

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

Proverbs 13:12



The Lord has been speaking to me lately about “hope deferred” and “hope displaced”. As Proverbs points out, “hope deferred makes the heart sick”. Hope displaced seems to make us remain on a never ending roller coaster ride from hopeful to hopelessness. It can even progress into anger at God and others. According to Strong’s Bible Dictionary, deferred means to “delay” or “draw out”. That implies that the thing hoped for is probable and will eventually come to pass. God’s

promises are true, but His timetable is rarely ours. Hebrews 11:1 reads, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” We can be sure of what we hope for even when it remains unseen if God, Himself, promises it to us. Hope is displaced when we assume that God will do something for us merely because He has done it for others. We can be full of hope and excitement one minute when it looks like our desires will be fulfilled, and emotionally dashed on the rocks the next as we realize that little is changed or that the situation has gotten worse.

In the middle of all of this, one thing is true... **God will never leave us or forsake us** (Hebrews 13:5). In the middle of our worst trials, we can hold onto God’s promise that He will always be there for us – even when He remains unseen and unfelt. That promise is sure. Hope displaced can crush us if we expect God to stop the trial immediately and fix the situation. Our hearts can leap for joy as we see a small crack in the clouds above, then sink to our stomachs as darker clouds move in. If we expected God to end the storm, He appears to have failed us. If we expect God to remain with us in the storm, He has kept His promise to never leave us.

To be sure, **God is in the business of performing miracles**. We have all experienced them. Had it not been for a miracle of transformation, I would not be running this ministry. Had it not been for a miracle of healing, some of you reading this newsletter would not be alive. But God sometimes has deeper miracles in mind than our immediate comfort and freedom. Sometimes He wants to carry us through the storm so we can learn to lean upon Him. Sometimes he wants to empower us to walk through the storm with Him. Sometimes, He wants to give us authority over the storm so that what once debilitated us becomes defeated by our lives through His power and might. That is a true, loving Savior. We all want to keep our kids safe from the bullies, but if we don’t teach them to stand they will never be strong.

In the life of the Apostle Paul, some of his trials were ended quickly, and some continued. When he and Silas were in stocks in the inner prison, they were supernaturally freed while worshipping. Paul had more faith than anyone I know... surviving shipwrecks, beatings, stonings... but even his prayers to God to remove his thorn in the flesh received a firm “no” (2 Corinthians 12). For some reason, it was more important for Paul to experience the grace of God rather than God’s healing. We aren’t sure what Paul’s thorn was, but in Galatians 4 Paul affirms that they would have “torn out” their own eyes and given them to him. Paul could have easily become angry at God and lost His grace to persevere, yet he held on to something deeper in Him.

I was moved by a speaker named Sy Rogers as he talked about the faith of Joni Eareckson Tada, a woman who is handicapped from her neck down from a diving accident when she was young. At first she was angry and wanted to die, yet she overcame her anger and accepted her cross. She grew to become a leading minister to the handicapped, author and singer who has touched the lives of millions. She remains in a wheelchair today, yet her faith in God is strong. Sy explains,



“Real faith is not receiving healing from a God who can do it, real faith is when the God who can do it chooses not to and you serve Him anyway.” Indeed, if our hope (or expectation and demand) is that God will solve our problems instantly and He doesn’t, we will become discouraged and angry at Him. If our hope (understanding) is that God will never leave us or forsake us and will walk with us through the trial, we can better love and serve Him even when He chooses not to grant us our request. Like Joni, we can transition from wanting to die or disappear to accepting “our normal” (our cross) and allowing God to do a deeper eternal work in us. When we allow God to fashion our lives as He sees best, like Paul we can learn to be content whatever our situation.

Are you frustrated or angry at God because your trial is still going on. Like many of you, I’ve had to wrestle with the questions of “why?” Why did God allow...? Where was He when...? Didn’t He care that...? As I receive more healing, I realize that it is through the trials that He has given me many gifts of the heart. If we embrace the trials, we will grow closer to Christ and know more of Him than we could ever dream possible if our lives were unchallenged. Jesus doesn’t rewrite history, but He can redeem it. Our present trial may not end, but He can calm the raging seas of our soul.

It’s alright to hope and pray that our trial will end, but our greater hope should be that we will be drawn closer to God. That is one hope that will not be displaced. Like Paul, the sooner we stop kicking against the goads, the sooner we see Christ more as He really is.

I have told you these things so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world. John 16:33

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