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Hope Against Hope



Hopelessness leaves a man or woman frozen in despair.

Jesus understood that his disciples would be tempted to despair after his crucifixion so he spent time beforehand preparing them, counseling them, and providing hope for them.

Jesus told his disciples that he was leaving and they could not follow him. What kind of news is that when they had just given three years of their life responding to his invitation to “Follow me”?

Change was coming and Jesus tried to prepare his followers. He encouraged them not to allow their hearts to be troubled. How were they supposed to not be troubled when their leader was crucified? They had to have hope. If they could hope in what Jesus was sharing with them, they could look beyond their current crisis and believe that God was going to perform the things that Jesus had taught them.

Jesus told his followers that their separation would be temporary. He was preparing a place for them and they would be with him again.

He told them that they were about to do even greater works than the ones He Himself had done.

Jesus told them that the Father was about to send them a Helper, the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus shared many more words that contained both challenge and hope as recorded in John 14-16. Then he prayed for his disciples.

We find this pattern in Jesus’ ministry. He told Peter that he was about to deny him, but that when he was RESTORED, he would strengthen his friends. Jesus gave him some challenging words but he also gave him hope.

The same pattern is also observable in the lives of Paul and Peter. Sometimes their words were challenging, but there was always a thread of hope.

As Christians, when we interact with others we also need to offer hope. Even in the most desperate circumstance, we need to be able to look at others and believe that God can bring something beautiful out of the situation.

We don’t need to offer false hope or false promises. A person who is hurting can see right through a religious answer that feels like an insincere pat on the back. False hope and false promises feel as empty as a dry well because they are!

So how can we help someone in desperation?

We can acknowledge, honestly, the difficulty of their situation, the depth of their pain. Sometimes this is the most necessary step because it bridges the depths of the loneliness and desperation someone is feeling and says that we are honestly acknowledging where they are emotionally without condemning them. We often don’t know how God can accomplish what needs to happen in a life; we don’t have a formula or a fix but as another human being, we can say, “That must be really hard.” Such a response acknowledges the reality of the pain. Galatians 6:2 instructs us to bear one another’s burdens and this is one way to do that.

Then we can share from our own lives about times when God did something for us when life seemed impossible. This is the power of testimony – which according to Rev. 12:11 is one of the ways to overcome the enemy.

And we can humbly pray for those who are hurting, asking God to do what only He can.

Jesus told his disciples that it was about to be hard, but God would be faithful. And then he prayed for them.

Hurting people need “Jesus with skin on”. They need someone whom Jesus is living in and through to offer hope.

Sometimes we say that we are hoping against hope, a phrase which means that in spite of what looks impossible, we have hope that things will change.

Romans 5:5 tells us that hope doesn't disappoint because it is based on the love of God.

Is there someone in your life who needs hope?

How can you offer hope to them?

Perhaps you just need to listen without feeling a need to fix anything or anybody.

Perhaps you need to call someone today to say you care.

Maybe a card of encouragement would be just the right thing.

How about a visit?

How about a hug? Many times I have just held someone and let them hurt in my arms. Words are not always necessary.

And as Jesus did, wrap what you do with a prayer for that person. I find that most people are more than happy for you to pray for them. Perhaps you can ask them, “Would it be okay for me to pray for you?” Then do so. It doesn't need to be long or religious sounding. Don't try to fix it in your prayer. Just honestly acknowledge the pain and ask for God to help. I often acknowledge in my prayers for others that I don't know the answer, but I know that God does and I ask for His help. It is more than okay to not have the answers. You know the One who does!

I recently hear Dan Allender teaching and he asked this question which riveted me. He asked, “Who has wept with you and your story?” He suggested that we cannot unlock our stories alone. We need each other.

Will you weep with someone over their pain?

This burden bearing fulfills the law of Christ which is the law of love.

There is hope against hope. It exists because of Christ. Receive it and offer it. It is the intangible tangible.

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