

Abounding in Hope

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"Hope" by Arlene Woo

Prayer of Illumination

Holy God, you are our hope and our strength,
by the power of the Holy Spirit
prepare the way in our hearts
for the coming of your Word,
So that we may see the glorious signs
of your promise fulfilled,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Scripture: Romans 15:4-13 (NRSVue)

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.

⁷ Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

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,

“Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles
and sing praises to your name”;

¹⁰ and again he says,

“Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people”;

¹¹ and again,

“Praise the Lord, all you gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him”;

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.”

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.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – “Abounding in Hope”

Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck’s landmark book *Mindset* talks about two theories of intelligence: a **fixed mindset** and a **growth mindset**.



Those with a predominantly **fixed mindset** see the goal of learning as looking smart. You're either born with talent or will never have it. It should just come naturally, effortlessly. Underlying this mindset is a fear that mistakes will show you don't have talent or ability. So those with fixed mindsets tend to shy away from challenges, because if you have to work hard at something, it means you aren't good and won't ever be good. And you don't want others to see any weakness or vulnerability in you.

But those who have a **growth mindset** believe that abilities and skills can be developed and honed with practice. Effort is seen in a more positive light. Challenges are opportunities to grow, learn, and hone new skills. The trial-and-error process of learning is embraced. So if you have an open mindset, you increase your chances of learning from mistakes and exhibiting emotional hardiness and agility. When knocked down, you're more likely to get back up again, keep going, and be all the wiser for it. In other words, with a growth mindset you can foster a more steadfast and hopeful attitude about life.

In our epistle reading this morning, we see that our God is the God of steadfastness and the God of hope. As Christians, we believe the hope and the steadfastness we have come from God. God is the source of our steadfastness and our hope. By the grace of God, we have at our disposal an eternal and unlimited reservoir to draw from, no matter how we're feeling or the circumstances we're going through. We just have to stay open to receive the overflow. It's always there. Sometimes our feelings can lead the way and inspire us to go to God. We have the "want to." But there are times we're just not feeling it. It's in these moments we do the right things in faith, trusting that our feelings will follow. There are practices that we can do in faith to help foster hope and perseverance: Praise God—no matter how you feel. Offer that sacrifice of praise when you're tired or discouraged. Keep a gratitude journal and decide to look for the good and give thanks to God. Think of others. Put your hope in the God of hope.

Something that has been helping me is listening to gospel and spirituals when I've been walking the dog or driving to the church or after I've read the Scriptures. Just me, the Holy Ghost, and Mavis Staples in my airpods:

*Some Holy Ghost keeps me hangin' on, hangin' on
I feel the hands, but I don't see anyone...
Now I don't know much,
but I can tell something's wrong
And something's wrong,
but some Holy Ghost keeps me.*

There's something about gospel and spirituals that go deep down into the human experience of our need for God, sharing our struggles, and looking to God for hope. We've got hope because we're not alone. God's got our back. And so our task is to work OUT what God *has* worked IN us and *is* working IN us. The good news is that Christ is our source and our model for this "open mindset," this "attitude of Christ."

Since Christ receives and welcomes others, we too receive and welcome others. Christ was humble and gracious in his dealings, so too are we. Christ is doing his work in us. When we're all tuned to Christ, we can be of the same mind and same voice. We can be in harmony with one another. Harmony isn't uniformity. You can have a four-part harmony—each part is unique but designed to work together with the other three. So in the midst of our differences, we have the same mind and attitude of Christ that's humble, listening, flexible, and accepting. We bear one another's burdens and weaknesses. We give each other a wide welcome—receiving others as Christ received us. With hope and perseverance we won't give up, but we will give in to openness of mind, humility of heart, and generosity of spirit. Christian hope puts our hope in God, *not* our circumstances. Our God of hope can give us joy and peace in believing. We can even abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, even if we find ourselves in difficult situations. With God, it's possible to be:

- Sad, yet rejoicing.
- Anxious, yet at peace.
- Penniless, yet enriching others.
- Suffering, yet hopeful.
- Dying, yet living.
- Having nothing—yet possessing all.

Hoping in the God of hope trusts that adversity betters us rather than embitters us. When we find ourselves distraught, discouraged, dispirited, or discombobulated, consider Jesus. Study his life and his example. If you're flagging in your faith, regularly pour over the gospels and the scriptures. Keep coming to gather and worship with the community of faith. We need each other! Reflect on how Jesus persevered in the face of opposition. Then think about what you're going through—it could be worse. Christ is there with us through it all. The word that Paul uses for this mindset in our passage is steadfast endurance—*hupomone* in the Greek. *Hupomone* isn't a passive resignation that merely absorbs life's blows with hands folded. No, the gift of *hupomone*—steadfast endurance—is that divine mindset that helps us be not only resilient, but ALSO live triumphantly and transformationally where we're strong in the broken places. God's *hupomone* makes it possible for us to pass through the breaking point...and not break. *Hupomone* imparts to us a holy "figureoutableness" and a divine "sticktoitiveness" to our challenges.

Look to Christ, look to the God of hope, the God of steadfastness, look to the encouragement of the Scriptures to keep praising God, to keep giving thanks, to keep asking and receiving forgiveness, to keep trusting that joy will come in the morning.

That's what we've been created for. That's what Christians do. That's our destiny.

Amen.

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible, copyright © 2021 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.