



Dear Friends,

Yesterday I was asked the question, "What is hope?" What would you say? We tend to want to define hope by what is hoped for, for instance: a better job, a repaired relationship, or renewed health. But that doesn't really help us understand hope.

Look at what these Bible study aids say:

From Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary

Hope is one of the three main elements of Christian character (1 Cor. 13:13). It is joined to faith and love, and is opposed to seeing or possessing (Rom. 8:24; 1 John 3:2). "Hope is an essential and fundamental element of Christian life, so essential indeed, that, like faith and love, it can itself designate the essence of Christianity (1 Pet. 3:15; Heb. 10:23). In it the whole glory of the Christian vocation is centered (Eph. 1:18; 4:4)." Unbelievers are without this hope (Eph. 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:13). **Christ is the actual object of the believer's hope**, because it is in his second coming that the hope of glory will be fulfilled (1 Tim. 1:1; Col. 1:27; Titus 2:13). It is spoken of as "lively", i.e., a living hope, a hope not frail and perishable, but having a perennial life (1 Pet. 1:3).

From Tyndale Bible Dictionary (2001)

Hope is an expectation or belief in the fulfillment of something desired... Christian hope is securely based upon the words and actions of God. The promises of God have proven to be dependable. **The resurrection of Jesus becomes the ultimate basis for hope.** Since God has already overcome death **through Christ, the Christian can live with confidence in the present.**

From Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (1995, c1985)

When fixed on God, **hope embraces expectation, trust, and patient waiting.**

To me, then, **hope is a state of anticipation**, a mindset that looks forward to the future. This anticipation is based on being completely convinced of God's love as expressed through Jesus dying for our sins and being raised to life for our eternal life. Perhaps faith and hope are two sides to one coin. Faith is believing in God and his promises. Hope is anticipating those promises coming true.

1 John 4:16 says, **We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love** (NLT) or in the Message - **We know it so well, we've embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God.**

But we shouldn't read this verse alone. Look at verse 13-15 before it. **This is how we know we're living steadily and deeply in him, and he in us: He's given us life from his life, from his very own Spirit. Also, we've seen for ourselves and continue to state openly that the Father sent his Son as Savior of the world. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is God's Son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well, we've embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God.**

BEV: Lord God, What does it mean that you love us?

ANSWER: I'm so glad you asked. My love for you looks similar to a warm blanket on a cold day. You can wrap yourself completely with it so that it touches every part of your body. It provides what you are lacking, warmth and comfort. It lets you focus on other things because you no longer have to worry about being cold. In the same way my love, when you let it, touches your whole life. My love provides what you were lacking, namely security and comfort. When you embrace my love you can focus on the needs of others because you are secure in my care for you.

BEV: What a beautiful image. I can see myself figuratively carrying around your love like a blanket whether I'm studying at home, or in a committee meeting, or during a difficult counseling appointment, or just talking with a friend. Thank you for helping me to understand your love a little more fully today. But you know I easily forget what you teach me, so please remind me often.

ANSWER: I will. You can count on it.

Dear Reader, What are you hoping for or hoping in these days? I'm afraid I can easily get enmeshed in hoping for temporal things, like a great vacation or new bedroom furniture, or a congenial family gathering. None of these are bad things to want but hoping for them, or more accurately worrying about and striving for them absorbs energy better spent on knowing God and understanding more fully what it means that he loves us. What can you do to more fully know and understand God's love for you? Why not take time right now and talk to God about it. You just might be surprised how ready God is to answer you.

Blessings from Bev



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