

A future and a hope

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Is this glass half full or half empty?

Some people tend to view life positively and optimistically (half full), while others view it more pessimistically (half empty).

Similarly some people have a very optimistic view of the future, while others are pessimistic (or they may consider they are just being realistic!).

What are some words that come to mind when you think of the future?

opportunities, change, effective ministry, death, heaven, fear, eternal life, climate change, pollution, world-wide evangelism, nervousness, uncertainty,

Your answers to this question will reflect whether you are optimistic or pessimistic and will be strongly influenced by your past experiences, your present situations, your view of God, your thinking about end-time events, and how you think our society and world is functioning.

All of us need hope, regardless of whether we are optimistic or pessimistic about the future!

- Without it don't we care much about ourselves or others; get bored easily, and soon fall into despair and hopelessness.
- With it we are energized and optimistic. We have a sense of purpose in our lives and look forward every day to what we can achieve, and what the future holds.

What is hope?

To many people hope is just wishful thinking. *I want xxxxx. I hope that I get it.* When someone hopes for something in this way and then doesn't receive it they get discouraged and lose motivation. From there it is very easy to become hopeless. And hopelessness is one of the great tragedies of this modern age.

But the good news is that there is hope! And this hope is found in Jesus Christ! We may not know what is going to happen to us in the future but we know the One who holds the future. In Christ we can face the future with confidence. Jesus has proved trustworthy in the past; we know that He will be trustworthy in the future. And this gives us a deep and genuine hope.

Here is what God said to His people when they were facing significant uncertainty regarding their future:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity."
Jeremiah 29:11-13

These verses are also relevant for us! They tell us that we have a future and a hope, and they also tell us what we can do to come into the future that God has for us.



Jeremiah 29:11-13 shows us:

- God has a plan for our lives.
- God wants us to prosper so that we have fruitful and fulfilled lives. He wants the best for us!
- None of God's actions will ever harm us. That's because He is a God of love.
- Hope comes when we know that God is in control of our lives.
- We have a future! This future is all about fulfilling God's plans and purposes for our lives. (And, of course, we also have an eternal future in heaven!).
- It's vital that we know what God's plans and purposes are for our lives. That's why He wants us to call on Him and pray to Him. When we do this He will listen and will reveal Himself to us.
- *I will be found by you* is the central purpose of our lives. We were lost, but God found us and drew us to Himself so that we can live in relationship with Him, and fulfill His purposes for creating us.
- As we fulfill God's plan for our lives we find meaning, purpose and fulfillment in everything we do.
- We live to please the Lord and in serving Him are set free from captivity and bondage to sin, our old selves or anything else! Hallelujah!

For Christians hope is the strong assurance that something which has not yet happened will happen in God's time, and by God's grace.

Living in relationship with God, and fulfilling His purposes for your life gives you a future and a hope!

Faith, hope and love

Many times in the Bible faith, hope and love are mentioned together:

We always thank God ...because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up in you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. Colossians 1:3,4.

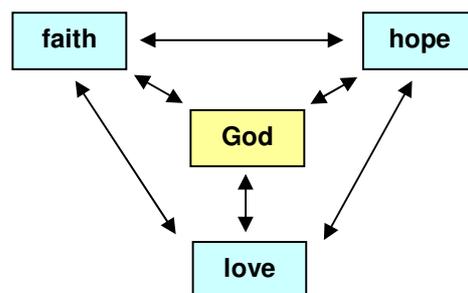
We thank God for your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:3.

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:7,13.

Why are faith, hope and love so strongly linked together?

We believe that the Lord knows what is best for us; put our **faith** in Him; submit our futures to Him; trust Him, and live out our lives in obedience to Him. The result is a strong and certain conviction that comes from knowing God is in control, and that He will work out His purposes in our lives. That's **hope**! And this is all underpinned by **love**. We know God is love. We also know that He loves us personally and individually and that He wants the best for us. That's why we can put our faith in Him, and why we have a future and a hope.



What is hope based on?

Hope is based on the fact that God never changes. He is always there. He always has been and always will be. He is always faithful, always loving, always good. As He has been in the past so He will be in the future. He is the great *I am*.

I the Lord do not change. Malachi 3:6.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Hebrews 13:8.

Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:20.

Because God does not change we can have confidence that He will continue to love us, care for us, watch over us and be with us in the future; regardless of what we will go through.

We live in the present but we know that God has been gracious to us in the past and we know that this will continue in the future. And that gives us hope!

Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27.

What are the results of having hope?

1. Vision

When we have hope we see ahead and know where we are going.

God reveals His will to us by His Word so we know what He wants for our lives. This gives us a direction; a sense of where to go; something to aim for. Out of this we have a vision of what lies ahead and a conviction that this is what God wants for us. *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* Psalm 119:105.

The vision can be for quite specific events that are to take place, or it can be very general, where we only know broad directions that God wants us to go in. Either way, the vision helps give meaning and purpose to our lives. We strive to achieve it. We are motivated by it. We know where we are going and recognize that God is with us in it, because we are doing His will.

If we don't have a vision of where God is taking us, we can easily feel lost and lose motivation. This is a major reason why people feel hopeless and useless. *Without a vision the people perish.* Proverbs 29:18.

2. Patience

We learn to be patient as we wait to come into what we hope for. We haven't received it yet, but we have a deep assurance that we will receive it in God's time.

Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. Romans 8:24,25.

God has His time to bring His will to pass. We must be patient and continue to trust Him until this happens. Being patient applies in all areas of life from little things right through to the whole course of our lives. We wait for God to answer a prayer.... We wait on Him to find His will.... We wait for His provision.... We wait for our ultimate redemption in Heaven (Romans 8:23). And all the time we are learning patience.

3. An anchor for the soul

An anchor keeps a boat safe in rough conditions, as long as the anchor is well attached to the boat and to the bottom of the sea. No matter what conditions we face in life we can weather them safely if we are strongly anchored to the Rock, Jesus Christ. He gives us stability and security in a changing and difficult world. The hope we have in Him then becomes a stabilizing force in our lives enabling us to face all of life's challenges. That's why hope is an anchor for the soul!



God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:18-20.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23.

So not only is Jesus our strong and stable Rock in a changing world, but He is also our great High Priest, interceding for us in all the situations we go through. (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25).

4. Optimism

If we really believe that God loves us and that He is in control of our lives we can't help but be optimistic about the future. Yes there will be ups and downs and there may even be tragedies, but we know that God will be with us and that He will work things out in accordance with His will.

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28.

All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. 1 John 3:3.

If we trust God we will be optimistic about our futures because we know that in His very nature He is love, and that this love will be worked out in our lives. (It may not always be pleasant and it will often not be what we want or expect, but we know that our loving God is always there for us – regardless of the circumstances).

If we doubt God we stop acknowledging that He loves us and we will soon get fearful about our futures and pessimistic about our future. That's when we start to imagine all sorts of negative things that could happen, and that's when hope fades.

Always remember that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. There is nothing too hard for Him! He loves you and wants the best for you. And He always will!

5. Motivation to press on

When we have hope we feel motivated and encouraged to press on into the next thing that God has for us. We know God is faithful, and that He will be with us and help us. This helps us to stay positive no matter what happens. We will be steadfast under pressure and will continually press in to move forward and fulfill God's will.

When we are motivated we will *hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for He who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23.*

6. Certainty regarding the future

It is said that there are only two certainties in life: death and taxes! Well there is another one as well. Jesus is coming again, and will set up an eternal Kingdom. Heaven (and hell) are certainties!

Knowing this can be very powerful for Christians because it helps us recognize that our life on earth is not all there is, and it gives us something for better to look forward to.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:1-3.

We know that we can live a meaningful life on earth by fulfilling God's purposes and doing His will, and we will be able to endure whatever trials come along. Yet we will know that there is something even better ahead of us: eternal life with Him in heaven! Knowing this enables us to be hopeful, regardless of whether we are going through difficult times, or blessed times.



The Apostle Paul explained this when he was in jail and facing up to his imminent death. He recognized that his eternal future was better, but while he was still alive, he would do his best to serve God and fulfill His will. *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.* Philippians 1:21-26.



7. Character

We all have different paths through life. Some have a very difficult path; others quite easy. Regardless of this as Christians we know that:

- God loves us
- God wants the best for us.
- God is in control of our lives.
- God has a purpose for our lives.

The way we react to the events we go through is strongly influenced by our sense of hope, and this, in turn, strongly influences our characters, and the way we are. Having hope changes us! It builds in us a resilience that enables us to face the future positively, regardless of whether our path through life is difficult or easy (or a mixture of the two).

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Romans 12:12.

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. Romans 5:2-5.

This means that we can have meaning and purpose regardless of whether our path through life is difficult or easy. If things are going well we know God is with us, and that He loves us and is blessing us. If things are difficult we still know God is with us and that He loves us; and we recognize that He is developing character in us, which is making us better people, and more like Jesus..... As long as we have hope!

A future and a hope

So the message that God gave to His people through Jeremiah is still relevant for us today:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity." Jeremiah 29:11-13

We have a future and a hope while we are alive:

Jesus said *I am come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.* John 10:10.

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him." The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks Him, to the one who seeks Him. Lamentations 3:22-25. ;

This means every day is an opportunity to live for Jesus; to walk with Him and serve Him; to learn and grow, and to fulfill God's purposes for our lives. Abundant life!



But in Christ we don't just have an abundant life here on earth! When we die, we will also have eternity in Heaven with Jesus!

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Titus 2:11-13.

We have a future and a hope for eternity:

Jesus said *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:1-3.*

Heaven will be better than we can ever imagine! We will be with Jesus and will give Him glory, forever and ever!

What a future, and what a hope!

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God. Psalm 146:5.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Discussion questions

On what basis can we have a future and a hope? How does this apply to non-Christians? What can Christians do to help non-Christians have more hope?

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future? What is your optimism/pessimism based on?

Why is there so much hopelessness in our society? What can Christians do about this?

Young people are facing a future of great uncertainty with issues like violence, terrorism, pandemics, global warming, environmental concerns, technological change and economic instability continually before them. Elderly people once knew relative stability in their world and in their lives, then it all seemed to change rapidly and be replaced with uncertainty. How do the issues of the day affect the way that young people and the elderly approach their futures? How do they affect their sense of hope? What can we do to help people of all ages prepare for the future in an uncertain world?

Read Jeremiah 29: 11-13 in its context. What was the situation in which this promise was given? What were the conditions that needed to be fulfilled to come into what the promise promised? How does the promise apply to us today? Is it a "blank cheque" that says that all Christians will have a future and a hope, regardless of how they live? What does "a future and a hope" mean for you?

What have you learned from your study of hope? How will you apply this in the future?