

Finding hope

in the midst of life's problems

By Dave Batty

The phone broke the early morning silence in my office. Distraught parents were calling about their 28 year old daughter who had relapsed back into drugs again.

Searching for answers, they poured out their concerns. They had been down this path several times before with their daughter. “We don’t understand why she can’t stay clean.”

They rehearsed the events of the past few months, noting the signs that had indicated a problem in her life. Finally their daughter had admitted to them that she was back on drugs.

A few hours later, their daughter was sitting in my office, her face clouded with sadness. It was hard for her to make eye contact as

she tried to explain what had happened over the past few months. Words jumbled out, but it was clear she was having a hard time seeing clearly what had happened in her life.

Her countenance was showing the strain of the battle going on inside.

What do you say to those who have not seen a miracle yet—those who have a son or daughter still trapped in the chaos of their problem?

It was clear she needed help. I told her I wouldn’t make any decisions for her, but we were ready to help. We talked about some of her options, and then prayed before she left.

Even after she left my office, the sadness in the room lingered on. I grieved at the lost potential in her life. At 28 she had such potential, but now it was all a tangled mess of broken dreams and broken trust.

I called her parents to tell them I had met with their daughter. Even after we ended our phone conversation, the pain of the parents stayed in my heart.

I wish I could say this is a rare occurrence. But sadly, it’s a common scenario—the loved one trapped by drug addiction is hardly aware of how much pain they bring into their family. And loved ones are left wondering—will it always be like this?

Even though the parents love God and have been praying hard, they know this will not be a quick fix. It will take time to restore trust. It will take time for their daughter to get her life back on track. And who knows how much pain still lies ahead?

So what do you tell a parent living with the pain of this tragedy?

We’d all love to see prayer bring a quick “magic wand” solution to all the pain and trouble we are experiencing in this situation.

Many families are faced with complicated problems. One mother called Teen Challenge to say her son had locked himself in his bedroom. The parents had spent over \$250,000 on various counselors, treatment programs and psychiatrists, seeking help for their son, but nothing had helped. Now their son was suicidal.

This family did see a miracle—their son came to Teen Challenge and experienced God’s transformation. His mind was healed, and he returned to society after completing Teen Challenge.

- ❖ **The difference between wishful thinking and God’s hope.**
- ❖ **How do you build hope in your life?**
- ❖ **How do you hold on to hope when everything you have tried does not work?**

Before the miracle comes

But what do you say to parents and loved ones who have not seen their miracle yet—those who have a son or daughter still trapped in the chaos of their addiction?

A young mother with a drug addict husband shared her painful story. Her last paycheck from work came while she was in the hospital, giving birth to her new child. She gave the check to her husband and asked that he get diapers and food for the baby, and then pick them up and bring them home from the hospital.

But when the time came for her to leave the hospital, her husband didn't come. She waited most of the day and finally called her sister to take her home. Walking in the front

door of her home, she found her husband, sprawled out on the couch, sleeping off the drug binge. The paycheck was gone. There was no money for food or diapers.

This was the last straw for this mother. She ordered her husband out of the apartment, and out of their

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lives. Even though this husband did eventually come to Teen Challenge and experience a miracle of transformation, it would be several years before this marriage was restored. And that too was a miracle!

How wonderful it is when a family does see a change—a miracle! But how do you keep hope alive when the chaos never ends? Is this hope just a cheap promise from those living in peace?

How do you hold on to hope when everything you have tried simply does not work?

God offers hope

Hope can be a light in the darkness of the chaos in your situation. But what kind of hope? In our culture we sometimes say, "I hope so," which often carries the idea of "wishful thinking." God offers real hope to us—not just wishful thinking. His hope can help us through the difficult times in our lives.

God promises a future filled with hope. "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 NIV)

The Bible describes God as a God of hope—it's part of His very character. "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." (Romans 15:13 NIV)

As you take a closer look at the Bible, it is clear that real hope has a direct connection to God. Not only is He a God of hope, but He is ready to give us His hope in the middle of our problems and pain.

The focus of your hope

The hope God offers is not based on the problems we have. It's not simply a hope that our circumstances will change. Nor is it a

Are you living with hope or despair?

The Old Testament Prophet Elijah received a word from God to go to Zarephath in Sidon and stay there. God also told him, "I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." (1 Kings 17:9 NIV)

When Elijah arrives in Zarephath, he meets a widow on the street and asks her for a drink and a piece of bread.

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die." (vs. 12)

Seeing this widow in such a place of desperation did not cause Elijah to change his request. Instead he boldly asks that he be fed first.

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and

bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son." (vs. 13)

Two people—one in despair, planning to die, the other—with great hope, expecting to get a free meal!

"Sounds like Elijah was being pretty selfish!" you may be saying. But Elijah was not being selfish, he was being obedient. He was expecting God to keep His promise.

Elijah also knew what God had told him—"I have commanded a widow to supply you with food." (vs 9) This widow was not acting with hope for God's provision—she was acting out of despair, simply looking at the natural.

God had a miracle in store for this widow. Both Elijah and the widow and her son had food until the drought ended. Even though God had spoken to her, she was still living in despair. She wasn't expecting a miracle—she was expecting to die. Elijah was filled with hope because he believed the promise of God in the middle of his need.

hope that I can fix the problems in my family. The focus of our hope needs to be Jesus.

Paul faced overwhelming problems in his life, even to the point that he despaired of living. But Paul knew about hope. “Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.” (2 Corinthians 1:9-10 NIV)

Paul’s hope was not in his ability to fix the problems in his life and those around him. He made a choice—“On him [God] we have set our hope.” (vs. 10)

You may be in the middle of your deepest problems today. Just like Paul, you can choose to “set your hope on God.” Hope is not a feeling—it’s not a tidal wave of joy in the middle of a problem.

You may be in despair and see no hope of change in your situation. Hope is not the magic wand that makes the problem disappear. Hope is the lifeline that can keep you from being overwhelmed by the storms in your life.

When you place your hope in Jesus, you place your confidence in His promises that He will never leave you or forsake you—that He will do what is best for you. Even though you may be in the middle of a huge problem, hope enables you to be at peace, knowing that Jesus is with you every step of the way.

The process of building hope

But just because you put your hope in Jesus does not mean the storm instantly stops. In fact, the storm may continue to rage, not just for a minute or two, but for months, or even years.

Psalm 31:24 says, “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.” (NIV) Even after making a choice to put your hope in Jesus, you still have to be strong.

How do we find strength in the chaos of our problems? The promises of God provide a solid foundation for our hope. We must stand on these promises and keep them in our minds.

One young college student stated in the midst of a big storm in his life, “I have to keep rehearsing the truths of God, because if I listen to my emotions, I get all confused.”

Radical hope

Job was a wealthy man who lost it all—not because he was sinful, but because he was a righteous man. His children were all killed in a single day and soon he also lost his health.

When he prayed to God, seeking some answers—the only answer he got was silence.

Job demonstrates how deep is his commitment to the one true God. “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.” (Job 13:15 NIV)

Was he frustrated—definitely! Yet in his frustration he did not sin against God or abandon his relationship with God.

What sustained Job in this time of great trial? Hope in God! His hope was not in his circumstances. His radical hope was in a loving God who really cared about him.

God has promised that He will never leave you or forsake you. (See Hebrews 13:5 and Deuteronomy 31:6.) We can put our hope in Him and experience His love and peace in the midst of the chaos we are in.

God offers a great promise of hope for everyone going through difficulties. “¹⁸ But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, ¹⁹ to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. ²⁰ We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. ²¹ In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. ²² May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.” (Psalm 33:18-22 NIV)

The promises of hope in the Bible speak clearly of God’s power to help us through the challenges we face with the problems in our lives. But these Scriptures also speak to the responsibilities we have in this process. We must make a choice to put our hope in Jesus. And we have to hold on to that hope in the middle of the storm.

Hope and suffering

Paul explains in more detail how suffering relates to the process of building hope in our lives. “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And 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 NIV)

To the person who has been living with the pain of a problem, this Scripture is bitter medicine. Why can’t God fix this problem? Why am

I still in the middle of this chaos? We may find some comfort in knowing that God has a future filled with hope for us.

But Paul says, “we also rejoice in our sufferings” (vs. 3). You say, “That just does not make sense! How can I rejoice that I am suffering?”

If Paul was speaking from a life of comfort, prosperity and success, we might dismiss his words as hollow. But Paul speaks from a life of frequent problems—overwhelming problems—even to the point that he thought he was going to die.

Yet in the midst of these problems he says, “we also rejoice in our sufferings.” Why? “Because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Romans 5:3-4 NIV)

Paul has taken hope to a new level—it’s not wishful thinking. It’s a character trait born out of life’s problems. He has persevered in the midst of problems, he’s kept his focus on Jesus. He has responded to these problems with the truths of God’s word.

In the Old Testament, Job did the same when he faced overwhelming problems in his life. He cried out to God for answers—but heaven was silent. His wife told him to curse God and die. But he ignored that advice and persevered. Finally God came and responded.

How long will you have to wait for God to respond to your crisis? I don’t have that answer. But God’s promises are clear—hold on to God’s hope. Put your focus on God the miracle-worker. “The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.” (Psalm 147:11 NIV) His love will see you through the storms, no matter how long they rage in your life.

Finding hope in the midst of life’s problems Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read Job 30:26-31. Have you ever been in a place of deep despair in your life? Briefly describe.
2. Read 1 Kings 17:7-16.
 - A. If you had been Elijah, how would you have responded when this widow said she was preparing her last meal before she died?
 - B. We know from verse 9 that God had already spoken to the widow. Yet she was filled with despair—expecting to die. How hard is it for you to have hope in the promises of God when you are facing hard times?
3. Read Palms 33:18-22 and Psalm 147:11. What lessons on hope are found in these verses?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 1:9-10. What are the storms in your life that seem hopeless to you? What are the lessons of hope to be learned in the midst of these problems?
5. Read Romans 5:1-5.
 - A. What is the process by which you can develop hope? (vs.3-4)
 - B. How has suffering helped you develop hope like Paul is talking about in these verses?
6. What is one area of your life where you need to take hold of more of God’s hope in responding to this situation?



Global Teen Challenge
P.O. Box 511
Columbus, GA 31902 USA
Phone: 706-576-6555
E-mail: gtc@Globaltc.org
Website: www.Globaltc.org

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