

Faith, [Hope](#) & Love_Part23

We are continuing our study on the Kingdom of God whose foundation is truth and eternal building blocks are faith, hope, and love. We spent 22 weeks exploring faith and tonight we transition to our study on hope. If you remember, **1 Corinthians 13:13** made it clear that the spiritual gifts which God gives us to navigate this life in the flesh (prophecy, tongues, knowledge, etc.) will all perish and pass away with this world. These gifts are temporal solutions meant to equip us with spiritual capabilities while we are bound by these weak bodies of flesh. Thus, once we shed these bodies, they will no longer be needed for then we will be like Him. We will know as we are known and we will see the Lord face to face. Yet, three things will abide for all eternity in the Kingdom of God: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.

Being the building blocks of the Kingdom of God, these are not completely independent of one another; rather, faith is an intricate and necessary part of hope and, collectively, faith and hope are an intricate and necessary part of God's divine *agape* love. Often they are dealt with separately and people actually believe they can love without first having learned to live by faith and live in hope. But I will go on the record as saying that absent some freaky crazy miracle (which God can do and I am sure has done), one cannot normally be a vessel to express God's divine *agape* love if he or she does not live *by* faith and live *in* hope.

We have learned that faith is very active, it is never passive, and it is about betting your life on the truth of the Word of God—the truth inherent in the names of God. And in the same way that faith is absolutely critical for us to experience the death of our “flesh” (our *Old Sinful Nature*), and we must die to our flesh in order

that we might live in God, hope is absolutely critical to learning how to live during our time in this world. And we must know how to live if we are ever going to know how to love with God's divine *agape* love. Remember our little axiom: we must die to live and we must live to love; and faith and hope are the keys to love.

Without hope, one cannot sustain in the face of the difficulties and terrors of this life—it is all too overwhelming. As we learned last week, being circumcised from this world is a violent, painful, and excruciating processes; and it can bury a person in sadness, depression, disillusionment, and despair. In this state, a person is not able to love for they are so taken back by what is happening to their life that they cannot truly be available for others. Without hope, the *victim mentality* rules and reigns supreme and one becomes very selfish and self-seeking. Hope, however, lifts us up and out of our pain and depression and gives an opening for God's divine *agape* love to flow from our lives; it is a crucial component of love.

Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." This means that if hope starts to wane in our lives, if it is prolonged too long and pushed out seemingly beyond our reach, or seems from our perspective to have been removed altogether, if we lose sight of hope, then we become anemic, weak, and sick. The heart cannot handle living without hope. And in this condition, all we can see is our pain and what we believe is unfairly happening to us. This hits some of the most primal areas of our humanity which are tied to survival. As such, we don't care if we hurt others; in fact, we want them to suffer just like we are suffering. And it is in this condition that jealousy and envy run ramped; and, before long, it usually brings forth a hateful malice which spews from our lives like poison from a snake. Accordingly, without hope, we simply do not have the perspective or the energy to

be “others” focused; and we linger in our sickness, sadness, anger, and depression. Living without hope is beyond tragic. Humans can survive the loss of most things in this life, but few can survive the loss of hope. Hope is necessary for life; in fact, during times of great suffering (like when God is surgically cutting us away from this world), hope gets us from one day to the next and from one moment to the next.

As most of you know, God took me through a terrible storm in my life, beginning back in 2001. He spoke to me from *Psalm 107:23-32* and, using the analogy of a ship at sea, He said that He was going to speak and raise up a stormy wind which would lift up the waves of the sea up to the heavens and then drop them down again to the depths. He said my soul would melt away in misery and I would reel and stagger like a drunken man until I came to my wits end. You had to know that word made me so happy—not!

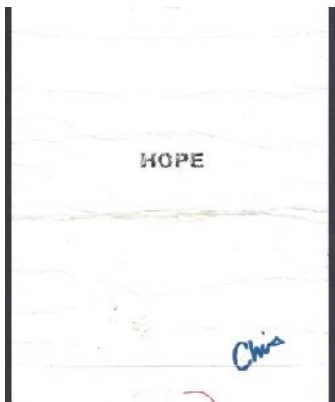
It all started with God telling me in the spring of that year that He was going to show me how much He loved me. Little did I know that this meant He was going to tear my life apart with the goal of ripping away from my soul its attachments to this world, while at the same time demolishing much of my wrong belief and unbelief. It was a brutal time; beyond, anything I would have imagined that I could have endured. And it was not so much the physical things of this world (the relational betrayal and devastation or the loss of tangible possessions and health) that vexed me, but it was the fact that God Himself turned against me and became my enemy. It was personal; and I saw a side of God’s love that not only did I not understand, no one ever told me about. He inflicted me internally with a pain that I cannot explain except to say that 24x7 I was in constant emotional, mental, and physical torment; and this torment came in waves; some of which were so big it would cause

me to just curl up in a ball all the while expecting my chest to cave in.

In Biblical language: I have seen the rod of His wrath; He made me walk in darkness and not in light; against me He turned His hand repeatedly, all the day; He besieged me and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship; in dark places He made me dwell; He walled me in so I could not escape; He bound me in heavy chains; He shut out my prayers despite my crying and pleas; He blocked my way with a high stone wall; He made my road crooked; He hid like a bear or a lion waiting to attack me and then He would drag me off the path and tear me into pieces leaving me helpless and devastated; He drew His bow and made me the target of His arrows, He shot them deep into my heart; He filled me with bitterness and made me drink wormwood, or a bitter cup of sorrow; He broke my teeth with gravel and made me cower in the dust; He stripped peace and prosperity away from me; every bit of my earthly splendor was removed; everything I had hoped for from the Lord was lost! For years, even the thought of my suffering and destruction was bitter, beyond words. I will never forget this awful time. (***Lamentations 3:1-18***).

This passage was given to me by the Lord before He unleashed hell on me; so I was warned. However, I remember when I first read it I could not connect to any of it since it used what to me was arcane “biblical” language. But wow, every word of it came true just as He said. But it was in the fall of 2001, November I believe, that I got another word from the Lord. But this one was different and it didn’t come through scripture. The storm had already started and I was already freaking out, but the waves were still somewhat manageable as it was right before God turned and became my enemy and fulfilled ***Lamentations 3***. It was just the warm up, so to speak, with the typical things like the sudden loss of a job, the loss of ministry, the

loss of practically all the money I had, the betrayal and slander from my wife and my so called friends, etc. Just the warm up. Anyway, I was home and walked out to the mail box and found one little envelope. It was from a guy that I had been acquainted with in Law School over 13 years previous. Honestly, I did not even know the guy and had probably only said “hi” to him once or twice across the room at some party. So it struck me weird to get an envelope from him. I opened it up and it was just a card signed by him with one word on it: **HOPE**.



I instantly knew this was from the Lord and it scared me to death. I suddenly knew what it meant: things were going to get way worse and I was going to need to hold on to what God had promised me if I ever hoped to make it through the storm and the **Lamentations 3** afflictions.

At that point in time, the Lord only promised me two things that I knew about. There was actually a third and that was a promise He made to me 8 years prior which came from **Isaiah 41**, but at that time I was not cognitively aware that He was bringing this promise to pass nor how the storm connected to its fulfillment. However, He did bring it to mind shortly after the destruction was unleashed on my life. The two promises were: 1) that He would show me how much He loved me; and 2) that He would bring me out of my distress, cause the storm to be still so that

the waves of the sea would be hushed, that I would be glad because the waves were quite; and, that He would lead me to my desired haven (*Psalm 107:28-30*). His promises were the **HOPE** to which He wanted me to hold on to during this time of great affliction.

I can say that I reached out and clung for this hope, I fought for this hope, I wrestled with people and with angels regarding this hope, and I barely held on—barely! My desired haven was like a dream: sometimes it was so clear and I felt I could touch it and then in an instant it would just fade and I felt I was grasping at air. However, Jesus did a lot during this time to help me. He talked to me, He made more and more and more unfathomable promises to me, and He taught me so much about Him. It was all very powerful and ground breaking even. But honestly, in the light of the affliction I endured, even with all His help I was often overrun with hopelessness; yet, right in the nick of time it would be reignited. It was crazy. I could be in the deepest of depressive states just loathing my life, furious at God, disillusioned and hopeless because of how long this was going on and how intense everything always was, but as soon as someone would come to me and challenge what God was showing me and what He was teaching me about sin, faith, life in the Spirit, His sovereignty, His love, and so on, hope would well up in me like a mad rushing fountain and I would advocate for the very one who was tearing my life apart. But then I would sink back into the deep darkness and it was in these awful places that I would search out His Word and each time I found that He would teach me more about who He is; and on and on it went through these cycles of hope and hopelessness. The Lord also assured me of the following:

Lamentations 3:25-33; 37-38

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust, perhaps there is **hope**. Let him give his cheek to the smiter, let him be filled with reproach. For the Lord will not reject forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men...Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?

Because of this word, I knew it was all from Him: every accusation, every lie, every insult, every betrayal, and every loss. And I didn't like it. It did not feel like "love." Still He always spoke to me of hope; and so I walked forward never retreating and never giving up ground that I had gained. I was resolute in what He had taught me and my face was set like flint. I may not have understood it all, but I knew it was the truth and so I carried on. I buried my face in the dust and I waited on Him believing that perhaps there is hope. I knew I would not be rejected forever, but let me tell you, it felt like forever. I longed for His compassion and abundant lovingkindness; every part of my being yearned for it.

There was another aspect of this whole ordeal that helped me cling to hope and that was the manner in which God had given me responsibility for people in my life. Being called as a shepherd, I could not run from nor set aside my duties. Without

this calling, I don't know what I would have done; but He put this "responsibility" deep within my bones because He knew I would need it to make it through this time. As you can imagine, with the extent and intensity of this storm, many others were being pounded by these waves as a consequence of being in my life; they were "not so innocent" casualties of my tempest. There were the girls, Sarah, Joel, and before long He added others like Linda and then my family. They needed to know what God was teaching me, they needed to see it proved out in my life, and they needed help so it could be proved out in their lives.

And as broken, crippled and torn apart as I was, the Lord would breathe hope into my soul and use me as a vessel to bring His Word to life. In the midst of it all, He challenged me from **Hebrews 12:11-13**: "No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong." I honestly have no idea how I found the strength to do what He called me to do in their lives; it was very supernatural. However, what I learned through it all is that He is my hope.

When this storm started, I did not understand hope, and even now the Lord has said there is so much more about hope that I need to learn. When we were praying about the visions I recently received about getting my head cut off by some demon and Lucifer putting His thumb print into my head, everyone was praying that God would stay His hand and not allow my head to be severed (whatever that means, but it clearly cannot be the least bit enjoyable). However, the Lord answered these prayers with vague uncertain images. I was hoping He would say, "Ok, ok, thanks

for asking; I changed my mind, your head will be ok.” Instead He said the following:

01/16/2014: Steve: I have allowed this uncertainty for a reason. I want you to be absolutely bathed in Hope. There is more of Hope for you to know and experience - and ultimately more of Me. Ask me and I will show you. Believe that I want to show you and believe that I do not want to hurt you and cause you more pain. Every part of you belongs to Me and I treat My things with the utmost care. So trust me. And hope. And hope some more. And hope even more after that, when you think you could not possibly hope even an ounce more.

This reminds me of a verse the Lord spoke during the midst of some of the darkest times in my storm. When I felt like I had no more strength and hope had fled my body, He would bring to my mind the promise that He would calm the waves and lead me to my desired haven. And I wanted that to be true so badly, but I was seriously struggling to hold on. I was exasperated, things were so bad, and I did not think I could possibly hope even an ounce more. That’s when He assured me that my hope would not be in vain and I would not be put to shame in anything.

Habakkuk 2:1-3

I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved. Then the Lord answered me and said, “Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed

time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay.”

He told me to wait for my promise trusting in His guarantee that it will be done. And the fact that “it will not delay” and it is “for an appointed time” means that nothing I or anyone else did or would do was going to alter either the time or the event. God had already foreseen each and every contingency, He planned for it; and now I wait for God to do what He promised—guaranteed—He would do. I get to walk forward into this amazing predestined plan for my life knowing that it will all come to pass just as He said (even all that seems so unfathomable, for instance, what He spoke of me in *Isaiah 30, 41, 42, 43* and *54*). And so I must wait.

Clearly, I still have a lot to learn about hope; and that means so do you. This will be for all of us and will be critical to this body and our ability to live and to love. We know “the war is coming” and so the Lord said on **01/16/2014**: “Those who are with Me need to be with Me. Those who are for Me need to be for Me. This is final and this is the reality. I have provided everyone with what they need to live this life and to live in godliness.” Thus, we need to know hope, we need to understand it, so that when things are so awful as a result of the war, and it seems we will lose all hope, we somehow, by the power of the Spirit, dig down deep into our soul and hope even more.

The Spirit declares in *Psalms 131:3*: “O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.” This is an *imperative*—a command—and it is in the Hebrew *Piel*, which intensifies the command. **HOPE** in the Lord, from this time forth and forevermore! For those who are the true Israel of God, demonstrated by the fact

that they bet their lives on the truth and thereby live by faith, hope is to be their way of life. And if this is something you have not known, from this day forth and forevermore you are to hope in the Lord. In the New Testament, in **1 Timothy 4:10**, the Spirit says that we are to have our hope fixed on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. And this is rendered in the *perfect active indicative*. Hence, it is to be a done deal; a decision we previously made that is already cemented in stone and cannot and will not be reversed, as it is a statement of fact regarding our lives. The Spirit wants you to fix your hope in this way on the living God.

1 Peter 1:20-21 says that our faith and hope are in God. **Jeremiah 14:8** and **17:13** speak of God being the hope of Israel, the Savior in times of distress. Then **Matthew 12:21** makes it clear that Jesus' name is the hope of all the world; and **1 Timothy 1:1** just flat out says it: Jesus Christ is our hope. Thus, I want you to understand that hope is not just some intangible mystical thing; rather, Biblical hope is wrapped up in a person; thus, it can be known, it can be experienced, and it has tangibility—thickness even. And since we are dealing with Jesus and His very personhood, His words, His promises to us, are as much a part of His being as is His character and nature. He is the living God and so our hope is found in Him almost as an extension of our faith.

Let me capture it this way, if faith is betting your lives on the truth, hope is about waiting and waiting and waiting for that truth to be fully realized and expressed in your life; it is about endurance and patience. **Romans 15:4** says the scripture, what was written in earlier times, was written for our instruction so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.

Likewise, **Romans 15:13** says, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in **believing**, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Where faith is about actively **believing** the truth, hope is about exercising the supernatural strength and endurance which comes from the Spirit to not deviate from the path until what you hope for is. This word translated “abound” in the Greek communicates that our faith should cause us to super abound in hope—in the excess. From this time forth and forever more we should be dripping with hope in the living God. Hope should exude from our lives. Why? Because our God is living and He always does everything that He says He will do—always! It’s just a matter of time. As it says in **Numbers 23:19**, “God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” We can count on this always being truth; thus, by faith we must persevere and wait on Him in order to know hope.

And because our hope is based on a person and not some mystical thing, we can be assured that our hope will never be in vain and that we will not be put to shame in anything. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he explained to them that despite the fact that he was in prison and new leaders had arisen who were going around preaching the “gospel” with selfish and distorted motives and were threatening the good work Paul had done in Philippi, He was not worried. His hope was in Jesus.

Philippians 1:18-20

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but

that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul knew that for God to fulfill His word to Paul, he would not rot in this prison and his work would not be dismantled by some creeps who cared more about what people thought of them than they did God. But either way, He knew His hope would not be in vain and that he would not be put to shame in anything, for Christ would be exalted in His body, whether by life or by death. This is a man who by faith died to his flesh so He could live, and had now learned how to hope so he could live in the power and confidence provided by the Spirit and wait for God. Paul goes on to say that even though He desires to be with Christ and leave this earth, he would remain for their sake in order that he might continue with them in their progress and joy in the faith (***Philippians 1:21-27***). Clearly, having learned to live in hope, Paul also learned to love. His desire was for them and not for himself. He truly considered others more important than Himself, which is the full expression of God's divine *agape* love. We must have faith to die in order that we might live. We must have hope to truly live; and we must live to love. This is our journey.

We will stop here tonight and pick up with hope next week as we learn about the God of hope and the types of things in which He has told us to hope.

Let's pray