

Hope Restored

You'll get through this. It won't be painless. It won't be quick. But God will use this mess for good (and I will add here, if you have prayed it so). In the meantime, don't be foolish or naïve. But don't despair either. With God's help, you will get through this.

From Max Lucado's book entitled, "You'll Get Through This".

It is a new year and many of us have entered with renewed determination to fulfil those goals, chase those dreams, meet those commitments. There is a new vigour and energy in the air. You can almost feel it. You can feel it with our children as they embark on their new year at school. You can feel it as you drive into the gym parking lot - you only have to try and find a parking at the gym at peak hours to experience this. At the same time of day its more difficult to find parking than at the end of last year. Why? Somehow it's easier to turn a new page and start again. Somehow it's easier to recommit at the start of the year. Somehow once we have paused, reflected, taken stock of what is most important to us and recalibrated, we have renewed energy to begin again. And this is wonderful. Such a gift from God. We have an opportunity to do this every day too. God's mercies are new every day!

While God's mercies are new each day, challenges from yesterday do follow us into today. They may follow us into tomorrow too. Just because it's a new day with new mercies, the challenges don't evaporate. The challenges don't change the fact that his mercies are new each day, but the mercies don't dissolve the challenges. And so it is with a new year. It's an opportunity to reset, refocus, begin again, try again, renew commitments, set new goals, explore new options. Yes. All these things. And yet for some, the challenges from last year have followed into this new year. The difficulties haven't evaporated with a change of date. Yes, there may be renewed energy, or not. But the challenges still shout as loud as they did. Maybe the heaviness still weighs as heavy, the financial leanness is still as lean, the bank account is well, in need, the relationship is still floundering, the job is still just as challenging, the school work, just got harder, the family situation is just as hard, the

marriage challenges are, well, just as challenging, and so on. Maybe you have just experienced a closed door, or repeated closed doors and you feel like giving up. Maybe it's a dream, a desire, a business, something that seems to have died, something that just seems impossible right now. Maybe it's a loss, a death, unanswered questions or something that happened that you still can't understand. Maybe you feel like if God had really been there, it wouldn't have happened. And so I am speaking today to those who have entered this new year with challenges from yesterday. The difficulties from last year maybe feel a bit more difficult, the challenges from yesterday just got more challenging, that impossible situation that you didn't believe could get worse... but it just got more impossible.... If you can identify with any of those, then I am speaking to you today. I am speaking to the person who lost hope, or who is struggling to hold on to hope. I am speaking to that person who finds themselves in the in-between time. In-between the promise and it's fulfilment. I want to encourage you today to hold on to hope. To find hope if you lost it.

God has a lot to say to us when we find ourselves in these type of places. And there are many accounts in the Bible for us to draw from. You see, we aren't promised smooth sailing in this life. If Jesus the son of God had to endure to cross for God's purposes to come to fruition, what makes us think that God's purposes will be plain sailing? We aren't guaranteed a smooth and pain free life. But there are some things that help us in our storms. There are some things that we need to guard in the storms of life. One of these is our hope.

I am going to start with an account of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus

*"Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." **Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So,***

when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.” (Joh 11:1-6, NKJV)

“So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (Joh 11:17-21, NKJV)

“Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"” (Joh 11:32-37, NKJV)

“Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go.”” (Joh 11:38-44, NKJV)

Hold on to Hope!

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation.” (Ps 42:5 ESV)

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” (Ps 42:11ESV)

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” (Ps 43:5ESV)

“Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’” (Eze 37:11, NKJV)

There is something that happens to our hearts, our minds, our progress, our attitudes, our actions, when we lose hope.

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.” (Pro 13:12, NKJV)

When we lose hope, we are more open to depression, to sadness, to unbelief, to passivity, to stop fighting for what we want and believe. It saps us of our energy, our courage, our faith. We feel defeated, “like what is the use, what is the purpose anyway?”. And so, if the enemy can rob us of our hope, if we get to that point of losing hope, he has won a battle.

“Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart, All you who hope in the LORD.” (Psa 31:24, NKJV)

Our hope is founded upon His Word

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” (Heb 10:23, NKJV)

We don't blindly hope. No! We hope in His Word. We hope in His promises. We hope in His faithfulness.

“God's way is perfect. All the LORD's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to Him for protection.” (Psa 18:30, NLT)

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isa 55:8-11, NKJV)

“My soul faints for Your salvation, But I hope in Your word.” (Psa 119:81, NKJV)

Hope is an anchor

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Heb 6:19-20, NKJV)

The context of this scripture, is the certainty of the promises of God, and the hope that we have because of this.

Paul is speaking about the pre-eminence of Christ and how He has reconciled us to Himself.... *“if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (Col 1:23, NKJV)*

Hope is a stepping stone into faith

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1, NKJV)

What are you hoping for?

What are your dreams? For this year?

Hope is a doorway to perfect peace and uncontainable joy

“Now may God, the inspiration and fountain of hope, fill you to overflowing with uncontainable joy and perfect peace as you trust in him. And may the power of the Holy Spirit continually surround your life with his super-abundance until you radiate with hope!” (Rom 15:13, TPT)

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Rom 15:13, NKJV)

Peace guards our hearts and minds

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Php 4:6-7, NKJV)

Joy gives us strength

“And Nehemiah continued, “Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength!”” (Neh 8:10, NLT)

““For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills Shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” (Isa 55:12, NKJV)

If there was such a thing as a hope-ometer, where would yours be at as a percentage?

Example 1. Observing and letting our level of hope be dictated by external circumstances and factual measures only.

Example 2. Soccer example.

Hope (and belief) help you position yourself aright for what God wants to do next.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Rom 15:13, NKJV)

If you need hope restored, we are going to pray today and trust that the God of hope will fill you with joy and peace and that you will abound in hope by the Power of the Holy Spirit. Having said this, I want to encourage you to dig into His Word. His word is the anchor that holds us. It is the substance of what we hope in. It is the foundation we build our lives upon. It is the very thing that feeds our faith and belief.

Let's pray.