

providing a future with hope

Challenger

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Keeping Hope Alive

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

My second born, Luke (age 12), frequently talks about what he's going to do in the future. The other day, he told me that if he doesn't play professional baseball (with the New York Yankees) or basketball (not restricted to the Pistons), or if he doesn't become a police officer (the kind who works with a K-9 dog—Luke loves animals), he wants to be a soldier. He was emphatic, though, that he wants to be a soldier who sees action! He wants to fight! (Thankfully, his mother has yet to learn of this latest aspiration.)

Children seem to have a capacity to believe that they can do anything, go anywhere, and achieve anything. This is wonderful. But over the years, reality can chip away at this belief. Life doesn't work out as we expect. Marriages fail. Children cause pain. Jobs become unfulfilling. Health deteriorates. Slowly, our dreams begin to die, and we resort to basic survival mode.

The poet Ed Sissman once wrote:

*Men past forty
Get up nights*

*Look out at city lights
And wonder why life is so long
And where they made the wrong turn.*

I can relate. Maybe you can too. Perhaps words like "stuck," "flat," "bored," and "tired" describe your condition. The enthusiasm that once gripped your life has all but vanished. Now it's a struggle just to get through the day.

If there's one appeal I'd like to make to you, it is this: Fight the good fight of faith. Or as the author of Hebrews puts it, "Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded" (10:35). Keep hoping. There

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is a rainbow and pot of gold at the end.

Professor and author Lewis Smedes writes, “There is nothing more important to the success of our journey than that we keep our hope alive.” Psychologist Karl Menninger calls hope a “life instinct.” Keep hoping, keep living; stop hoping, die.

Lewis continues, “Hope is our fuel for the journey. As long as we keep hope alive, we keep moving.” Hope gives us persevering power. Come what may, as long as we have hope, we can stay the course.

For what can we hope? The Apostle Paul answers this in Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us *all things*?” In other words, a God who went to the extreme of giving his very best will not withhold anything that will benefit us. The fact that God handed over his Son—an incomparably great thing—is guarantee that he will give to us all other good things (which are small by comparison).

John Flavel, a Puritan pastor from over 300 years ago, gave this commentary on the above verse: “How is it imaginable that God should withhold, after this, spirituals or temporal, from his people? How shall he not call them effectually, justify them freely, sanctify them thoroughly, and glorify them eternally? How shall he not clothe them, feed them, protect and deliver them? Surely if he would not spare this own Son one stroke, one tear, one groan, one sigh, one circumstance of misery, it can never be imagined that ever he should, after this, deny or withhold

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from his people, for whose sakes all this was suffered, any mercies, any comforts, any privilege, spiritual or temporal, which is good for them.”

Of course, this verse does not mean that we will be exempt from pain, heartache, and suffering (the rest of Romans 8 bears this out). It does mean, however, that a good and sovereign God will so order our lives that nothing of ultimate profit will be withheld from us. The proof of this is Calvary.

Having such a hope gives us spiritual backbone and fortitude. We see this from the book of Psalms where we meet a man forsaken by parents and surrounded on all sides by enemies. Notwithstanding, he is confident. He knew God’s goodness would have the final word. In light of this, he charged himself with these simple words: “Take heart. Don’t quit” (27:13, Msg).

Hold on, friend, don’t turn back: “For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay’.” (Heb. 10:37) God is for you and not against you. He is working out all things for good (i.e. your advantage) to those who love him (Rom. 8:28).

*“For I know the plans I have for you,
declares the Lord,
plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.”
Jeremiah 29:11*

Food for Thought:

- Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.
- Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.

Testimony

--Ed Townsend--

“I was born in Detroit, the oldest of 4 children. One month after my birth my parents and I moved to what was at that time the most famous and well-known ghetto in the world Harlem, New York.

My parents benefited from the Civil Rights era in the sixties. This meant more opportunities for my family. But it came at a cost. More opportunity meant less quality time with us kids.

At a junior high dance a friend of my older brother gave me some alcohol. It made me feel less shy around girls. Soon I began to smoke marijuana. My grades at school began to suffer. I started to skip school and became involved with gangs. I eventually dropped out of school altogether.

My involvement with gangs soon got me into trouble with the law. This continued until a cousin of mine helped me gain employment at one of the Big Three automotive companies in Detroit. There I was introduced to cocaine and crack cocaine.

I began dealing drugs as well. As the profits from my drug dealing increased so did my drug addiction. I began to miss work because of this addiction. I was eventually fired.

I began to commit other crimes to support my habit. I eventually got caught and went to prison for 5 and ½ years. During my time there I made many promises to stop, but when I got out I went straight back to drugs. I went from rehab to rehab but nothing worked.

I remember going on a 3-day binge and feeling so empty. I was angry, confused, and

lonely. I cried out to God, and he heard me. A friend of mine suggested I go to Life Challenge, and I enrolled in June of 2004.

I am now clean and sober. But most important, I'm saved and have a relationship with Jesus Christ. I have a better understanding of God's love and don't want to disappoint this God of love. It feels great to be right with God and be serving him!”

MINISTRY UPDATE:

- *In addition to our ongoing weekly nursing home ministry, we are conducting a summer outreach to neighborhood children through our portable bicycle-tire repair shop. Please pray that God touches hearts.*
- *We welcome Lloyd Preston as our latest addition to the ranks of staff. He is a retired school administrator who, in addition to being a great encourager, counsels and prays with needy students.*

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At Life Challenge, one of our goals is to instill hope to all those who come to us for help. We want men and women to know that there is a way out. That there is a God who loves them and will deliver them. That there is a God who promises to be with them to the very end. Please pray with us to this end.

May God richly bless you,

*Jeff*

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