

# INTRODUCTION

*“I know in my soul no matter how bad it gets  
I’ll be alright”*

Several decades ago, the late German theologian Juergen Moltmann wrote a book entitled *The Theology of Hope*<sup>1</sup>. The whole idea behind the “theology of hope” is that believers have a hope which sustains and carries each believer through life. As stated in 1 Peter 1:3 (ESV), *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* It is an expectation that the promises of God are already in the process of fulfillment. Moltmann’s point was that eschatology (the doctrine of the last things) should not be an appendix to Christian theology but should be the starting point of everything. According to him, it is confidence in what God is going to do in the future that must determine how we think and act now.

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I am not sure that is entirely right. While the theology of hope does have its value, its tendency to blur the lines between future fulfillment and current experience should be a cause of some concern. As with any doctrine, we must always go back to the Word of God as our standard. I would call the cross of Christ, not eschatology, the center. And further, I would argue that we must take our ideas—even of the future—from the cross. But Moltmann was correct in stressing that hope is important for living well now. To have hope is to look at the future optimistically. So, to some extent a person must have hope to live. People who despair do not go on.

During my pastoral life, there have been moments—upon hearing the stories or cries of congregants—that would leave me questioning the benefit of hope. “What can one truly hope for in this situation?” I can share personally that not only situations that those you know encounter rob you of hope like a towering bully demanding your lunch money, but even what people have seen me go through personally causes them to surrender hope. Questions have been spoken that are similar to this: “If my pastor has gone through this, and look how it ended for him, why should I have hope for anything different?”

How can any person remain sane in the midst of a tragic and desperate world in which we live? The senseless can, because they do not think about the future at all. Thinking people, who look at the pattern of the degradation of society, find the future grim. I’ve said it often: “My children and grandchildren will never know the America I once knew.” Yet, in the spirit of one of my great heroes—Winston Churchill, who was a statesman and orator—made a mantra of the words “*never give up*” to the British during wartime in the 20th century.

This book is a personal perspective on where our hope comes from, even in the face of life challenges. The Christian life has its fill of suffering, setbacks, doubts, fears, tragedies, and confusion. What I have learned and surely know is that God gives us hope. Not only does the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ give us Good News—that our sins are forgiven, and we can obtain eternal life—this same gospel inspires hope.

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**Romans 15:4** (NIV) says, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Notice: the way to that sound and steadfast hope is through the Bible.

There are many versions of *The Wizard of Oz* now. All are supposedly based on *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*<sup>2</sup>, a 1900 children’s novel written by American author L. Frank Baum. Since its first publication in 1900, it has been adapted many times for film, television, and theatre. The one that I saw first—which is the story’s best-known adaptation and the version about which most cultural references to the story are based—was the one starring Judy Garland as Dorothy, produced in 1939.

You may recall Dorothy and her friends—the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion—are told to follow a yellow brick road to find their future. At the end of that yellow brick road would be their future; that is, the Wizard in Oz.

Likewise, the Cross, followed by the exhortation in Romans 15:4, gives us a road to hope. That begins with our trust in Jesus and His atoning sacrifice at Calvary, which initiates our journey marked with teaching, patient endurance, and encouragement. That is our yellow brick road—not to a Wizard of Oz, but to hope from the God of Heaven.

Let’s walk that road.

## The Teaching of the Scriptures

The first of the important steps along this road leading to hope is teaching, because it is through the teaching of the Scriptures that the other elements—endurance and encouragement—come. Christianity is a teaching faith, and our text is the Bible.

The Bible is from God. When Paul says that everything written in the past “was written to teach us,” he did so intending that the church in future ages might be blessed by the writings of Moses and the psalms of David, so that we

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might profit by them. Paul's point is that God caused the human writers of the Bible to write as they did, because what He had in mind was the edification and encouragement of His people through the ages.

Other books may instruct and even inspire wonderfully, but only the Bible gives us a sure ground for hope, since only it speaks with full authority and trustworthiness about what God did to save us from sin and give us eternal life.<sup>2</sup>

### Patient Endurance

The second step on the road leading to hope is endurance, which some versions of the Scriptures translate to *patience* (King James Version), *perseverance* (New American Standard Bible) or even *patient endurance*. This word (*hypomonê*) occurs thirty-two times in the New Testament—sixteen times in Paul's writings, six of which are in Romans. The word involves both passively accepting what we cannot change and actively pressing on in faithful obedience and discipleship.

### Hebrews 12:1–2

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Our Christian journey is often referred to as a “walk”—and rightly so (Romans 6:4; 13:13; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:15; Col. 3:7; 1 Thess. 4:1, 12). However, the writer of Hebrews indicates it is a run, and one that is to require endurance. The description is the characteristic of a man who is not swayed from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith by even the greatest trials and sufferings.

### Hebrews 10:36 (ESV)

*“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”*

This endurance implies hard labor. It implies carrying a burden faithfully. It implies the mission of what it means to be a Christian. It implies not quitting, or giving up, or giving in to the onslaught of the enemy’s assault. Suffering you will face. Challenges will come. Opposition will stack up against you. But you are in a race to finish. And, more importantly, you are not without hope.

### Encouragement

It is here where we make the third step on the road leading to hope: *“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

We look to Jesus Christ. Why does this lead to hope? Because Jesus endured—even the suffering of the cross—yet His journey was rewarded with a place at the right hand of the throne of God. So we look to Him in the midst of our personal struggles. That is the way to run the race. As a runner focuses his eyes on the prize—perhaps, at the end of the race or the finishing mark—so we are to hold Jesus up before us. And as we run we keep our eye on Him, swerving not to the right or to the left, looking to Him for strength and grace and endurance—and in hope!

We are encouraged because we look to Jesus. He is the author of your faith. He is the pioneer of it, the one who went before you. He is the one who planted hope in you. He is author and finisher—the perfecter—of your faith.

The end result of this is hope. Paul, then, in Romans 15:4, would be saying that it is through our own personal enduring, as well as through the encouragement that we have in studying the Bible, that we find hope. In the text, the article is present before the word hope (“the hope”), meaning the

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Christian hope. This is not just optimism that Paul is writing about—not a hope founded on something the world thinks possible. Also, the verb have is in the present tense, meaning that hope is a present possession.

### The Biblical Meaning of Hope

Many of us have hopes every single day. When we speak of hope today, however, the word *hope* implies that there is doubt that what we hope for will actually happen.

This is not true in Biblical language. The word used for *hope* in the Bible contains no doubt that the hoped-for event will happen. The word for *hope* in Biblical Greek is ἐλπίς, pronounced *elpis*. This word would be translated today as *anticipation, expectation, or even confident expectation*. *Elpis* implies that something is going to happen, and the subject is anticipating it with confidence. Therefore, whenever you read the word *hope* in the New Testament, you should read that verse understanding *hope* to mean **confident expectation**.

There are over 50 uses of this word *elpis*, or “certain hope” in the New Testament. Here are a few uses in which confident expectation can replace the Greek word derived from *elpis*:

#### 2 Corinthians 3:12

*“Therefore, since we have such hope [confident expectation], we are very bold.”*

#### Romans 15:13

*“May the God of hope [confident expectation], fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with confident expectation by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

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### Titus 1:2

*“This truth gives them hope [confident expectation] that they have eternal life, which God -- who does not lie -- promised them before the world began.”*

### 1 Peter 3:15

*“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope [confident expectation] that you have.”*

And finally, a personal favorite:

### Hebrews 6:19

*“We have this hope [confident expectation] as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”*

Truly, the Word of the Lord, and the patient endurance, and the encouragement that comes from Christ—who endured the cross—is the same that will give you hope. Your life can be anchored in hope.

### The Cross

When Paul quotes Isaiah 11:10 in Romans 15:12, saying that *“the Gentiles will hope in him [that is, in Christ],”* he is thinking of personal salvation, of course. Any hope that does not lead to personal salvation results in what Paul said: *“If our hope in Christ is only in this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world”* (1 Corinthians 15:19, NLT).

Paul’s phrase describing the Ephesians before they came to Christ was *“without hope and without God in the world”* (Eph. 2:12). For the many who do not want God, they will be discovering that to be without God also means to be without hope.

We must remind everyone that where there is God, there is hope—and that Jesus Christ is still what Martin Luther called *der Heiden Heiland*, “the Savior [and, therefore, the hope] of the Gentiles.”

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We live in a broken world. At some point, pain and suffering will crash into our lives. It's not a matter of if, but when. And when it does, we can be caught in the trap of believing, *"I am helpless. This is hopeless. There's no way out."*

But in **Romans 5:8** Paul tells us that hope in suffering is possible. *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Christ's death is a reminder of His overwhelming love for us. If Jesus was willing to die for us while we were in rebellion against Him, how much more will He care for us—His children—when tragedy strikes?

It's a hope that is anchored in the cross.

The cross also reveals that Jesus can identify with our pain. In hardship, He knows what we are feeling because He has experienced it Himself. He knows the pain of being betrayed by a close friend. He's experienced the humiliation of being falsely accused of something He didn't do. Jesus endured physical pain that felt like it would never end. The agony on the cross caused him to cry out the despair of abandonment.

Though He can empathize with our suffering, it doesn't mean all our pain will magically disappear, nor is there a lessening of the grief and sorrow that we are all bound to experience. Yet, the cross proves to us that a greater plan of God for us is at work.

What is that greater work? **The resurrection!** The reason we can have hope in suffering is because, with Jesus, death leads to new life. Therefore, we can be assured that our pain isn't wasted. Jesus is with us in the midst of it, and it inexplicably is leading to a greater good, and glory.

The cross is hopeful because a resurrection is inevitable. The shift from death to life not only fuels our hope—it's also the seedbed of joy.

Hope that provides joy in the midst of suffering isn't phony or fabricated happiness that's disconnected from the reality of one's circumstance. Rather, it's a deep-seated conviction that assures me—as we would say it in the church I grew up in—*"E'rything gonna' be a'right!"* It comes from the assurance that



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Jesus is Lord of all. It's grounded in the hope of the larger story of God making all things new (Revelation 21:5).

While suffering can knock us down and cause a great sense of defeat, the cross and resurrection empower us to get back up and face another day. While pain and hardship, over time, can cause us to grow angry and bitter, focusing on Jesus and the victory He has secured can help us remain hopeful and full of joy. Nobody wants to suffer, but if we stay connected to Christ, He'll redeem our suffering in unexpected and brilliant ways.

The cross is the ultimate symbol of hope for all who believe. It is the place where our sins were atoned for and where our salvation was won. It is the place where Christ showed us the depths of His love and the extent to which He was willing to go to bring us to a place of rest in God.

Finally, the cross also gives us hope for our future. It is this message of hope that I share with you in the pages of this book. This is the hope that we have as we fix our eyes on Jesus. We have the hope of eternal life with Him—where there will be no more tears, no more pain, and no more suffering. We have the hope of being with Him forever in glory.

It is a "*Hope In Front of Me*" that I deeply desire to be in front of you. The words I share are experiences of mine, that may not be yours. My life has landed me in dark places—not as much physically as emotionally and mentally. Dare I say, even, spiritually.

There is a light, however. A light that can be seen. A light that is greater than any darkness. **Discover it. See it. Hope will arise.**

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and find hope in the cross. Let us live our lives in the light of the hope that we have in Him, sharing His love and His grace with those around us.