



"The grand essentials to happiness in this life are something to do, something to love and something to hope for."

—Joseph Addison

20-Feb-09

Why Is Hope Delayed?

It may sound impossible, but we can have hope in the face of the monumental problems facing, not just the United States, but also the entire world. Our hope is not physical, for no place exists on earth where we can run and expect to find an island of [peace](#) and hope. The times are similar to what [Amos 5:18-20](#) describes:

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or as though he went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

Mankind's problems are endless and insurmountable. They are also complex, requiring [wisdom](#) and power to execute solutions that are beyond what any man possesses. Vain men keep attempting to convince others that they have the solutions, but we know innately and from history that they are going to fail. More wars and further economic collapses will come. [God](#) has willed that Christians must pass through these perilous times with [the world](#).

In one sense, life on earth has always been this way. Ancient Greek mythology teaches us that when Pandora opened her box of evils, she let all of them escape except for hope. Apparently, hope was considered to be an evil at this point. However, Pandora later reopened the box, allowing hope to escape. Hope proved to be stronger than any of the previously released evils. The myth leaves an impression that the Greeks felt ambivalent about hope, to say the least. In their thought, reasons for despair always accompany the presence of hope, thus despair remains a distinct possibility in spite of hope's presence.

Far more truthful is what a Bible-believer can find about hope in God's Word. Christians can have hope for three major reasons: First, God has forgiven our sins, so even death should hold no terror for us. Second, we have God's unbreakable promise to send [Jesus Christ](#) and establish His [Kingdom on earth](#). Third, because of God's calling, we believe His Word and have the indwelling of His Spirit to guide and empower us through whatever comes along.

But why are God's promises of good delayed in times like this, when every culture on earth is breaking down and sheer terror may soon confront us? Does not [Proverbs 13:12](#) read, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick"? It is easy for a person with a frustrated, anxious spirit, troubled from observing mankind's violence and greed, to become weary of constant discouragement. In fact, [Revelation 6:10](#) envisions saints crying out from their graves, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on earth?"

Hope is generally defined as "an expectation of good in spite of the obvious presence of multiple obstacles to a positive outcome." Some equate it with a wish, but biblical hope is far more. A *wish* is merely "a desire for a particular end," and one can be made when absolutely no valid reason for the desired outcome exists. It can be a mindless, unreasonable fantasy with no solid basis, nothing more than a senseless, exaggerated drift of thought beyond honest logic.

In [Psalm 42:5](#), David provides us with counsel: "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall

yet praise Him for the help of His countenance" (see verse 11; [Psalm 43:5](#)). His advice points to the difference between biblical hope and a wish. Real hope is anchored in the unfailing character and power of Almighty God, not in a mere whim of a careless mind. It is impossible for God to lie; He does not change.

In [I Corinthians 13:13](#), hope is listed along with [faith](#) and [love](#) as three of the greatest virtues a Christian can have as part of his character. Because of ever-present reasons for despair, we can presume that hope is a necessity of Christian life. [Hebrews 6:18-19](#) tells us to "lay hold of the hope set before us," and that hope in God's promises is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." Thus, when we have hope in God, it can truly dispel our fears of falling into frustration and despair.

Bible writers use "hope" as either a noun or verb. As a noun, hope points to the object of our expectation, for instance, our hope is the [resurrection of the dead](#) or God's unfailing character. As a verb, hope points to our hopeful attitude, describing our strong expectation of good. A Christian needs both aspects because both contribute to his motivation to follow God's way.

God often delays answering and/or providing things that, based on His Word, we have justifiable hope to receive. We have the example of David, who prayed in such a circumstance: "My God, My God, [why have You forsaken Me](#)? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent" ([Psalm 22:1-2](#)). We are by no means equal to David, yet have we not all been in such a circumstance? David's prayer reveals his strong sense of urgency as he endured his trial. However, we also know that his trust did not break; he persevered through it. [Psalm 22:19-21](#) shows that God eventually answered David.

David's hope—his internal attitude—remained steadfast because it was anchored in the pure and unchanging character of God and His promises—the ground or reason for his expectation of good. Did God answer because David totally deserved to be answered? No, He answered because He is the [merciful](#) God and because David, as part of His purpose, was being prepared for what lies ahead.

In this lies the answer as to why God withholds the good. He is in no way being mean, thoughtlessly unaware, or distracted by other events. As Creator, He knows far better than we can even begin to imagine what each individual within His purpose needs to fit precisely into His creation. Does the created thing know his exact place in God's plan? Does he know exactly what qualities he needs to develop? God knows, and even He needs time to develop them.

Hope does not deal with the past, even though the past supplies part of its foundation. God's historical witness of His unfailing, unchanging character in dealing with others who preceded us in His purpose undergirds our hope. Except for this aspect, hope always seeks a measure of security in the present in order to attain what is laid out before it in the future.

The charge for us, then, is twofold: To avoid mere vain wishing, we must make sure our reasons for hope are firmly anchored in God Himself and His words of promise to His children. Then, with that solid foundation, let hope arise within to motivate the working out of our salvation. This gives evidence that our faith, hope, and love, functioning together, are glorifying God.

- John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Antidotes to Fear and Depression](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Anxiety, fear, depression, and panic disorders have increased dramatically in America, characterized by feelings of loss of control, and hopelessness for the future. The key to overcoming the fear of loss of control is to admit that God is in control. If we have our priorities straight, God will take care of the anxieties we encounter. If people do not have God's vision of the future, they will end up in aberrant behavior, eventually leading to death, but happy and blessed are they who keep God's direction.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[What, Me Worry?](#)

by Mike Ford

It is not uncommon to worry about one's financial situation. It has never been easy for most people to make ends meet, causing anxiety. Yet, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ commands us not to worry about our lives, food, drink, or clothing. Considering what life was like in His day, Mike Ford explains, Jesus' simple solution to this common problem will work for Christians just as well now as then.

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