you can ever say, that you wouldn't be my daughter. God looked at his people, He looked at the Israelites and he said, that he

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said, I'm coming for you, I'm gonna fight to restore our relationship. I'm gonna gather my people back together again. I'm gonna rebuild what was torn down. I'm gonna breathe life into your hardened hearts. I'm gonna rescue you. So if you have a Bible, let's open up to Ezekiel.

We're gonna go to chapter 37 and start with verse 11. Says: *He said to me: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They are saying our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off. Therefore prophecy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God, Look, I'm gonna open your graves. I will make you come up out of your graves, my people. And bring you back to the land of Israel. You shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and make you come up out of them, my people. I will put my spirit in you that you may come to life.* And this is the God we serve. This is the God on the hard days, the days like my wedding that wasn't happening. This is the God we need to trust is still working, is still fighting for our hearts, is still working all things for good. And just as he fought for the Israelites, he's fighting for you. He's rebuilding what was destroyed in your marriage, in your relationship with him. He's breathing life into your darkness.

But I think, I'm a practical person, and I can see that and I can know that. But I think how do we actually have hope every day? How do we have hope in the way we live? And for me, it's two ways that have helped me best. And the first way is to simply look for God. My senior year of college, my Bible study leader would always start out each study with the question: How have you seen God's love this week? And at the start of the year, my answers were superficial, like, I went on a cool run. The weather was nice. But as the year progressed, I began to look for God's love throughout my week. And I found not only did the more I find it, but the more I wanted to find it. The more I found it in a beautiful sunset, in a great call with a high school friend, in a time in prayer, where God was helping me sort through something that year that was heavy on my heart. The more I looked for God's love, the more I found it and saw his presence. And that brought me hope that year.

Another way, I think, of looking, choosing hope in our everyday life is choosing gratitude. There was a study done at Cornell, basically trying to answer the question, why does everyone think everyone else has it easier than them. And if you grew up with a sibling, you get this. My mom and dad was always easier on my brother than me, right. But the study looked at cyclists. And it noticed that when they were biking into the wind, when wind was blowing at their face, it's all they noticed. All they noticed is how their face was getting windburn, how it was slowing down their speed, how it was harder to pedal into the wind. But then when

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they turned and the winds were at their back, and the tail winds are pushing them along, they were grateful. But the study found that that gratitude only lasted for about a minute and then after that minute they failed to notice that they were being boosted along by the winds.

And the study found that the same premise applies to our life. We often pay attention to the barriers in front of us because we have to overcome them, we have to get through them somehow. But we often forget to pay attention to the things boosting us along, we can just be boosted along. And I think in this talk today, the same premise applies to our hope.

So often we forget how God has boosted us along in the past. Maybe for you, you grew up in a loving family. Maybe God brought you and your spouse together at the perfect time. Maybe he put a key spiritual friend or mentor in your life exactly when you need it. Whatever it is, I know you and I know myself, we have all been boosted along. And I think when you're lacking hope remembering that, remembering how God has boosted us along in the past, gives us hope that he is and that he will.

For me, one of my biggest moments of that is the day that we did get married. The day that we did get married, we decided to get married on the one year anniversary of the accident to redeem the day. And to each day look back on that anniversary and remember that hope in my recovery, the hope in the prayers and the support of our people helping us fight to get back to a spot where we were ready in God's timing to get married. Another example of being boosted along is we didn't know after the accident, if we would be able to have a family. But after almost losing my life in a car, we gave birth to our first healthy child in the front seat of our car.

Our God, brothers and sisters, he's still working, no matter how dark your story is right now. He's working in his timing. He's working in his way. But he is present. He is boosting you along and our God is still rolling stones.

Let's close in prayer with a quote from Saint Teresa of Avila: *In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Hope, oh my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly. Even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain and turns a very short time into a long one. Dream that the more you struggle, the more you prove the love that you bear your God. And the more you will rejoice one day with your beloved in happiness and rapture that can never end. God, I thank you for your faithfulness. I thank you that you are always fighting for us, rescuing us, loving us in your timing. And I pray today for anyone desperate for hope that they would find all the ways that you have boosted them along, that they will look for your presence and your love in*

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their everyday life and they would have hope that you're working all things for good. I ask this in your name. Amen. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.