

HOPE AMIDST SUFFERING

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: COLOSSIANS 1:19–2:5 PRINT PASSAGE: COLOSSIANS 1:24–2:3

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:2–3, KJV)

Intro

A commitment to Christ involves having to endure the inevitable reality of suffering. As it is a part of life, suffering is the term we use to describe any prolonged experience that involves severe pain, trauma, grief, agony, and the like. While we suffer in different ways, we will all eventually suffer in this life.

Though it is an uncomfortable experience, suffering is a crucial part of our spiritual formation. Suffering is as essential as fellowshiping with the saints, reading the Bible regularly, attending church, and even the service done in ministry. As an indispensable feature of the Christian life, our suffering is meant to help define our identity in God and with God.

Given that God can do all things, a fair question could be: "Why must we suffer?" This is a profound and difficult question that has been debated by philosophers, scholars, theologians, and people in general for centuries.

Christ followers are destined to suffer because He suffered; and to live like Christ is to suffer in His name. The good news, however, is that we don't have to suffer alone. Because we have chosen to suffer for Christ, He becomes the center of our hope in the midst of our suffering.

The Christian church in Colossae during the time of Paul certainly had their share of suffering. In addition to social despair, they also were persecuted by the Roman Empire and Jewish authorities who opposed their beliefs and practices. They were pressured by surrounding influences of pagan lifestyles and culture.

Think About It

Something we can hope for amidst our suffering is the confidence in knowing that our pain helps to produce purpose.

1. Sacrifice for Christ (Colossians 1:24–29)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

WHO now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

I AM now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

25 I became its minister according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

26 the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.

27 To them God chose to make known how great among the gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

29 For this I toil and strive with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

Know It

In verse 24, Paul transitions from talking about the supremacy of Christ to what it means to suffer as did Christ. Because he had never been seen by the people of Colossae, it was important that Paul inform them of the nature of his ministry. He needed to establish his authority to address more significant theological points. In reference to the trials and tribulations he had to endure to spread the Gospel, Paul tells the people, "I now rejoice in my suffering," as it was necessary for their sake. According to Paul, the afflictions he endured throughout his work was how he identified with and participated in the work of Christ. His desire to fill what was lacking

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in the affliction refers to his readiness to continue suffering for the sake of Christ and for the sake of His body, which he describes as the church. Paul was willing to suffer on behalf of the church because he saw himself as a servant of the church whom God had commissioned to proclaim the Gospel of hope. He did not take this position of his own accord, but rather because God had called him to it.

Paul suffered in two ways. He suffered personal attacks at the hands of the people in Colossae who were against the Gentile believers' acceptance of God. He also suffered at the hands of Jews in neighboring cities who sought to stop the advancement of the Gospel in general.

In verse 26, Paul explains his role in the administration of God's plan, which is related to the mystery that has been hidden from generation for the ages. In Pauline terminology, a mystery is a truth that lay hidden in the pages of the Old Testament and its explanation awaited another day. The day of understanding came with the death and resurrection of Christ and the mystery was revealed to all believers. The content of this mystery is that Christ resides in the heart of the believer, and with Him the hope of glory. So though the Jews had access to the Torah and other stories of the Old Testament, it was impossible for them to fully understand what salvation would look like until Jesus came onto the scene. He revealed the mystery. That's why believers can go to the Old Testament today and see all the allusions and prophecies about Jesus that have been fulfilled and make the connections that the Jewish people never could. Jesus is the key that unlocks the treasure trove of information in the Old Testament, and reveals how God had a plan for the entire world all along.

This is the essence of Paul's message, according to verse 28. Referring to the message of the Gospel as the embodiment of Christ, Paul says "it is Him we preach." His message serves as wisdom that warns against false teaching that rejects God's grace and provides instruction for those open to it.

Paul's primary purpose was to present every person as perfect in Christ. He thought in terms of the return of Christ and the desire to see each Christian mature in the Lord. To this end, Paul labored intently using the strength that Christ supplied to him to accomplish this task.

Paul connects the general toil and difficulty inherent in

2. All About Christ (Colossians 2:1-3)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

1 For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you and for those in Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face.

2 I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ,

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

the work of ministry to the specific struggles he endured on behalf of the Colossians. He wanted the people to know how great his conflict was as a means to articulate his concern for them, those who haven't seen his face in the flesh, and the nearby community of believers in Laodicea. This extends to believers today. We have never seen Paul in the flesh; we merely have his words in front of us that we take to heart as God's message to us from thousands of years ago. Though we haven't met Paul personally, we trust in God's word and that it is inerrant. Therefore, we can trust Paul's authority, as did the Colossians who had never met him. His attention to suffering was also meant to show what can be expected when one serves for the sake of Christ.

Yet, amid the inevitable struggles believers will face, according to Paul, being knit together in love and having the assurance of understanding regarding the hidden knowledge of God insures deliverance from them. When we're in the midst of suffering, it's easy to become discouraged and downcast, and when we're in that state of mind, it's all the easier for the devil to prey upon us. So, rather than dwell on the suffering, Paul wanted to send an encouragement to the believers that our suffering is for a good cause and we can take hope in that.

His reference to being knit together in love spoke of a call to unity. God makes it clear repeatedly that He is all about relationship and communion. Therefore, as believers, it's important to our spiritual health for us to be relational! This

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means spending time seeking God’s truth together, praying with and for one another, and fellowshiping. God’s truth would bring them together, but if they listened to false teaching or doctrine, this would divide them.

Paul also emphasizes that a believer’s full assurance in God brings them real riches, unlike earthly riches that will pass away. If someone is struggling in their faith and doubts that God is real—or believes He exists but doubts that He’s good or loving—then they are missing out on the riches that come with the full assurance that God is good, loving, and desires a personal relationship with you. Believers who are confident in God and their relationship with Him experience a fuller, richer Christian walk. This is what Paul desired for the Colossians to experience.

Once again, Paul touches on the mystery of God being revealed in Christ. In this context, Paul says that it’s impossible for us to understand and know God’s character without Jesus. God revealed Himself to humanity through His Son. Jesus is how God demonstrated His love, His goodness, His patience, etc. All of these things the Jewish people may have experienced in the Old Testament, but it became flesh and tangible through the life of Jesus.

In these verses, Paul is refuting a false doctrine that was circulating around Colossae. False teachers were encouraging the people to seek knowledge and truth, but *not* Jesus. This is a dangerous position to take because anything that promises truth without Jesus is a scheme of the devil. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). That means He is the ultimate Source of truth and knowledge. Too many people today would rather believe in knowledge and have put science on a pedestal or idol. But without the acknowledgement that God created science and is the Divine mind behind it, the picture is incomplete and they will never have the full knowledge that they seek.

Paul wanted the Colossians to know that whatever questions the people had about God or how they should live was answered in Jesus: the mystery revealed. If Jesus didn’t live it or say it, then they were following a false doctrine. Paul once again compares this knowledge to precious treasure and riches, reminding the Colossians how worthy God’s truth is and how it’s worth seeking at any cost. Suffering in life is inevitable, but Jesus invites us, without reservation, to come to Him.

Remember It

The narrative of our religious heritage begins with the phenomenon of the “Invisible Institution.” As a template for the modern day Black Church, the Invisible Institution was a community of enslaved Africans and Caribbeans who gathered together under a refuge of hope amid their suffering to worship God in secret. The Invisible Institution was ground zero for more than just the Black church; it is also the context within which the African became an African American. Just as Paul encouraged the people of Colossae to be knit together in love with a sure understanding of God, so was the community of the enslaved through the phenomenon of the Invisible Institution.



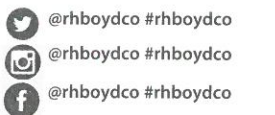
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider “Take Me to the King” by Tamela Mann.

Share It • Live It • Hear It

Think of a time you suffered. How did the hope of Christ get you through? Share a passage of Scripture that encourages you to stay strong in your faith and maintain hope during difficult times.

How would you encourage someone else who is suffering with something? What Scripture passages would you encourage a suffering person to read. How would you encourage him or her to pray?

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Devotional Readings for June 3–9, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Boldly Proclaiming the Kingdom	The Awesome Presence of God	The Consuming Fire	The Lord’s Blessing Makes Rich	Your Treasure Is with Your Heart	Seek First God’s Kingdom	Christ, the Most Precious Gift
Acts 28:23–31	Exodus 19:9–11, 16–25	Hebrews 12:18–29	Proverbs 10:19–25	Matthew 6:19–24	Matthew 6:25–34	Colossians 1:24–2:3

REFLECTING GOD'S SPIRIT

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: 2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-18 PRINT PASSAGE: 2 CORINTHIANS 3:5-18

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV)

Intro When one accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the Spirit of the Lord lives within that person. Upon surrendering ourselves to the Holy Spirit and His direction, we are led to do God's will and to represent His character in our lives. In other words, we are called to reflect God's Spirit in the world.

But what does that mean? How do we reflect God's Spirit, if we aren't sure what God's Spirit really is? That is a good question, an one that has challenged many believers in the faith. The Holy Spirit is just as much a part of the Trinity as is Christ and the Godhead. He is the expression of God's presence, power, and purpose in this world and the One who abides within the heart of the believer. To reflect the Spirit of God is to demonstrate His character of love, justice, and peace.

Paul explains to his readers in Corinth that the source and nature of his and Timothy's ministry is to spread the Gospel. He acknowledges that their competency to carry out this divine work is not something that comes from within themselves, but rather, their sufficiency is from God. It is God, according to Paul, who has made them fit to be ministers of the New Covenant. Because Paul took this calling so seriously and left behind these letters for us to learn from today, we are able to take up this calling as well. This is part of living our faith in God and Paul gives us the template to follow through Jesus.

Think About It

Elaborate upon the condition of one's gift when God's blessings are taken for granted.

1. Sufficient in Christ (2 Corinthians 3: 5-6)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

NOT that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

NOT that we are qualified of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our qualification is from God,

6 who has made us qualified to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Know It

The expression "new covenant" appears in the New Testament as a designation for the arrangement established between God and His people on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection. The church derives the expression "New Testament" from this phraseology, which has its roots in Jeremiah 31:31, where the prophet described the restoration period after Israel's exile as the time of "the new covenant." The term "new" did not mean entirely new. It connoted "renewed" or "made anew." God promised to renew His people to fresh and sincere covenant life after the exile.

By clarifying that this sufficiency is not of the letter but of the Spirit, Paul is articulating the nature, character, and power of this new covenant in contrast to the old. The letter and Spirit refer to the two different ways of rendering service to God under the two different covenants. The one is carved in letters on stone tablets, which required obedience, while the other is written on human hearts and impels surrender to God's divine agency. The letter of the Law referred to the literal interpretation of the written regulations, regiments, requirements, and rituals given to Moses by God for the people to obey. Those who live under the Law live under its condemnation, which is why the letter of the Law kills.

Conversely, the Spirit of God gives life and righteousness to those who believe in Him. Rather than condemn, the Holy Spirit convicts as He cultivates a relationship between God and the believer. While the letter of the Law focused on the externalized interpretation of God's commands, the Spirit deals with its internalized intent for promoting a deep and abiding relationship with Him.

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2. New vs. the Old Covenant (2 Corinthian 3:7-11)

King James Version

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

New Revised Standard Version

7 Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses's face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside,

8 how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?

9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory!

10 Indeed, what once had glory has in this respect lost its glory because of the greater glory,

11 for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

In verse seven, Paul argues that the glory of the Old Covenant cannot compare to that of the new. Describing it as the ministry of death written and engraved on stones, Paul contrasts the Old Covenant (commandments that God wrote on stones and gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai) and the glory associated with it in his own ministry along with the glory that comes through the preaching of the Gospel.

During the wilderness journey, the glory of the Old Covenant was evidenced by a supernatural light that would illuminate Moses' face while he delivered the dictates of the Law to the people. The glory of his countenance was so bright and convicting that the children of Israel could not look steadily at Moses when he spoke the decrees. A veil had to be worn on Moses' face when confronting the people so as not to frighten them.

Eventually, however, this uncomfortable light faded, proving Paul's argument that the glory of the Old Covenant was temporary and, therefore, was

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passing away. Replacing the fading glory of the Old Covenant is the ministry of the Spirit, according to Paul, which is more glorious and permanent. It refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in and throughout the life of the believer.

What Paul contrasted as the ministry of death and the ministry of the Spirit in 3:7-8, he now calls the ministry of condemnation and the ministry of righteousness in 3:9. Both words, "condemnation" and "righteousness," are employed as courtroom language outside the New Testament and are frequent in Paul's theological vocabulary of salvation. "Condemnation" means that the defendant is judged guilty of the crime and is sentenced to be executed. "Righteousness" is used to declare the defendant innocent and, thus, set free. Praise the Lord that we no longer have to fight against God or struggle in vain to achieve something that could never have been achieved in the first place. God made it so easy for us by sending His Son to die in our place. He took on the punishment that we deserved so that we might no longer be at war with Him. What an incredible concept!

Though the Law came from God, it only served to highlight the sin of the people, pronouncing them irrefutably guilty before His presence. For them, it emphasized the need for mercy, grace, and salvation from the Lord to be applied on their behalf. Ironically, the language Paul uses to describe the Old Covenant (i.e., the ministry of condemnation and of death) is apropos because believing all that was needed to acquire salvation from the Lord was compliance to the Law would in fact guarantee eternal condemnation and death.

Conversely, the ministry of righteousness (i.e., of the Spirit) serves to lead people to depend on Christ and, upon doing so, they are justified and accepted by God. This, according to verse 10, exceeds much more in glory than the Law. The glory that comes with the ministry of the Spirit is so infinitely superior to that of the Law that it makes the former glory associated with the Old Covenant look as if it had no glory at all in comparison.

Paul's point is not just that the relevance of the old covenant gradually dissipates, but that its obsolescence was built into it from its inception, evidenced by the need for a veil to cover the glory of Moses' face. It has now been abruptly replaced by the coming of a superior glory open for all to see in Christ through the Gospel. This glory comes uncovered from the beginning indicating that it is everlasting and never to be replaced.

The New Covenant reveals God's love and grace through Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God and the exact representation of His nature. By it, believers are guaranteed eternal life and freedom through the Spirit of God.

To accentuate the contrast between the Spirit's superiority to the Law, Paul entices his readers with the alluring claim that if they thought the glory of the Old Covenant (which is temporary and passing away) was something special, the glory of the New Covenant (which is permanent and perfect) will blow your mind! Every believer should be anxiously anticipating this future glory that will be ours when God deems the time is right.

3. Unveiled Boldness (2 Corinthians 3:12–18)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13 And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with complete frankness,

13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside.

14 But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, the same veil is still there; it is not unveiled since in Christ it is set aside.

15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds,

16 but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Paul's boldness of speech to spread the Gospel is analogous to lifting the veil and revealing God's glory to the people, like Moses did in the wilderness. But unlike Moses, who also used the veil to conceal the glory as it faded, Paul preaches the counter—that the veil is no longer needed, because it is taken away in Christ. And when one who was once blinded by the veil of the Old Covenant turns to the Lord, it is taken away and they are exposed to the glory of God.

To be exposed to God's glory is to realize that the Lord and the Spirit are one. Though He functions as an independent part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is also the expression of God's power, glory, and presence amid all creation. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. According to Paul, this wasn't just freedom from sin and the Law, but also freedom to boldly radiate the glory of God in spreading the true Gospel of Christ. Paul closes this section by addressing all believers with unveiled faces, meaning those who are bold enough to approach God without fear or shame.

Application & Review

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Remember It

There is something to be said about Moses' use of the veil to conceal the light of God's glory. While it served a practical purpose, sparing the children of Israel the discomfort of God's convicting light, it also obstructed their view of and prevented their access to God's glory. Perhaps this is why it eventually faded. When one attempts to hide God's glory, it diminishes the worth we once ascribed to being in His presence, in that we take Him and His blessings for granted. A life unveiled is one that boldly reflects the Spirit of God in all that we do. It involves having the courage to spread the Gospel of Christ through the prism of personality; that is, to live in the light of Christ's character of love.



Share It • Live It • Hear It

For a musical complement to the lesson, consider "Oil and Water" by Travis Greene.

Commit to revealing the character of Christ in your actions.

How can the light of God's glory through you shine more brightly?

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Devotional Readings for June 10–16, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Servant Leadership	You Shall Receive Power	Anointed by God	How Pleasant to Live in Unity	Bear with One Another in Love	Embrace the Mind of Christ	Prayer for Hope, Joy, and Peace
Luke 22:25–30	Acts 1:1–11	Isaiah 61	Psalms 133–134	Ephesians 4:1–7	Philippians 2:1–13	Romans 15:1–13

HOPE AMIDST DIFFERENCES

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ROMANS 15:1 –13 PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 15:1 –13

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5–6, KJV)

Intro

The modern idea of race emerged in the late 15th and early 16th centuries when European explorers and colonizers endeavored to oppress people of different continents and regions, and began to categorize them according to their perceived differences. With the invention of race, the phenomenon of “whiteness” surfaced and eventually came to define America as only white. It is the social and institutional reinforcement that this country and the systems governing its people were designed by and for the advantage of white people.

In essence, the cure for racism is the intentional act to form authentic relationships, not only with God, but also with each other. Establishing authentic relationships takes work, as it involves love, courage, patience, vulnerability, and most importantly, time. As believers, an aspiration to develop authentic relationships with one another should be a natural extension of our worship.

For the Roman believers, unity as an outgrowth of liberty and love was Paul’s goal. As he aspired to visit the community of faith, he wanted to find within it a unified and loving fellowship of believers, regardless of differences, that would unite with him in extending the Gospel to Spain and the regions beyond. His message was not academic—it was a practical one that believers today need to hear and heed. Unity is at the heart of the Divine.

Think About It

To be united by a common hope in Christ is to celebrate the blessing of difference.

1. Strong and Weak Believers (Romans 15:1–6)

King James Version

WE then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

New Revised Standard Version

WE who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

2 Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor.

3 For Christ did not please himself, but, as it is written, “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

5 May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus,

6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Know It

Continuing in the admonishment that weak and strong Christians should live together in harmony, when speaking of the “weak,” Paul likely refers to those who feel compelled to observe prescribed rituals and dietary regulations. They were members of the faith community who were predominantly Jewish converts. Conversely, the “strong” were believers who, through faith, recognized they were not bound to the regulations of the Law; therefore, they served God with a greater degree of liberty. The majority of members who made up this group were Gentile converts.

Rather than pleasing themselves, the strong believer should aspire to please his or her neighbor for the neighbor’s good, with the hope that the selfless service demonstrated will result in the neighbor’s salvation. Of course, the greatest example of selfless service is evidenced in the person and work of Jesus

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Christ, as stated in verse three. Paul's intent was to show that if Christ, the Son of God, did not order His life to please Himself, how much more should believers forgo all personal advantage and follow the path of the Suffering Servant?

In verse five, Paul encourages like-mindedness toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, among the believers. While he is not implying that they should all be of one consciousness, he encourages his readers to strive for a unity of perspective, one that encompasses Jesus Christ as the ultimate model for Christian conduct. Paul's mission was to unite and strengthen the church for the future purpose of launching an outreach ministry to the regions beyond Rome.

His thinking was that as each member of the church drew closer to Christ, each would simultaneously draw closer to one another. This unity, fused by worship, would produce a symphony of praise wherein all of the people would glorify God with one mind and one voice. What a beautiful aspiration for us to continue to strive for today! Paul repeatedly hones in on this idea of Christianity being a family of many members, but all beloved by God.

2. One in Christ (Romans 15:7–12)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.	7 Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.
8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:	8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors
9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.	9 and that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles and sing praises to your name";
10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.	10 and again he says, "Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people";
11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.	11 and again, "Praise the Lord, all you gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him";
12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.	12 and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the gentiles; in him the gentiles shall hope."

Paul further councils his readers to receive one another, just as Christ received them (v. 7). His admonishment was for them to treat each other with hospitality, respect, and kindness. He appealed to every believer's personal experience of being accepted by God's grace to serve as a guide for how they should accept each other. Paul wanted to assure that they would adopt an openness to embrace those who were different from them in love, without discrimination or judgment, and to regard each one as a brother or sister in Christ. Paul needed to be assured that they knew the Gospel has the power to bring diverse people together into one body that loves serves and supports one another, while furthering the Great Commission of Christ.

In support of the universal scope of God's redemptive work through Christ His Son, Paul cites four Old Testament Scriptures (vv. 10–12). The first is found in 2 Sam. 22:50 and then in Ps. 18:49. David vowed to praise God among the Gentiles, to sing in honor of His name. Israel was to be the instrument through whom God's redemptive work would extend to the Gentiles. The second is from Moses' great hymn celebrating God's victory over Pharaoh and his army: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people" (Deuteronomy 32:43). The third is from Ps. 117:1, where the writer called upon the Gentiles to lift their voices in praise to the Lord. Paul references this text in support of his position that the salvation of the Gentiles was on God's mind from the very beginning, rather than it being something He decided at a later time. Finally, Paul cites the well-known messianic promise from Isaiah 11. The Messiah will come as a root of Jesse and He who shall rise and rule the nations; and in Him, the Gentiles shall hope.

3. Hope Amid Difference (Romans 15:13)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.	13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's prayer for the believers at Rome was for God to fill them with all joy and peace, believing that they may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's admonition for his readers to learn to live together in unity is not an easy thing to do—certainly not something to be accomplished in the power of human ability. Joy and peace are supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and any hope they have of learning to love those of a different racial and ethnic background can only come through Him. Overall, Romans 15:13 is a prayer for the spiritual well-being of the believers, expressing the apostle's desire for them to experience the transformative power of hope, joy, and peace to change hearts and minds through their relationship with God.

Remember It

As believers, hope comes naturally; but as Christians, accepting those who are different than us does not. Unfortunately, Paul's admonishment to the believers in Rome—to live in harmony, following the example of Christ who did not please Himself, but instead served others and endured suffering for God's glory—seems to have gone unheeded in the modern day Christian church.

In many places, uniformity rather than unity is a more accurate description of the way the average evangelical church gathers together for worship. We must be a part of the change that is needed. We must go back to the biblical basics and throw out the religious fallacies that hinder us from unity.



Share It • Live It • Hear It

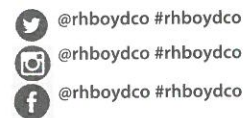
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider "Way Maker" by Maranda Curtis.

Define the hope that guides your commitment to God.

How do you accept those who believe and live differently than you? Do you have meaningful relationships with people who live/believe differently? Why or why not?

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Devotional Readings for June 17-23, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Hope in God Our Help	Whoever Has the Son Has Life	Boldness in Christ for Prayer	The Lord Is My Shepherd	Trust in God Our Salvation	Maturing in Christ	Trust God's Promises
Psalm 42	1 John 5:1-13	1 John 5:14-21	Psalm 23	Isaiah 12	Hebrews 6:1-8	Hebrews 6:9-20

GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: HEBREWS 6:9-20 PRINT PASSAGE: HEBREWS 6:9-20

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition, Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School*

KEY VERSE: We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:19-20, KJV)

Intro

Faith in God is meant to be a practical resource for the believer, particularly in times of extreme challenge. This is because our faith is not only composed of belief rooted in hope, but it is also made up of our experiences being in relationship with God. To be sure, it is usually during the moments of our greatest difficulties that we find the most comfort in knowing that God can deliver us. This is what faith is: a constant knowing that God is trustworthy to fulfill His promise to protect, provide, and preserve. The trustworthiness of God is an overarching theme for the writer of the Hebrews.

The people to whom this letter was addressed were a group of Christians who had a Jewish background and were familiar with the Old Testament. They were facing persecution because of their faith, and thusly, the temptation to abandon their faith in Jesus Christ. They had ceased to grow as Christians and had begun to fall away from the faith. The readers of Hebrews may have been in danger of returning to Judaism or to mixing it with Christianity as a way to cope with the difficulties they were facing. The letter was probably written before 70 A.D., when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The exact location of the recipients and the author is uncertain, but some scholars suggest that they were in Palestine or Rome. Though there is much unknown about the author of Hebrews, the letter cannot be overestimated regarding the worth it has in understanding the nature of God, Christ, and the new covenant.

Think About It

Trusting God should be as natural for the believer as turning on the light switch and expecting the light to come on—well, when the light bill has been paid.

1. Warning Against Abandoning the Faith (Hebrews 6:9–12)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
BUT, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.	EVEN though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation.
10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.	10 For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.
11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:	11 And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end,
12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.	12 so that you may not become sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Know It

Verse nine begins with the writer of Hebrews transitioning from giving a warning to his readers to encouraging them. He quickly assures the recipients of the letter that he did not regard the extreme description (vv. 4–8) of those who abandoned the faith as applicable to them. Instead, he was confident of better things concerning his readers, things that accompany salvation. The writer's confidence in them is qualified by their works and labor of love that they have shown toward God's name.

Their labor of love included concern for others, righteous living, and other demonstrations of godly virtues. According to verse 10, they have participated in providing ministry to the saints both in the past and now.

The writer's claim that God is not unjust highlights his position that in the face of such overwhelming moral evidence, it seemed inconceivable that God would overlook the works and the love that were evident products of His divine grace. Not that God has any obligation to the readers, nor did they have any claim on Him. Salvation is not granted by works; nevertheless, but God does not overlook those who do His will. God is faithful and righteous, and He will reward His people for the deeds of service and kindness done to others that are motivated by their love for God. This the writer includes as a way to encourage his Christians readers who were facing persecution and were tempted to abandon the faith.

2. God's Oath is Sure (Hebrews 6:13–15)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself,	13 When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,
14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.	14 saying, "I will surely bless you and multiply you."
15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.	15 And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise.

Abraham is mentioned in verse 13 to show the reliability of God's promises. God had confirmed His promise to Abraham with an oath. Genesis 22:16 claimed that God made a promise and supported it with His own personal oath. He could swear by no one greater than Himself to whom He could appeal in an oath. God's word by itself is a foundation strong enough for their trust to be grounded in. When God added an oath to His word, the addition made the promise even more certain.

Citing the quote, "surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you," the author of Hebrews is referring to God's oath to Abraham. In Genesis 12:2–3, and again in 17:6–8, God promised Abraham that His blessing would come upon the patriarch and his descendants. After Abraham responded with obedience to the command, God reinforced the earlier promise with an oath (Gen. 22:17–18). The promise to Abraham involved the multiplication of his offspring and the blessing of the nations of the world through his offspring.

Abraham endured the challenges of the trial concerning Isaac. He became an outstanding example of someone who patiently endured and obtained the promise. Abraham himself provided a pattern that the readers of Hebrews could profitably imitate. God's promise to Abraham was not fulfilled quickly or easily. In fact, it took such a long time that Abraham and Sarah at one point decided to take the promise into their own hands and manufacture a child through a hand-maiden. That decision turned out poorly. Mercifully, redeemed that situation (Genesis 16). Despite that error in judgment and impatience, God was faithful to His promise. He allowed Sarah to become pregnant and bear the child of promise herself. Millions of Jews are alive today because of God's faithfulness to Abraham. There is no doubting that God was true to His word. And if He was true to His word back then, we can be confident that He is still true to His word today. We know that God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. What a blessing that we don't need to doubt God or His promises! He is faithful!

3. From Faith to Promise (Hebrews 6:16–20)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.	16 Humans, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute among them.
17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:	17 In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath,
18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:	18 so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us.
19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;	19 We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain,
20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.	20 where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The writer returns to discussing the significance of an oath in verse 16. According to him, human beings swear by the greater beings to back up their statements because the promise of a human being is not reliable enough for trust. To show more abundantly the unchanging nature of His counsel, God makes an oath to Abraham.

The ultimate fulfillment of that oath is found in Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and the son of Abraham. Through Him, all nations are blessed because He died and rose again for our sins.

God's oath is based on two immutable things, according to verse 18: His word and His nature. His word is unchangeable in that it is impossible for God to lie. It is therefore true and reliable. God's word reveals His will and His works. It contains His promises and prophecies and testifies of His faithfulness and power. This is confirmed not just by His actions and signs, but also by the fulfillment of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. God's nature is unchangeable because it is perfect.

Application & Review

NOTES:

Remember It

God is trustworthy! For the believer, living in and with this awareness is the primary factor in determining one's spiritual development. Disappointment, betrayal, and disloyalty are common realities among people. Being conditioned by the world to distrust everybody and anything, it is difficult to surrender ourselves completely to the care of God. This lesson, therefore, provides hope as to how we can strengthen our resolve to trust in God during times of trouble. First, consider what His word says. The Bible is a great resource in that it establishes the fundamental basis of God, His nature, and His promises. Second, we can take inventory of the experiences encountered with God.



Share It • Live It • Hear It

For a musical complement to the lesson, consider "Jireh" by Elevation Worship and Maverick City.

Identify what might be some difficulties that prevents trusting in God.

How would you encourage another believer to trust in God? How would you encourage an unbeliever?

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Devotional Readings for June 24–30, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
My Heart Shall Not Fear	The Treasure of Knowing Christ	Jesus Makes a Difference	God Will Help the Fearful	The Wise Shall Shine Brightly	Encounter with Christ	A New Creature
Psalm 27	Philippians 3:1–14	Galatians 1:13–24	Isaiah 41:1–15	Daniel 12	Acts 9:1–9	Acts 26:1–11

HOPE IN GOD TRANSFORMS US

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ACTS 26:1-11

PRINT PASSAGE: ACTS 26:1-11

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors (Acts 26:6, KJV)

Intro

To be called into the ministry of the preached Gospel can be a daunting experience. It is an intimidating prospect for one to think that he or she has been chosen by God to speak on His behalf. While there are a number of challenges one would first need to acknowledge and address in accepting the call to preach, perhaps the greatest of them is our realized unworthiness to do the job. God and His word/voice is holy. We, on the other hand, are not—far from it. Any preacher is a perfectly imperfect vessel carrying within him or her a word from God for the people. When the light of God's word illuminates within, it radiates through the cracks of their imperfection so that those who see the light receive God's word with grace.

Preachers should offer the word with the hope that the light of God's word will transform both the messenger and those who have ears to hear. The intimidation they may feel is a constant reminder of the holy work God has called them to do. Each time they are faithful to do preach, they are transformed to look more like Him. The preacher's faithfulness to God and God's call is how hearers are able to grow our own faith.

The Apostle Paul is a great example of a broken vessel God used to spread His word. He was a preacher for God despite formerly killing God's people, all in the name of God. Yet, despite his past, God used Paul and his writings to establish the foundation for what eventually became our Christian tradition. Just as Paul's hope in God transformed him, our hope in God can also transform us.

Think About It

Since the substance of our hope is a relationship with God, the more intimate our relationship with God, the greater our hope.

1. Paul's Appeal (Acts 26:1-3)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

THEN Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

AGRIPPA said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself:

2 "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews,

3 because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg of you to listen to me patiently.

Know It

The first three verses in this chapter comprise a formal introduction to the speech Paul is about to give. Continuing in the solemnity of the occasion already set by the ceremonious arrival of the distinguished audience and Festus' presentation of the case against Paul (25:23-27), King Agrippa now formally grants Paul permission to speak on his own behalf. Paul then motioned to the audience to indicate the beginning of his address and stretched out his hand, like a Greek orator, maintaining this posture throughout his duration of his address.

Paul begins with a formal appeal to curry the favor with the king and the distinguished audience. He was pleased to appear before King Agrippa, as it was an essential factor for his dramatic appeal. As the Jewish king, Agrippa would be familiar with Jewish customs and points of dispute. He was also a thoroughly Hellenistic king who lived a Roman lifestyle. He was thus in the unique position to give his opinion on both the Jewish and Roman legal aspects of Paul's situation. Festus knew that, and was therefore eager for the king to hear Paul and give his opinion on the case. The Jews accused Paul of preaching a false doctrine; namely, that Jesus rose from the dead. Given this was a religious issue involving theological belief and practices, Festus knew he would be incompetent to deliberate such matters. Agrippa, however, was in a better position to judge.

NOTES:

2. Paul's Early Life (Acts 26:4–6)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;	4 "All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem.
5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.	5 They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee.
6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God, unto our fathers:	6 And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors,

Paul began his testimony (v. 4), by referring to his upbringing and the manner of life he lived from his youth, at first in his own nation and then in Jerusalem. He went on to share how he was reared among his own people, who knew how he lived according to the strictest sect of his religion as a Pharisee.

Paul shared all of this to impress upon King Agrippa that he was not unknown in Jewish circles. Indeed, he began his career as a high-profile Pharisee serving the Sanhedrin by persecuting and imprisoning Christians. He was "a Pharisee of the Pharisees," and as a Pharisee he believed in the hope of the promise made by God to "the fathers." It is for this, Paul says, that he was being judged; more specifically, it was Paul's belief in the resurrection. The hope of the promise is realized through Christ and His resurrection. But those Jews (Sadducean) who did not believe in the resurrection viewed Paul's preaching as heretical and subsequently brought charges against him.

Appealing to the Pharisees in the audience, Paul asks the rhetorical question: Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed in God's ability to resurrect the dead. Though they did not automatically believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, the Pharisees' belief in resurrection was consistent with Paul's argument. His claim was that since God is almighty and faithful, He can and will raise the dead, as He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. Paul asserted that he was not guilty of any crime, but rather, he was a faithful Jew who believed in the promises that God made to the ancestors of Israel.

In his speech, Paul is attempting to prove that he wasn't saying anything heretical; he was simply expounding on the very beliefs that were fundamental to the Jewish faith. He knew that Jesus was the key to everything the Jewish people were already doing, and the moral code they strived to live under. If he could make that connection, he would prove his innocence.

3. Hope in the Promise (Acts 26:7–11)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.	7 a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, Your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews!
8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?	8 Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?
9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.	9 "Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.	10 And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death.
11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.	11 By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme, and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

Paul then cites the promise for the twelve tribes who earnestly serve God night and day (v. 7), to refer to the oath God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would bless them and their descendants. He promised that through their offspring all nations of the earth would be blessed. This promise was later confirmed by the prophets who foretold the coming of a Messiah, who would be a descendant of David and bring salvation to the world.

Paul says that the twelve tribes of Israel, which are the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons, were hoping to attain this promise, as they earnestly worshiped God. The twelve tribes were not literally present in Israel at that time; however, Paul uses this term to refer to the whole nation of Israel as God's chosen people who were waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise. He concludes by explaining his history as a Pharisee who killed and imprisoned Christians to demonstrate that he was once blinded by the letter of the Law. He wants to clarify that he understands the plight of the Jewish people because he was once on that side of the aisle. But having found freedom, he wanted to free them as well.

Remember It

There is perhaps no greater conversion story in the Bible than that of Paul’s encounter with Christ. It served as the centerpiece of Paul’s missionary activity and theological development. As a result of seeing a blinding light, Paul fell to the ground. It was at that moment he heard the voice of the Savior. His conversion on the road to Damascus became ground zero for the Christian movement. Paul’s story shows us how hope in God can transform a person’s life. He went from being an enemy of God and His people to being a friend of God and His messenger. He was transformed from being a proud and violent man to being a humble and gentle man; from hopeless and lost to being hopeful and found.



Share It • Live It • Hear It




For a musical complement to the lesson, consider singing the hymn “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less.”

How do you define hope in your life?

How do you exhibit this hope in life?

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Devotional Readings for July 1–7, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Forgive Us Our Trespasses	An Evil King Seals Judah’s Fate	God’s People Are Cast into Exile	Boldly Approach the Throne of Grace	God Will Remember Sins No More	Joy Comes with the Morning	Hope in God’s Steadfast Love
Matthew 6:9–15	Jeremiah 52:1–15	Jeremiah 52:16–30	Hebrews 4:12–16	Hebrews 8:6–13	Psalm 30	Lamentations 3:1–24