



Praying and Living in Hope

Dear Friends,

Have you ever felt totally hopeless? There are times I have felt that way, particularly at those moments when every thing seems to be going wrong. I can tell you from personal experience how important it is that I must have hope as an anchor for my soul as Hebrew 6:19 say, *“This is the hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.”*

So many are now depressed because the pain of the past and the unmet expectations of the present have removed all real hope for the future. As a result, all they can think about is how are they going to escape the present situation they are in which appears hopeless with no real future. The problem in just leaving our present circumstances provides no real solution, for the key is learning how to live in hope.

Dr. Charles R. Ringma has stated, “If we live in hope, we have a future. If hope dies, then the future dies with it. The person who is without hope can only live with the legacy of the past and the circumstances of the present.”

The person who has learned to pray and live in hope is the person who is living in the conscious presence of God. In the awareness of God’s eternal presence, we are awakened to His love. This love is demonstrated not only through the wonders of creation, but also through the reality proclaimed in the Scriptures. There we see that He has sent His son, the resurrected Christ, who plows daily through our hopeless circumstances, planting seeds of life both now and for all eternity.

Paul knew that plowing through hopeless circumstances was a result of experiencing the power of Christ’s resurrection. He declared in Philippians 3:10, *“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection”*. Without knowing the power of His resurrection, we will find ourselves hopelessly lost in an ocean of despair, tossing and turning in confusion and hopelessness. God did not create us to experience such an existence and for that reason He placed a hunger within us that only He can fill. The key to receiving such filling can be found within the power of His Word (the Scriptures) and the wonders of His works (creation). God’s desire is that we would not just know about Him, but would come to know Him in such an intimate, powerful way that we can pray victoriously.

These are trying times. That is why it is critical that we know how to pray victoriously and live in hope. The events we are seeing today are spoken about in the Scriptures that would take place prior to the return of Jesus Christ. Wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, turmoil in the Middle East, and worldwide economic crisis are just part of the list of current events that Scriptures speaks of that is reported daily in the evening news. At this time we must know who Jesus is and what His resurrection means in our daily lives.

Colossians 1:15-17 tells us, *“He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together”*. The Greek word for firstborn, “protokos” refers to first in honor, rather than first in time (Exodus 4:22). It is to Christ, God has assigned the lordship and sovereignty of all creation.

May God knit us *“together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2:2-3).

“For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority” (Colossians 2:9-10).

Because Christ is risen, we have hope. This reality is demonstrated through every seed that is planted and then resurrected into the wonderful plant with the purpose planned at the time of its creation. The Creator of all commands us through His creation and the power of His word to, *“Not fear; for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”* (Isaiah. 41:10). The fact that God upholds us with His righteousness right hand tells us we do not need to be afraid of life. The resurrected Christ has provided a hope for a future both now and for all eternity.

The fact is that even though we know that the death of Jesus Christ has provided the solution for sin and His resurrected body opened the door to an eternal future for us in the presence of God, we still live in a very troubled world. That troubled world also invades regularly our inner world, robbing us of the reality that we can live in hope. Paul reawakens us to the future that hope provides in the midst of our present circumstances when he declared, *“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).

If we have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of our life, then we need to learn to live in the hope He has provided for us. This hope frees us to love and be loved. For without the free flow of such love we will find ourselves growing old in a lifeless world without hope both now and for all eternity.

The following six points will help you understand how the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ allows you to live in hope.

1. Paul refers to the power of the resurrection as God's deliverance from the Kingdom of Darkness (Colossians 1:13).
 - a. delivered from darkness of ignorance of God and into the light of knowledge of Him.
 - b. delivered from darkness of sin and brought into the light of holiness.
 - c. delivered from the powers of demonic forces and able to be led by the Holy Spirit.
2. The Resurrection also means we are reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20). Christ has established a treaty for us with God.
3. Because of the Resurrection, we have been redeemed (1 Peter 1:18-19).
4. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have been forgiven (Colossians 1:14). Forgiveness in the Old Testament meant remission of debts and freedom. To be forgiven means to have an obligation cancelled.
5. The Resurrection means a new life (2 Cor.5:17, Col.3:4)-a life lived in Christ (Col.2:6), which will affect our personal relationships with others (Col.3:16-23).
6. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is our guarantee that someday we will also be raised from the dead (1 Cor.15:55-58).

Because of the Resurrection, we can pray and live in hope (Colossians 1:5, Hebrews 2:15). That's why we don't have to retreat from life, but can victoriously experience it.

I believe people grow old not because of the hardening of the arteries, but because of a hardening of the heart. Time and hopelessness wear us down as we travel through this vale of tears. Yet I have learned that with hope burning within, I have a refuge which keeps the heart of love from hardening. *"We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day"* (2 Cor.4: 16 NIV). The Message Bible expresses this verse in the following fashion: *"We're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without His unfolding grace."*

I am learning as I get older that when I pray living in the hope of the resurrection I am actually by faith experiencing life as a bullfight. Lenny Revich author of Everlasting Optimism says, "In a bullfight, the toreador holds the cape to the side when the bull charges. He doesn't hold it in front of his body. Realize that every negative thing that comes our way is not meant for us. It's meant for the cape. Hold the cape to the side, and let the negativity go by."

When I *pray and live in hope* I can then hold the cape to the side, which gives me time to come up with a positive response based on faith in God.

The health benefits are clear. Ravich goes on and says, “People who hold the cape in front of their body-the bull hits them in the chest. We have a phrase for these people-they take things to heart. The hospitals are full of people who take things to heart.”

As I pray and live in the hope of the resurrection I do not have to take the negative things that life throws at me to heart. It is in this knowledge that the Spirit moves and joy in the present troubles is reborn. Yes, the bills may be mounting, but the reality that, “*My God will meet all my needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus,*” (Philippians 4:19) provides a present peace and a hope that passes all understanding.

Jesus knew how easy it would be for us to grow weary and lose hope. That is why He promised to send the Holy Spirit. “*But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Holy Spirit [the Advocate] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you*” (John 16:7).

The Spirit of God reveals the power of God’s mercy and enables us to pray and live in the hope revealed daily through creation and the Word of God (Psalm 19). What hope it provides to know that God is not a distant God, but one who’s Spirit is near us, present among us and acts on us. Throughout the Scriptures we see a wide range of testimonies that tell of how the Holy Spirit entered diverse human relationships and the every day life of individuals providing hope and help

The radical message of hope and the justice it provides is evident when one studies the work of the Holy Spirit. In Joel Chapter 2 we read that the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all flesh-old, young, rich, poor, slave and free. As Michael Welker has said, “There is no righteousness without mercy, without integration of the weak, without liberation of the oppressed, without those who have been forced to the margins of society, participating in the processes of economic, judicial, social and cultural life.”

We see that the work of the Holy Spirit is to put to death the life of self and sin. As Romans 8:13 declares, “*For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*” The misdeeds of the body are those which cause us to be more concerned about our personal comforts than whether or not others are clothed and sheltered.

The fact is, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is not offering us false hope through get-rich quick gimmicks. He is inviting us to experience the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. It is God’s Word which provides hope both now and for all eternity.

In order to experience this hope, we must be willing to obey God no matter what it might cost us personally. The cause of King Saul's ruin was his unwillingness to obey God and put Agag, the King of Amalek to death. This represents that one thing in life that provides hope outside of God – be it money, influence or even that special person. Saul carried out God's commands in every area but one. He fought his battles courageously, won the war against Amalek and captured Agag; but he kept the best of spoils and spared the life of the king. This was the cause of his ruin. Samuel, in I Samuel 15:22 arrives on the scene, kills Agag and tells Saul to his face, "*To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*" It is through daily obedience to God that we find hope.

The false hope self-centeredness provides clothes itself in so many disguises that nothing but the piercing sword of the Spirit and the Word of God can reveal it. Listen once again to Hebrews 4:12-13 "*The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.*" Romans 15:4 declares, "*Through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.*"

All the time we are trying so hard to create hope through our own efforts, the Spirit of God is calling us to die to selfish ambitions and experience the hope and freedom of Christ. Only as we are totally dedicated to Him are we free to pray, serve and love in hope as we experience Christ resurrection.

The sword of the Word is God's weapon for slaying our pride and laying us at the mercy seat of Christ. There one finds hope for II Corinthians 5:17 says, "*If anyone be in Christ they are a new creature, the old has passed away, the new has come.*" What hope and joy this newness provides both now and for all eternity.

When Nehemiah told the people, "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*" (Nehemiah 8:10) he was actually saying the joy of the Lord is your wall. It is this wall, which surrounds our souls and enables us to endure pain and declare in word and deed that we have the hope of heaven and the eternal future that it provides. "*For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all. Who hopes for what he (or she) already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently*" (Romans 8:24-25).

To pray and live in the hope that Christ provides is vital. This hope enables us to live fully in the now with the joy that God will be with us in whatever the future may bring. "*In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depths nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:37-39).

In the midst of their needs, the Biblical writers, who prayed and experienced this hope, were able to say “*We have tasted of the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age*” (Hebrews 6:5). They had experienced “*the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*” (2 Corinthians. 5:5).

The one who prays and lives in the hope that Christ provides has a future. This hope is more than optimism that believes things will improve. It is a hope that is centered in God. In Psalms 33:18-22 we read “*But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you*” (Psalms 33:18-22).

Putting our hope in God and praying births within us a hope that knows it is not us but God who has the final word, “*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).

Jesus is not asking us to figure out how He will solve the problem, but to accept the fact that He will meet the need beyond what we can even ask or think. That’s why praying and living in hope is so important. It causes us to shift our attention from the problem to the Living God who desires to be our problem-solver.

What an unspeakable privilege we now have, because Christ is Risen, to come to know God as our loving heavenly Father and pray to Him daily. How can we afford to let another day pass without desiring to know God in an intimate way? Those who seek Him now will be able, as they trust in Christ, to continue to get to know God for all eternity. After all, what a great God He is! So let us begin now to pray and live in hope as we seek the fullness of Christ. He is such a great God that it will indeed take an eternity for us to truly get to know and understand what an awesome God we serve.

As you experience the Resurrected Christ continue to *pray and live in hope* as you daily read the Scriptures and study the wonders of God’s creation.

Always remember, there is hope, Christ is Risen!

Yours in Christ,


Larry Rice

