

Preserve One Another's Hope

Keep each other's hope in God high. When bad times threaten hope, reassure others of God's sovereignty, His steadfast love, His past deliverances and His wonderful plans for the future.

Isa 40:30-31; Rom 15:4; 2 Cor 3:12; Eph 4:4; Col 1:22-23; 1 Thess 1:3; 1 Tim 4:10; 1 Tim 6:17; Titus 2:11-14; Heb 3:6; Heb 10:23; 1 Peter 1:13

Hope is one of the three things we absolutely know never ends. 1 Cor 13:13 in the Expanded Bible reads, *“So these three things continue forever [endure; remain]: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.”* This means that we will need and use hope, even in heaven.

Christians are told to preserve one another's hope in Hebrews 10:23: *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”*

First note that our hope is to be in God and His faithfulness. Our hope is to be in nothing else – not our savings account or our own skill and effort.

We use the word “hope” for all sorts of things. We hope that we will be able to make enough money to go on a vacation. We hope that someone will like us. We hope that the weather will be good tomorrow. This is not the hope that the Bible is talking about in many, many verses. This kind of hope leaves room for doubt. It might not be that we will be able to go on a vacation, but we hope we can.

The word for hope in the Bible is very different than the way we commonly use the word and concept. Biblical hope is belief and trust in what is certain. And, the only truly certain thing in life is God.

The Christian's hope is hope in God's character and God's promises because God is faithful. In many cases, the word “trust” could be substituted. We are to keep one another's hope high which means expecting good things from God's character and trusting God's faithfulness to His promises. Hope is always in something we have to wait for.

With regard to hope in God's nature, we are to help one another trust in all of who God is. For example, God is in control of all things because He is sovereign; He is immortal and never will be unavailable to us; He is unable to do wrong and only able to do good; He never changes; and He is always present, even though invisible. And that just scratches the surface of who and what God is.

Let's just consider that God is in charge of everything and that He is good and unable to sin. We are to help one another be strong in trust that Jesus is with us and watching out for us. As a result, we hope for a lot of things that are certain to come in the future – things like heaven – things that God has promised.

Hope can be weak or strong in all of these characteristics of God. They should always be absolutely strong, but life's circumstances tend to weaken them. That is why we are so important to one another – we are to continually return one another's hope in God to the highest trust.

For example, one of us might have finally saved up enough money to go on a luxury vacation. And, then, our car dies and the money must go to the purchase of another. Although just yesterday this person in our Christian Inner Circle believed strongly that God only does good and is in control, doubt that this is true arises from the disappointment of the loss of the vacation. That is the time when those in this person's Christian Inner Circle who are strong in their faith must step up to remind that God knows all and sees the big picture. Listing a few of the reasons that God might have allowed the vacation to be prevented can help. Someone in the family might have become injured or even died on the vacation. Or God might know that the vacation would work against those in the family who are actively being molded into the image of Jesus, which would result in eternal negative consequences and loss.

It is not "if" but "when" difficulties and trials strike that every Christian will struggle with hope. At first there is usually discouragement. Then the situation is turned over to the Lord. But, when trials do not disappear within a short period of time, hope can begin to fade.

Fortunately, faltering hope can be recognized and needed help offered in the frequent contact of closer relationships with people of strong faith. Christian friendships, Christian families and Christian marriages are where most of the trials of a person's life should be noticed.

Also, – hope can be weak or strong – or somewhere in between – regarding the promises of God. Usually our hope or trust that our own resurrection as a reality is strong. We know that we have been promised under a covenant God decreed that if we trust in Jesus Christ's death on the cross to have paid the penalty for our sins, then we will be saved from eternal separation from God in hell and live after we die. However, occasionally one of us will begin to doubt a bit. Perhaps a friend who has always declared that he was going to heaven all of a sudden starts exposing uncertainty by saying, "if I go to heaven".

Probably most common is hope that shrinks when something seriously bad confronts us. When things are going well, we believe that God is completely good and in control of everything that happens to us. Then, a person we love is going to die young, we lose a job, or someone is seriously injured or contracts a debilitating disease. All of a sudden, our trust wavers. That is the time when friends have to help hope survive and strengthen.

Hope in God's nature and character, who He is, carries reality beyond the grave. In the worst cases of tragedy in the lives of Christians, the hope is trust in God's promises to rescue. And, there is no rescue like entering the gates of heaven. Christians in terrible, incurable pain need the help of those in their Christian Inner Circle to have their hope in God's promise of heaven. Those believers who live in abject poverty all over the world need the help of those in their Christian Inner Circles to hope for the never-ending banquet in heaven.

Listen to this from 2 Cor 4:16-18 from the Today's Living Bible translation.

That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day. These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever!

So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.

And, so, we are to keep each other's hope in God and His faithfulness high when bad times threaten hope, as they will. We are to reassure others of God's sovereignty, His steadfast love, the times He has delivered us in the past, and His wonderful plans for our future.

While hope wavers during the Christian journey this side of death, presumably, it will not waver in heaven. However, it seems that situations and opportunities in heaven may require stronger hope, or trust, than we already have in God and His faithfulness – just not to deal with anything bad.

Helping one another keep our hope solid now will change our spirits to exercise our own hope stronger. In heaven, whatever our role with one another regarding hope, those of us who pay attention to this instruction from God to preserve one another's hope will be able to join our hope with another's hope for wonderful heavenly results that require more substantial hope.

Since hope is related to expecting new things from God's character and His promises, not everyone's ability to hope may be sufficient for the never-ending brand new things to hope for once we get to heaven. We will need others in heaven to help us with their stronger hope so we have sufficient hope for whatever good thing we want in heaven.

Suppose, for example, that there is a 20-mile long zip line in heaven and you do not have strong enough hope to anticipate this new opportunity that you would like to enjoy. In other words, it doesn't quite come into your mind that you could do it. That would not be sin as thinking we can not do similar things now, before death, is not sin. But, it would require a boost in hope from someone who had more substantial hope. That person or those persons would say to you, "There is a zip line you would enjoy and can do. And, remember, our God protects us thoroughly now that Satan is not able to reach us."

Eph 1:18-19 indicates that we are called to hope for riches in eternal life that we will inherit as children of God: ". . . *that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*"

God does not tell us what these riches of our glorious inheritance are. It seems God finds joy in surprising us. In heaven, hoping in God and His character will have us trusting in His faithfulness for one wonderful amazement after another.

Remember that 2 Cor 4:18 told us that hoping is looking "*forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen . . . the joys to come will last forever.*" We don't want any of our close friends and family members to not hope in God and His promise for these joys. Whatever they will be, they must be better than joys we experience now.

Preserving each other's hope now will make finding the special joys of heaven more exciting. If we go to heaven with a well-developed, strong hope to participate in heaven's joys, don't you think that we will be a bit more excited if we anticipate them through hope? It seems quite likely that in heaven we will be at different levels of anticipation for its joys – commensurate with the level of hope we allowed to develop in us this side of death.

This short fictional story of someone in heaven might help.

Everyone hopes for a good day in heaven. There is no lack of hope here. Some have plans and some wait to make plans until the morning news reveals something they have not known about before. Jill has the hope today for excitedly progressing to a higher skill level skiing on the avalanche slopes. Francine waited to make her decision, hoping for something to do she had

never ever considered. She learned just this morning of a video class at the library about a characteristic of Jesus never before revealed.

[end of story]

Is it hard to understand that our righteousness might grow in heaven? Righteousness can grow; it is not just being without sin. Imagine that we pour a glass of purified water. Cannot we add a little untainted lemon to the water? That is how in heaven we are going to be able to add to our righteousness. Certainly in heaven more will be revealed about the character of Jesus. As things are revealed to us little by little, we will be conformed to Him in that new way and our righteousness will grow.

There will be no “same old, same old” in heaven. We will always have the hope of receiving something more from our infinite God. We will hope to learn some new quality of our Lord Jesus and begin our journey to incorporate that righteousness into our spirits. – We will hope for some new understanding that gives us goose bumps. – We will hope for some new experience. – All of these things will surely come from our creative God. For these things we will exercise hope in God’s character and promises.

We probably know people who are greatly excited about life and its wonderful things. And, sadly, we know people who hardly respond to the sight of something wonderful, someone doing something really nice, or some new experience meant to be enjoyable. Which one do we want to be? If we want to be in heaven receiving each new mercy with excitement, then we want to grow in our ability to hope now.

Colossians 1:27 reads, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*”, and it is plural in the Greek in which it was written. The hope of glory is Jesus living in us together, not in us separately. Jesus living in all of us together is the hope of an indescribable, everlasting, glorious life. Just think how important is your Christian Inner Circle! In it is Jesus and the hope of glory.

What is needed is for Christian friendships, families and marriages to always be on the watch when someone has to deal with something hard. To illustrate, it is not wise to wait to help a drowning person until they disappear under the water. Action should be taken when we see a swimmer might be having trouble. Then is the time to get in the water and swim near to them just in case. It is the same with hope. We should not wait until someone becomes despondent and is losing hope. Whenever someone in our Christian Inner Circle faces difficult situations, we need to be expressing trust in God and helping to keep their hope high.

First, we should have frequent contact with those in our Christian Inner Circle to know when they are facing something difficult. Second, when hard things come their way, we must increase our contact with them, watching to see if their hope dwindles. Third, we should express our own hope for them, even before their hope starts to grow cold.

Sharing our hope for them needs to be done without giving the impression that they need to fake hope. It is important that everyone acknowledges that faith will get weak at times. Disappointment and despair should not be hidden from one another so that together hope can be preserved.

Honest discussions of trials should occur openly in Christian friendships and families. Our Christian friends and family members can help us know that there is hope, that there is light at the end of a time of darkness, that there is forgiveness in Christ and a new beginning, and that the Lord really does help us to prevail through the most difficult circumstances.

Those with incurable illnesses can slowly and tenderly be helped to look toward heaven when they will

be released from their sickness. They are helped in their hope by the tender caring of Christian friends and family members who share in their hurt, but not their hopelessness. Personal concern leads to the search for passages in the Bible which will restore hope, passages tailored to the situation.

When we watch carefully over one another and help one another preserve hope, both the one under trial and those helping to keep hope strong will grow in hope. The one with diminishing hope will see his or her hope grow by the expressions of hope provided, most likely with Scriptures. And, those seeking to build another's hope will be challenged to have deeper hope themselves.

Let's not waste the difficulties we face by just waiting for them to go away. Let's immediately put our hope in God to fulfill His promise to watch out for us. Let's make sure everyone hopes in God, His character and His promises.

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There is more about preserving one another's hope at our website ChristiansTogether.org. Just go down the list of the Togethers and click on "Preserve One Another's Hope".

Prayer to Embrace this Together

Dear God of Our Hope, help me and those in my Christian Inner Circle to preserve one another's hope in You and Your loving faithfulness to those of us who are Yours. Help us to be transparently involved in one another's lives and listen for the Holy Spirit to indicate when someone's hope is weak.

Please help us all to become more like Jesus who had His hope based solidly in God, His nature, His sovereign control, His love, and His promises. Like Jesus who constantly assured His followers to trust God, help us all to reassure one another that God is faithful and will deliver us during hard times. Empower us to help one another have hope that is certain about God, not just wishful hope.

May our lives worship You more because we believe without doubt in who You are and are certain of Your promises. Help us to keep one another's trust in You high when troubles challenge our faith and security.

Make us strong in Your power to defeat the devil by together, with one another's help, rebuffing Satan's attempts to destroy our certain hope in Your love and care for us. Since the evil one will twist Scripture to degrade God and His truth, keep making us more complete in our knowledge of the Bible. Help us to see when one of us begins to doubt Your truth and Your steadfast love and take action to preserve that believer's hope.

Help us all to prepare for heaven by growing more completely to trust in all You have promised us for this life so that we will enter heaven full of trust for all that You have promised for life after death. We want certain anticipation for wonderful relationship with You in heaven, as well as for all of the wonderful things You have planned for us.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.