

## The Power of Hope

Genesis 18:1–5 • Romans 5:1–11

**Rom. 5:1** Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. **3** Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; **4** perseverance, character; and character, hope. **5** 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.

**Rom. 5:6** You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. **7** Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. **8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

### Study

*Justified* — describes relationships; literally, *made right by*

*Peace* — Paul's idea of peace comes from the Hebrew word, *shalom*, which is not just an absence of violence, but the presence of justice, where the hungry have enough food, the thirsty enough water, the unhoused have a place to stay, and the oppressed are freed and shown dignity.

*Gained access by faith* — imagine a door opening in front of you

*Grace* — (Gr. *charis*) the undeserved blessing of God; connected with the words for *gift* (Gr. *charisma*) and *joy* (Gr. *chara*)

*Hope* — (Gr. *elpis*) Biblical hope is not wishful thinking, but confidence based on God's reality

*Sufferings* — (Gr. *thlipsis*) stress, pressure, distress, trouble

*Perseverance* — (Gr. *hupomonē*) actively engaged patience and endurance; hanging in there

*Character* — (Gr. *dōkime*) used of metal that has passed through the refiner's fire, as silver in the expression, "sterling character"

*Just the right time* — (Gr. *kairos*) The Greek language has two words for time: 1) *chronos* which is clock-time, as in chronometer, and 2) *kairos* which is more about timing and the fullness of time, as in *just in time*, or *at just the right moment*

*Sinners* — Sin is anything that separates or hinders our relationship with God. A sinner, then, is not a bad person, but someone who broken or needy in a way that confounds their search for God. In that way, we are all "sinners!"

### Message

From the booklet, *Bits and Pieces*, comes an interesting story about Florence Chadwick, the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions. On the Fourth of July in 1951, she attempted to swim from Catalina Island to the California coast. The challenge was not so much the distance, but the bone-chilling waters of the Pacific and the presence of great white

sharks. To complicate matters, a dense fog lay over the entire area, making it impossible for her to see. After about 15 hours in the water, and within just a mile of her goal, Chadwick gave up. Later she told a reporter, "Look, I'm not excusing myself. But if I could have seen land, I might have made it."<sup>1</sup> A lot of us feel like Florence. We have been swimming hard in cold, perhaps dangerous waters and we are tired. We hear that God is leading us into the future, but when we look ahead, we see only fog. How can we have hope?

First, hang on. Be steadfast. Anyone can have hope in the good times. Anyone can love God when things are running smoothly. What about the rest of the time? Paul writes, "...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..." John Killinger retells this story about perseverance from *Atlantic Monthly* about the days of the great western cattle rancher: "A little burro sometimes would be harnessed to a wild steed. Bucking and raging, convulsing like drunken sailors, the two would be turned loose like Laurel and Hardy to proceed out onto the desert range. They could be seen disappearing over the horizon, the great steed dragging that little burro along and throwing him about like a bag of cream puffs. They might be gone for days, but eventually they would come back. The little burro would be seen first, trotting back across the horizon, leading the submissive steed in tow. Somewhere out there on the rim of the world, that steed would become exhausted from trying to get rid of the burro, and in that moment, the burro would take mastery and become the leader."<sup>2</sup> And that is the way it is with the kingdom and its heroes, isn't it? By hanging on when life is knocking us around, God works in us to build real inner strength that will help us transcend our challenges.

Second, stay humble and teachable. Once there was a park ranger who gathered a group of nature hikers together for a walking class on the mountain plants. He'd been doing this same hike for years, but it was always fresh for him. He and the group came to a beautiful meadow, where the groups of wildflowers were like bouquets. The ranger was a couple minutes into his talk, and enjoying himself when the radio squawked. Annoyed, the ranger turned the radio down. The group finished and went on. They came upon a lovely sprig of rare flower, and the group paused for the ranger to explain how wonderful this was. The radio buzzed loudly in the mountain stillness. Before the radio could really disturb anyone, the ranger turned it off altogether. For another hour, everything went smoothly. They had almost reached the turn-around point, when another ranger came barreling down from the watchtower ahead. "What's wrong?" asked the group's guide. Breathless, the other ranger replied, "Haven't you had your radio on? All afternoon headquarters has been trying to reach you. A grizzly was spotted in the area...and he's been stalking your group for the last 2 hours!"<sup>3</sup> I think sometimes we are more interested in what we want than what God wants. God tries to get our attention, but we are having such a good time and so focused on what we want that we can't be bothered. Eventually we turn the radio of our heart down so low that God's voice can't disturb us anymore. Unaware of the danger stalking our heart and soul, we just keep on our merry way. But if we are to be resilient, then it's not about our plan at all. To be resilient, we need God's voice leading us, so we turn *up* the radio of God's voice in our

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<sup>1</sup>www.sermoncentral.com

<sup>2</sup>*Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*. Edited by *Leadership Magazine*.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

heart through prayer. And we stay teachable, allowing what God wants to come first. We have to stay humble and teachable.

Third, trust the grace will come. Gregory Wiens tells the story that one afternoon while playing on a wooden picnic table, his 4½-year-old son, Jordon, ran a splinter into his finger. Sobbing, he called his father at the office.

“I want God to take the splinter out,” he said. I told him his mother could remove it very easily. But he wanted God to do it because when Mom takes a splinter out, it hurts. He wanted God to remove it “by himself.” When I got home an hour later, the splinter was still there so I proceeded to remove it, and I tried to teach Jordon that sometimes God uses others to do his work. And sometimes it is painful.<sup>4</sup>

Listen, God can do anything God wants. The love of Jesus can change lives and heal the broken. The Holy Spirit can come with power to teach and lead and bring joy. But throughout history, God has chosen to channel grace primarily through people. The world has more than a splinter, and our friends and neighbors need more than prayer to get it out. God needs us to get on with it—to be the arms that embrace the hurting, the hands which serve the hungry and lonely, the legs that carry the Good News, and the mouths that speak kindness. How will we find the strength and wisdom to do it? How will we find the resources to do it? God’s grace and power and wisdom will come to us at just the right time so we can accomplish what God wants us to do.

The power of hope does not come from some “rose-colored glasses” delusion about reality, where we are unwilling to look at the pain or obstacles around us. On the contrary, as Eric Greitens, the Navy SEAL who wrote a book on resilience, says,

To recognize that it’s possible for people to endure abuse, violence, or the untimely death of someone they love isn’t to deny the tragedy of what they have experienced (which would be unhealthy or impossible for them to do in any case). It is, in fact, to offer them the one thing they may most need when the world looks as if it’s all a catastrophe: hope rooted in reality.<sup>5</sup>

Helen Keller, the woman who was blind and deaf and who still inspires many today, adds: “My optimism then does not rest on the absence of evil, but on a glad belief in the preponderance of good and a willing effort always to cooperate with the good that it may prevail. I try to increase the power God has given me to see the best in everything and everyone and, make that Best a part of my life.”<sup>6</sup> You’ll notice that both Eric Greitens and Helen Keller focus not on the things they cannot control, but on the things they can with God’s help. We cannot change our pasts, cannot wipe out the bad things that happen to us, or that we ourselves have done. What we can do is ask for God’s forgiveness for our failings, and for God’s guidance and courage to choose what we will do with our past, what we will do, as Helen Keller adds, to

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<sup>4</sup>Gregory Wiens, [www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com)

<sup>5</sup>Greitens, *Resilience: Hard-won Wisdom for Living a Better Life*, p. 172.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenges* by Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney, p. 32.

“increase the power God has given me to see the best in everything and everyone and, make that Best a part of my life.” The power of hope lies in how it keeps options open, how it keeps us in touch with God and God’s purpose. Reality made full of possibility.

Two months after her failure, Florence Chadwick, the long-distance swimmer, decided to try swimming from Catalina once more. Once more a misty veil obscured the coastline and she couldn’t see the shore. Once more, she had a small fleet of boats to look for sharks. But this time she made it, because she kept reminding herself that land was there. With that confidence she bravely swam on and achieved her goal. In fact, she broke the men’s record by 2 hours!<sup>7</sup> The power of hope is a gift God gives, grace that comes while we are still sinners. We see the power of hope as Jesus embraces the path of the cross, trusting that God will make something beautiful of even that horrific death—and so Jesus experiences the resurrection. My friends, we cannot always see what is ahead, but we have a great God who provides wherever He guides, who shares His strength with the weary, and who pours out power on those who live in hope according to His purpose. So let us walk with confidence, knowing that we are the ones God has chosen and called to experience the power of hope.

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<sup>7</sup>Florence Chadwick is worth reading about! See at least the Wikipedia article.