

Thoughts and Reflections on Hope

Ali Massey



I love the thought of hope being what's left, rather than where we start - reminds me of 1 Corinthians 13, where it says, *"...and these three remain: faith, hope and love..."*. We rightly major in on love, but it doesn't change the fact that hope is one of the 3 things we're left with when all else fades.

Faith and hope are very much linked, as it says in the definition of faith in Hebrews as well.

Regarding hope coming out of and being linked to suffering, I also think that's right. One thing Frank Fearnley once shared that stuck with me was about doubt and faith: that they're not opposites, but work together - you go through doubt to get to faith: doubt makes you question, and through the questioning comes faith. Similarly with suffering and hope.

Lastly, our hope as Christians is hooked into a person, the person of Jesus, in a loving God, not in circumstances or things. Christ in us, the hope of glory, Christ our hope, etc...

Louise Alan



This this made me think straight away that this may be about working through the hard times and eventually you will come out of the other side again. After continuing to read the paragraph that stood out to me:

"We had hoped that our parents would love us unconditionally. We had hoped that by this time in life we would be married, or we would have a meaningful career. We had hoped that our children wouldn't make the mistakes we did. We had hoped this lockdown would be over by now".

I don't know if this is because I'd just had a phone conversation with my friend about being close to 30. That seems to have happened all of a sudden when we still feel 20, and looking at how our lives match up to what we thought when we were younger in terms of job, marriage and children. But as I was reading that paragraph all I could think is that you can set targets to do things by a certain age, or in a certain order, but that might not be the path that is intended for you. It will happen when it's supposed to, so you just have to have faith something better is going to come because of this. I felt a little sad when hope was turned into 'hoped' because it must feel so confusing when you lose that hope. But then when it mentions "when God close a door he opens a window" I thought yes this is true. I don't know if this is an odd link but tying this into the lockdown I feel like this is a way to say to the world let's just stop for a minute and reset. In this time you can evaluate what you really miss doing and what you want to focus more on and what you're most grateful for. Reading that those imprisoned are only allowed out every 3 days to shower just makes you realise, even though it's been hard compared to life before lockdown we are so lucky to be in our homes, have a health service that is there when we need it, and we are gradually returning to a new normal. But others may still be going through it, or had a much worse experience.

Olivido Vea



"We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us."

This is the part of the reading that stands out most for me. I agree that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character. In a way it shapes you and it makes you stronger. For me hope comes from suffering, from trying to be positive and think that things will get better. If I do not have hope, what is the alternative? Despair? Thinking that there is no end to the present situation?

"Nothing is permanent" that is what I read a while back in a book and that also gives me hope. It helps me to cope with the present situation. Hope and praying is what helps me with the present times. Also feeling grateful for who I share my

life with. Feeling grateful is as important for me as hope.

As I said, if I do not have hope, what is the alternative? Hope can disappoint you but at the end of the day, it might not. Hope.

David Buckley



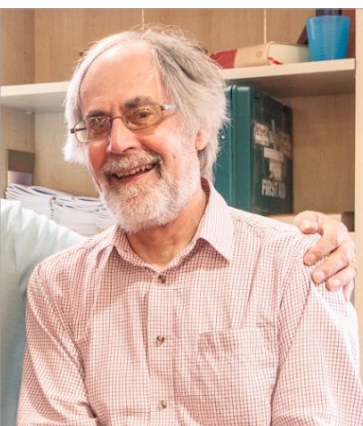
Three quick thoughts:

Genesis 1 - The earth was shapeless and empty and the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters and God said, *"Let there be light, and there was light"*. When God spoke, it was sorted.

Then Paul's use of that image in 2 Cor 4 *"For God who said 'Let light shine out of darkness' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay..."*

Gideon in Judges 7 with an army of 300 armed with clay pots with a torch (the burning type, of course) inside and a trumpet against an enemy which could not be counted. They broke the jars and the light shone out and then blew the trumpets and the enemies run away screaming. (We have this treasure - the light of God - in jars of clay).

Len Harling



I don't see hope as solving a problem. It is nothing more than wishful thinking. I never found hope that attractive maybe a bit of a gamble.

Looking back over the years I have had all those things people wish for, but as the years passed I realised something was missing. I was functionally fulfilled at the expense of time, friendship and relationships. I was empty wondering what will make me whole.

Then God gave me a beautiful gift, Church, Christ and the Holy Spirit, it was more than I could have ever hoped for. Hope may not happen when we want it to happen, so trust in God to deliver, it will surprise you.

I like to use the analogy of driving through a dark tunnel with my headlights on, the walls of the tunnel are trust, I will never veer off course. The journey is in faith knowing I will never turn back because around the corner is hope of a new tomorrow.



TJ White. I've suffered plenty of things, loss of my independence and abilities, the death of my son, periods of very very little money, abuse by the state. I'm not sure any of it built anything, I've survived all of it, clearly, but each time it's drained me further and I've found it harder and harder to do the work to fight back. I've too many friends with PTSD to think that suffering is something that is helpful. It's exhausting and relentless and the only people who've endured are those who survived, it's a very circular argument. However my first long experience, everything is coloured by that, and nothing has

quite ever been as bad. There was a period of my life where things were intensely hopeless, I clung to God like a lifeline I poured out my pain and prayed in random places at random times, God was why I was sticking it out. The only thing I remember bringing me what felt like a positive sense of hope instead of that sense of clinging on was the day I checked to see if I would be able to kill myself. I was 11, my chosen method would work and I knew I had a choice, the choice gave me a reason to carry on. Knowing I could leave if I needed. It's not supposed to make sense, it's depression, it doesn't have to. I felt that way my entire teens. Nobody knew the extent of what was happening till it bled out around the edges too much to contain and I became a problem. Most people don't tend to care if you are the quiet kind of crazy, it's when you do things that make them uncomfortable that they start to notice and try to make it go away. They call it help, it's not. They tell you how to heal and how to change and what you should be, they offer what they need you to take and they make assumptions about everything. They try to contain and limit what bleeds out so it's not so messy. What followed me were the words 'attention seeker' as if the issue isn't clinging to life by the nails, as if the issue is the distraction you are to everyone else's life. Things got worse when I got noticed. The only person with me for nearly 10 years, the only one who heard everything and didn't reject me was Jesus, that is why I'm still here and I suppose that was a desperate kind of hope for something that should be better. So I waited, not very patiently but I waited and stuck it out, I hung in there, I don't remember feeling much hope but I was certainly enduring and I hadn't stopped trying. All of this only really changed when someone came down and met me where I was, right where I was and let me kick out and bleed all over them, no matter how messy. In all the pain and the mess this person sat with me and held me and didn't let go, I wasn't too much, ever. There was hope, real hope. I'd had Jesus all the way in the same place with me, he'd been the only one listening to that point and the reason I survived so long. I still couldn't grasp a lot of what he had to offer, it was too hard to understand from where I was starting. He sent a human being to bring some light and the kicking I'd been doing for 10 years finally bled daylight inside of me and I slowly found my way out, I've not been back since.

We need connection, maybe more than we need food and drink, God knows this, God IS this but we get in the way, and other people too often get in the way instead of helping. What worries me is often the idea that suffering builds something, I don't feel built, I felt damaged, I now feel stuck back together, sticky tape and string style. I'm certainly shaped by it but into someone far more fragile and less resilient. The story doesn't end at 'a person found me and helped me and everything got better'. It got messier, I walked away from my faith because of the way the Christians had been reacting to and treating me, I walked all the way into Wicca before I came back. I still can't listen to a certain type of worship song because the despair is just overwhelming. I've had to leave churches because I cannot listen to a sermon that is pushing me back 20 years and today that feels like hopelessness because the world has so much more colour and depth now. I wonder if we risk missing how much we need people to actually feel hope, people who will sit with us where we are no matter where that is BEFORE the daylight can bleed through. The thing that stands out to me is the use of 'We' in the whole verse, 'we' are enduring 'we' are suffering 'our' collective suffering. If we won't get down into the pain with each other, if we can't endure together we can't be building anything, we just shatter.

There is a line in a song that is all about this it's called Spiderweb and Lace and it's goes "I'm held together with Spiderweb and Lace". The chorus is "Can I share this with you, I can carry it with two, but if there's only one of me, I think I'll drown before I breathe".



Hope and suffering.

I love this sermon as I think it speaks of something that is profound about our journey through life - hope.

I think hope is such an important topic. In my experience I believe there are two types of hope. The first type is the naïve form of hope, where we hope our lives will be exactly as we want them to be. We want material success, health, purpose, friendships and love. We want the future to be better than what we have now. These are not bad things to want for our life, but the nature of reality means there are so many

things that are out of our control that it is naïve to expect all we hope for will come our way. It is often the young who have these hopes for all to be pleasant and easy in the future but also sometimes when life hits us with something big and difficult to cope with we just hope it will go away. That our journey through life can return to being as easy and pain free as possible. So this hope is for a future time of ease and comfort.

Then there is the second type of hope. This hope is different from the first as it comes about when we realise the first type of hope can't help us, can't deliver the life we feel we deserve or need. This second hope comes about as we realise it is harmful to keep waiting for life to be easy again. So, this second hope is born of suffering. It is a hope that is born of an understanding that sometimes life will remain hard, the situation we don't want isn't going anywhere and maybe there isn't a magical time in the future where everything is perfect. I think that prolonged or deep suffering can act as a doorway to this hope, we can stay stuck with our despair or we can walk through this door we find our suffering has brought us to. As we go through this door of new understanding, rather than see our situation as despairing, we see a bigger picture, a pattern that runs through life and that was played out in the life of Jesus. A pattern that shows that nothing is wasted, everything is of value even the hard stuff. Everything and everyone can be resurrected, can be transformed into something worthwhile, true and formed of love. This brings us a new hope that what we are going through will be meaningful, that it will in some way, however tiny, serve the evolution of the human heart and spirit, our own and of those we influence.

I believe God is calling us forward, towards an understanding of how we are all connected, of what our true nature is, and to see the reality of our true potential. God doesn't cause the suffering in order to achieve this, he has freely given of himself to create this world and as this giving is from love and free from conditions, we have been granted freedom, freedom to choose how we want to live. Suffering is a reality of the human condition, a result of a freely given life with all its swirling possibilities, both good and bad. This mixture of things we can and things we mostly can't control is something universal we all share. This is why the world is the way it is, but I strongly believe we are on an evolutionary path to wake up to who we really are and what we can achieve. I think this is something we do with God - as co-creators and partners we create heaven on earth here and now. So, I think God uses rather than creates suffering, it is like an alchemy where the end result is gold.

And while I agree that hope is what is left when nothing else remains of how you want things to be, I don't think that is all that is left. My own experience has been one of deep suffering, I have watched a terrible illness ruin both my mum's and now my son's life. I have seen my beautiful son be very ill for years, he has been housebound and unwell in a way it is difficult to comprehend, he has missed out on 3 years so far of his childhood and all the experiences that most 10-13 year olds have, I have experienced a heartbreak I didn't know possible as this has unfolded. I have felt my pain as a grief. It is as if the life I

imagined for my son went drifting away from me down the river. But God sat with me at the side of the river as my dreams sailed downstream, he put his arms around me as I cried at my heartbreak and despair at what was lost, he cried with me, he shared my pain and agony, he didn't try to placate me by saying that everything was going to be ok and my life would end up just as I want it to be. I sat at the riverside for a long time grieving but after a time it was as if God said to me, 'Open your eyes, what is in front of you? What is true and beautiful here and now? Can you see nothing is lost? Love can never sail downstream away from you'. I believe as well as the gift of hope, which often feels like something in the future we also have the gift of the present moment, where despite, and often because of, our pain, we are aware of what actually matters and that is what is here now, what is in front of us, what is true and beautiful in the moment we are in. It is from this place that we create a beautiful life, one based on love. This love informs what action needs to be taken now. How can I help or serve now? I feel my suffering has been a gift, not one I asked for but one that opened a door. I have come to understand gratitude, perspective, compassion for the suffering of others, the need for hope and the importance of love above all else. These are universal truths, but it takes the experience of the personal to grasp them. We don't really understand them unless we have had the fire of pain burn away the superficial and unimportant.

So while I can't see what is coming floating its way toward me down the river, I have hope it will be part of a greater whole, that in some way whatever is coming will be used for good, be used for the evolution of the human heart and spirit, even if that is only in a tiny way. I have a hope that the alchemy of love will turn whatever is coming my way into gold.

Sukhwant Kaur



In recent weeks, I found myself adrift amidst the ocean of global unrest, pain & suffering heard and seen in global news broadcasts. After a few weeks of feeling a surge of pain and suffering, just as I was getting almost totally washed out, I realised my own helplessness and at the point of total surrender, I eventually remembered Who was in this massive storm with me. For me, this passage helps me to remember that hope was embedded within me from the beginning and is a deep rooted inner sense that things can get better and a deep anticipation that there is greater good ahead. It's the survival implant of the heart and spirit. Most times, there's little choice in suffering. We can find ourselves in suffering as a result of many things beyond our own

control. I have learnt that pain and suffering are the most serious teacher which brings forth Christ like character and the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Suffering brings everything into sharp focus and is a definer and a refiner. It shows me what really matters to me. It shows me what I really value, who and what I really care about and what I really need. Suffering shows me Who stands with me in the fires and the storms and Who stays with me when I get stuck in the valleys, ravines & caves. Suffering shows me who my brothers and sisters are.

For some people, hope may come from having had good things before. Hope for them is believing that their good times will come back again. For others, who find themselves between a rock and a hard place, it can be about desperately hoping things won't get any worse and it's a holding on to the desperate belief that one day, just one day, eventually, they will get out of the hell they are in.

For me, gritty hope comes from having weathered much, and yet still believing that good exists, and that God was and is with me and will never forsake me, especially when everything else is rendered meaningless and turns to dust. When I hit my ground zero, all that really matters to me is just having peace. Gritty hope is found in the darkest places, and even in the face of terrible things, hope doesn't give up believing in God's Presence, purpose and protection.

As for Kicking at the darkness, I'd rather think of the Chinese Proverb that it is "Better to light a candle than to curse the dark".