

more to be LIVING HOPE

because all you need is Jesus

Jesus transcends all things. In Christ, there is no matter given to financial status, social issues, or personal challenges. God is for all, and in Christ, He is our all.

The promises of heaven wrap this life with purpose, in a way that no bow could ever accomplish. Discovering this gift of Living Hope, however, is a journey -- a journey of seeking, embracing, and proclaiming.

After almost twenty years of living as a follower of Christ, I still find it shocking that all that we really need is Jesus. Maybe you agree with me? Maybe you don't?

Even though I believe, live, and speak on Jesus being everything, I often question what that even means! Yes, I doubt my faith and God's word at times.

I really struggle when I look around at so many people who don't even believe in God who seem to have a life wrapped up in a pretty pink, frilly and bling-bling covered bow.

Yes, I question why I believe what I believe -- and no one is forcing me to believe anything!

I've lived life on the other side of my faith. I had the blings and bows as a child. It isn't all it is cracked up to be. What looks so wonderful in the lives around us can be totally and absolutely empty. Why else would those of us living in the wealthiest nation battle depression, obesity, debt, and despair? Money doesn't buy happiness. Material things don't satisfy our souls. Relationships can't give us the hope we crave.

I know first hand that life apart from Christ is empty, meaningless, and hopeless. It is in Jesus Christ alone, who by His death and resurrection, that we can find a Living Hope and a remarkable inheritance -- one that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us.

Because of God's great love for us, He gave us His Son as an earthly promise of an eternal gift. It is priceless. A living gift. Full of hope.



seeking hope

After a year-long mission to understand what it means to hope in the Lord, I found that its dimensions far exceeded my understanding. It was a shock to recognize that I've spent my lifetime hoping in things, circumstances, people, and accomplishments. Could this be the result of a difficult childhood, where looking ahead and to my own strength was a means of surviving? Or was this simply the influence of the culture?

Even though I turned to Christ as my Savior in college, Jesus was not truly my source of hope, and as a result, I became full of despair, frustration, and even exhaustion. Those vows to have the life I hoped for controlled me. I was tired out from trying to be the good girl. My hope was contrived and didn't even come close to resembling what is described in the Scriptures:

Hebrews 11:1 NIV: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

Imagine living with confidence and assurance in what we do not see, instead of living with worry and anxiety, striving to control every outcome?

Lamentations 3:25-27 MSG: "God proves to be good to the man who passionately waits, to the woman who diligently seeks. It's a good thing to quietly hope, quietly hope for help from God. It's a good thing when you're young to stick it out through the hard times."

Imagine waiting in quietness of spirit, without fretting, waiting on God to help instead of growing exhausted in trying to do it all on our own?

1 Corinthians 13:13 MSG: "...trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly..."

Imagine trusting God as one who never moves off course?

Romans 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the holy spirit."

Imagine being filled to the brim with the hope of Christ, and allowing that to overflow onto others, instead of the critical, negative, frustrating spirit that often contaminates our relationships?

embracing hope

In order to live a life defined by a godly, living hope, we must shift our perspective, moving out of what we think we know and into discovering the mind of Christ. This means no longer looking at life through the lens of our personal experiences, but rather looking at the Scriptures for a biblically sound framework in which to view life and understand truths that transcend age, culture, opportunities, and desires. Embracing hope is about understanding the dynamics of salvation, suffering, and sanctification, which is revealed throughout Scriptures and captured in a passage found in 1 Peter 1:3-9:

1. **Salvation** • 1 Peter 1:3-5

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's

power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

A Christian life is defined by the point in which someone is born again through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, believing that He died on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus alone makes a person right

Living : zāō

1. to live, breathe, be among the living (not lifeless, not dead)
2. to enjoy real life
3. active, blessed, endless in the kingdom of God
4. to be fresh, strong, efficient,
5. active, powerful, efficacious

before God, allowing us to live a forgiven and redeemed life, in which we choose to demonstrate our love for God by our obedience to the Word, rather than attempting to prove our worthiness.

2. **Suffering** • 1 Peter 1:6-7

⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

A Christian life is marked by times of testing and trials, brought on by living in a fallen world marred by sin. Some of the trials may be the result of our own sin or the effect of being in relationships/community with others who have sinned. We are called to endure suffering and persevere through trials, looking for opportunities to glorify God as an evidence of our faith.

1 Peter 3:6 promises testing and trials, so why do we ask "why, God?" in the face of challenges? Would we be better off saying, "Why not me?" What motivates us to create an earthly-bound utopia instead of embracing the reality of suffering, in light of our faith in the Savior who suffered on our behalf? What would it take to embrace our suffering (not like it) and decide to glorify God by choosing to praise Him and serve in our mess, despite our suffering?

Trial: *peirasmos*

1. an enticement to sin, temptation, whether arising from the desires or from the outward circumstances
2. an internal temptation to sin
3. the condition of things, or a mental state, by which we are enticed to sin, or to a lapse from the faith and holiness
4. adversity, affliction, trouble: sent by God and serving to test or prove one's character, faith, holiness

3. **Sanctification** • 1 Peter 1:8-9

⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

proclaiming hope

Discovering what it means to hope in the Lord is not only a worthy endeavor for one's own faith journey, but it is a beautiful gift to give to others. This world is desperately crying out for hope and longing for a way to live in the midst of disappointment, despair, and desperate times. Proclaiming -- or sharing the hope of God with others -- doesn't need to be complicated. We don't need to be skilled theologians, carry a certificate validating our authority to teach, have our faith all figured out, or be able to express the Gospel eloquently. On the contrary, the apostle Paul tells us quite the opposite is true:

1 Corinthians 1:17: For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

God works through those He equips, not those who are qualified:

1 Peter 2:21: For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

We don't need to give others hope found in us. Rather, we need to introduce them to the one who is becoming our Living Hope, Jesus Christ -- in order to prepare them for a life that starts with salvation, moves through suffering, and culminates in sanctification.

1 Peter 5:6-11: ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Will you share the promise of living hope with others today? Will you convey through living out your own faith what the inheritance of Christ looks like? Will you choose, now, that you'll put your hope in the One who promises eternity?

A Christian life is a journey of becoming more like Christ, refined by the times of suffering and being transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:1-2) as well as by the work of the Holy Spirit guiding our lives (Ephesians 1).

**James 1:3-4
NASB / NIV**
...knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance / perseverance. And let endurance / perseverance (finish its work) have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect (mature) and complete, lacking in nothing.

Endurance / Perseverance: Hupomene / Hypomone

- 1. steadfastness, constancy, endurance... not swerved from deliberate purpose and loyalty to faith ... even the greatest trials and sufferings**
- 2. a patient, steadfast waiting for**
- 3. a patient enduring, sustaining, perseverance**
- 4. In the NIV the term "perseverance" occurs thirteen times, all in the New Testament.**
- 5. energetic resistance, steadfastness under pressure, and endurance in the face of trials.**
- 6. either confidence in or tense expectation of ("waiting on") the power or the faithfulness of God, who delivers his people; it is closely linked with the idea of hope**

This passage from 1 Peter 1:3-9 offers us a way to look at life through a Biblical framework. For example, if 1 Peter 1:4 promises us an inheritance that is "imperishable, undefiled, unfading...kept," why are we striving to store up our material things, accomplishments, and reputation? What if we gave up all the effort in

trying to secure our future? What if we yield our lives to the Lord -- choosing to steward our gifts, talents, and responsibilities, but not trying control everything?

These truths beckon us to ask the question about our life purpose and focus, forcing us to acknowledge where we put our hope. If we can come to the place of acknowledging that life is hard, for every human being, then how much easier it will be to embrace a Living Hope found in Jesus Christ through putting on an eternal perspective.

The Christian life is a journey of spiritual maturity. Faith alone does not define a believer. Living as a disciple, striving only "to be good," forsakes the heart of obedience that God desires most of all. And yet following "all the rules" does not ensure a comfort filled life. There are tests and trials, for everyone.