

## VIRTUE 3

# HOPE

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

—Galatians 6:9-10

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

—Isaiah 40:30-31

**W**ikipedia defines *hope* as “The emotional state, the opposite of which is despair, which promotes the belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one’s life.”<sup>17</sup> Throughout Scripture, we are presented with passages that inspire us to hope in God and not ourselves or some other external resource or power:

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the Lord delights

in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love (Psalm 147:10-11).

Wait for the Lord. Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord (Psalm 27:14).

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God (Psalm 20:7).

Hope really comes down to what you actually believe in when the chips are on the table. One Old Testament story (2 Chronicles 32) shows what can happen when a leader is faced with an “all in” situation and chooses to hope only in God.

The year was 701 BC, and the leader of God’s people, King Hezekiah, was cornered by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. Sennacherib was invading King Hezekiah’s homeland (Judah) and was getting ready to annihilate God’s people and add Judah to his growing list of real estate. He had already laid siege to the surrounding fortified cities and was getting ready to make war on Jerusalem.

When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had turned his forces on Jerusalem, he made preparations for war and started a counter-strategy by blocking off the water from the springs outside the city so the king of Assyria would not have access to the water supply. Then, right before the battle with the Assyrian army was upon them, he gathered his military officers and encouraged them with these words: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.’ And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said” (32:7-8). Hezekiah gave them weapons, shields, an offensive strategy (blocking off the water), and then he gave them the best asset in battle—he gave them *hope*.

So what happened next? Were God's people disappointed? No. They trusted in God and watched the truth of this verse unfold before their very eyes: "No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse" (Psalm 25:3).

But not without a challenge first. While King Sennacherib was attacking a neighboring city, he sent his officers to Jerusalem with a message specifically designed to destroy the hope of God's people. The message was addressed to both King Hezekiah and all the people of Judah: "On what are you basing your confidence, that you remain in Jerusalem under siege? When Hezekiah says, 'The Lord our God will save us from the hand of the king of Assyria,' he is misleading you, to let you die of hunger and thirst" (2 Chronicles 32:10-11). So now King Hezekiah and the people had a choice: Believe and hope in God, or look at their circumstances and believe the threat of the enemy that they would die of hunger and thirst.

The Bible records their choice—they prayed and put their hope in God. "King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to heaven about this" (32:20). What happens next is simply amazing. They did not even need to fight in the battle. The Lord saw their trust, sent a heavenly angel who completely wiped out the entire fighting force of the Assyrian army, including their leaders. And what happened to King Sennacherib? He withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he finally arrived home, he entered the temple of his (false) god, and some of his sons rushed him and cut him down with swords (32:21). God wins.

The well-known story of David and Goliath reflects a similar situation: an under-equipped and overwhelmed child of God faced with a spiritual decision—who to place his hope in. David could have put his hope in his brothers, the Israelite army, the armor of Saul, or the five rocks he took from the creek bed for ammunition. But he did not. David put his hope fully in God:

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against

you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Samuel 17:45-46).

In life, we can wait, hope, and trust in God or act in our own feeble efforts and waste our time and energy. Hoping in God means holding steadfast and taking action *when and how* he prompts us. My personal story that follows shows that having hope can also mean staying the course and waiting for God's best in our lives.

When I was about eighteen years old, my friend Peter and I were out on a Friday night, tracking down whatever fun the nightlife could offer two young and reckless men. We ran into a few young ladies that night who were also up to no good. Just before chasing into a night that could have ended in sin, I drove home to pick up a few things. While walking through the kitchen, I muttered something to my mom like, "I'm tired of waiting for God's choice for a woman in my life. I'm going to go find my own now." While storming past her on my way out the door, she said, "That's fine, Danny. Just remember that Esau gave up his entire birthright for a bowl of stew." Then she just turned and went back to bed. It was like she had tied a rope around my ankles and jerked my feet out from under me. I hung my motorcycle keys by the door and went to bed.

The passage my mom referenced that night was Genesis 25:29-34:

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die," Esau said.

“What good is the birthright to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

*All* can be lost without hope. Hope is really the only way one can move beyond bad choices and make good ones; the only way one can overlook temptations in exchange for future blessings. Real rewards await those who choose wisely. Had I gone out that night, full of mischievous ambition, there’s a good chance I would not have had the life, wife, and kids I have now. When my hope was almost gone, it was the last glimmer of my future that my mom showed me that helped me stay the course.

### **REFLECT**

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.

—Jeremiah 29:11

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: 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.”

—Lamentations 3:21-25

Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

—Proverbs 24:14

Hope in God. If you have good hope and faith in him, you shall be delivered from your enemies.

—Joan of Arc<sup>18</sup>

**RESPOND**

1. King Hezekiah hoped in God, but he still prepared weapons and took strategic action. How can we do both in our lives—trust God *and* act?
2. In difficult situations, we are faced with the choice between hoping and despairing. What practical ways can we choose hope and avoid despair?
3. How can hoping in God's best save our time and resources?
4. What happens if we trust in ourselves rather than in God?
5. How did King Hezekiah give his followers hope? How can you follow his example when giving hope to others in your life?
6. How does hope empower us to overcome temptation?
7. How does a modern-day knight cultivate hope?
8. What role does worship play in keeping us hoping for a better day?