

We Have This Hope
What is Hope and Why is it Important?
Hebrews 6:19
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I probably don't have to work too hard to convince you that the past year has been difficult, and as followers of Jesus, we haven't been immune to the difficulty. We all experienced disruption as parts of our lives we took for granted were put on pause. Work, school, church, getting together with friends and celebrating holidays with family were altered significantly. We encountered fear related to a pandemic that infected tens of millions and has led to more than a million deaths worldwide. We've also faced uncertainty about when our lives might return to some semblance of normal. Through it all, our nation, our communities, our churches and even at times our families, have grown increasingly polarized over differences of opinion about COVID, racial unrest and the 2020 presidential election.

Last fall our staff began to talk about how we could transition from operating in crisis mode as we responded to all the dynamics surrounding COVID, to leading proactively as we looked to the weeks, months, and year ahead. We began to discuss whether there was a theme that would be most helpful for our church family to focus on this year.

Tod Bolsinger, a church consultant, and author of the books, [Canoeing the Mountains](#) and [Tempered Resilience](#), says that through the COVID pandemic four "lacks" were revealed in the church—lack of community, lack of discipleship, lack of leadership development and lack of resilience among followers of Jesus. Our staff discussed these "lacks" and while we could see evidence of all of them in our own lives and in our church family, lack of resilience resonated with us the most. Like some of you, I've been frustrated and at times discouraged, at seeing little noticeable difference between followers of Jesus and those who profess no faith in Christ, in response to all we've walked through this past year. As our staff discussed the lack of resilience we've noticed in ourselves and others, the theme of hope came into focus for us.

Hope, like the word *love*, is one of those oft-used words that's so common, it has almost loses its meaning. *I sure hope the weather is nice tomorrow so I can do some yard work. I hope the Phillies have a better season than last year. I hope we're having something I like for dinner. I*

hope Pastor Layne's sermon is interesting today. I hope you had a nice Easter with your family. When so many things have the word hope attached to them, we easily lose sight of what hope actually means.

Over the next 50 days and throughout 2021, we want to help our church family focus on the hope we have in Jesus—how that hope impacts our lives and how it distinguishes us from those who don't share our faith in Jesus. Hebrews 6:19 is a foundational verse for us: **"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."** Hebrews 6:19 Over the next 7 weeks, we want to lead our church family in intentionally focusing on the hope we have in Jesus. In addition to our sermons, a team of people from McBIC created a devotional guide with daily writings on hope; and, we've recruited leaders for 20 small groups. We encourage you to participate in as many different aspects of this initiative as you're able.

Throughout the series, we'll be exploring the lives of Biblical characters from the Old and New Testaments to see what we can learn about hope from them, but today I want to begin with the basic questions, "What is hope?" and "Why is it important?" The Bible has much to say about hope—over 40 verses address the topic directly. I asked Pastor Jen—our Kids' Pastor—to coordinate our McBIC children sharing some of what the Bible says about hope.

Kids Video of Hope Scriptures

What is hope? and Why is it important? As I began to prepare for this series, I realized I wasn't clear on the difference between hope and faith. The two are complementary, but they're not the same. I found the following illustration helpful...

The relationship between faith and hope can be illustrated in the joy a child feels when his father tells him they are going to an amusement park tomorrow. The child believes that he will go to the amusement park, based on his father's word—that is **faith**. At the same time, that belief within the child kindles an irrepressible joy—that is **hope**. The child's natural trust in his father's promise is the faith; the child's squeals of delight and jumping in place are the expressions of the hope.

Without faith, there is no hope, and without hope there is no true faith. Faith is grounded in the reality of the past, while hope looks forward to future reality. It's our faith that allows us to live as people of hope. Paul captures this connection between our faith developed through past experiences and our future hope in Titus 1:2 when he writes, "[We have] *the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.*" John Mark

Comer—a pastor and author who you’ll hear me mention again in few minutes—says, *“Hope is the expectation of coming good based on the person and promises of God.”*, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, *“Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.”*

In a podcast on the topic of hope, John Mark Comer noted that the appropriate question isn’t *“Do we have hope?”* The question is, *“What do we hope in?”* And he went on to highlight four truths about hope that I’ll use as an outline to help answer the question, *“Why is hope important?”*

The first truth Comer shares is that as followers of Jesus our hope is founded on the belief that **Jesus will return and make all things new**. The theme of newness is repeated throughout the Scriptures. In chapter 43 verses 18 & 19 of Isaiah, God said, *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing.”* Isaiah 43: 18 & 19 And in the New Testament Jesus is introduced to us as the One who makes new life a reality for those who place their faith in Him. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17 says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* 2 Corinthians 5:17 And in Revelation chapter 21—the 2nd to last chapter in the Bible we read about a new heaven and a new earth. God, sitting on his throne, said, *“I am making everything new!”* Revelation 21:5 It’s the hope we have in God that all things—including you and me—will be made new, that sustains us and propels us forward even in the most difficult of times when faith is hard to hold onto. The promise of newness gives us hope.

The 2nd and 3rd truths about the importance of hope relate to a topic none of us likes—suffering. The 2nd truth is we have hope because we know **Jesus is with us in our suffering**. The Bible is filled with reminders of God’s presence amidst our suffering and many of the songs we sing together on Sunday mornings reinforce this truth. I especially like the assurances found in Romans chapter 8. Listen to these selected verses from this magnificent chapter that remind us of the hope that we have, because Jesus is with us...

Romans 8 selected

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Suffering is part of our human experience here on earth, but we don't suffer alone—Jesus is with us, and the Bible promises us we can face suffering with hope, because of our assurance that God uses the difficulty we encounter in life to mold and shape us into his people. The 3rd truth about hope is **Jesus will use our suffering to form us into people of love.**

We talked a lot about surrender and perspective during Lent, and those words apply here as well. In surrender we lay ourselves and all that happens to us and those we love before God with open hands, believing He will work in them for our good and to accomplish his purposes. Perspective puts everything we walk through in the context of God's greater plans for now and eternity, rather than just our present life as we know it. These Scriptures emphasize how Jesus forms us as his people through suffering.

- Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Romans 5:3 & 4
- Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4
- For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2 Cor. 4:17

The Bible assures us that God uses trials, suffering and difficulty to form us into the

people He created us to be, but another aspect of suffering that provides us with hope is knowing that our suffering becomes a platform God uses that allows us to minister to others going through difficult times. 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 3 & 4 tells us,

- Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 2 Cor. 1: 3 & 4

Suffering is difficult and none of us chooses it willingly, but as followers of Jesus we can embrace hope in the face of suffering, because we know God uses it to develop us into his people and our suffering allows us to comfort others who are walking through tough times.

Lastly, we can embrace hope as God's children, because Jesus promises **God's will is in the process of being accomplished on earth as it is in heaven**. When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He said, *"This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* As followers of Jesus, we live and pray with the hope that our prayers and our lives our bringing God's kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. When I don't see progress I'd like to see, when I'm weighed down and discouraged, when I wonder if what I'm doing is making a real difference, I need to go back to Jesus' prayer, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* and remember that Jesus' kingdom has already come; Jesus' kingdom is coming; and, one day, Jesus kingdom will fully arrive. Based on my faith in Jesus and in what I've seen Him do in the past, I can have hope that He is at work in my life, in the lives of those I love, and in my world. Over the next 7 Sundays we're going to look at Biblical characters who embodied hope. Their hope didn't mean that life was easy or that things always turned out the way they desired, but in the midst of all they walked through, their hope in God sustained them.

As we conclude our time together this morning, I'd like you to hear an example of hope from a couple many of us know well—Sam and Joyce Utsick. The Utsicks have attended McBIC for over 25 years and have volunteered in a variety of capacities at our church and were employed at McBIC as facility and maintenance staff. Pastor Susan Vigliano is going to interview Sam and Joyce about how their hope in Jesus has sustained them...

Interview w/ Sam & Joyce Utsick

Our Response—I'd like to return to the words from Hebrews chapter 12—words we referred to frequently during Lent—as words to embrace as people of hope.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3