

November 3, 2019

## **Title: A Hope and a Prayer**

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**Text: Romans 12:12 and Romans 5:1-5**

### **Living in No-Man's Land**

#### **The quest for perfection:**

We live our lives in the no-man's land between hope and trouble. Every one of us is hard-wired for perfection in some way or another. Just think of what goes through your mind when you decide to go out to dinner. You call ahead to make a reservation so you'll be sure to have a table. You go on line to check out the menu in advance. There it is: your favorite steak, cooked to perfection – or at least it sure looks that way on your phone. You can almost taste it. Perfection.

But later that evening, when you are at the restaurant, and the waitress has brought you your steak, you encounter reality: It isn't nearly as thick and juicy as the steak on your phone. And when you take a bite, you discover that you got the toughest part of the cow.

That's just the way Life is here on Planet Earth. We can forever imagine how things should be, but the reality almost always seems to fall short.

#### **A time for everything:**

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Solomon summed it up perfectly when he wrote:

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-5 NIV*

*There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,*

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*a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
 a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
 a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing...*

He goes on to observe that God has "set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end." (Eccl. 3:11b NIV)

There it is: living in the no-man's land between life and death, planting and harvest, demolition and construction, weeping and laughter, mourning and dancing.

So how do you find your way in such a confusing world?

**Finding our Way****Hope:**

The first thing you need to know in no-man's land is *where you're going*. For a Christian, our destination is defined by one word: Hope. Paul -- no stranger to no-man's land! -- writes:

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*Romans 12:12a NIV*

*Be joyful in hope...*

Another translation says:

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*Romans 12:12a NEB*

*Let hope keep you joyful.*

For Paul, as a Jew, "hope" was not just a fond wish for something better, like when we say, "Well, I *hope* things work out okay!" For him, "hope" meant waiting for something that was guaranteed to happen. It's how you feel

when Friday rolls around and you are anticipating the weekend. You are filled with *hope* and are positive you aren't going to work Saturday morning.

And what is *our hope*? Nothing less than being raised from death with Christ!

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*Romans 8:23-24 J.B. Phillips*

*And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension, while we wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that at last we have realized our full sonship in him. We were saved by this hope, but in our moments of impatience let us remember that hope always means waiting for something that we haven't yet got.*

Rule #1: never let go of your hope!

### **Affliction:**

The second thing you need to know is what to do with *affliction*. Paul writes:

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*Romans 12:12b NIV*

*...patient in affliction...*

Affliction means trouble, opposition, persecution, all the things that ruin your day. You know how it is when something seems "too good to be true!" Sure enough, something comes along and ruins the party.

But the Christian has a secret weapon for battling against affliction: patient endurance. The word Paul uses means more than passively putting up with trouble. It carries the idea of "standing your ground," "holding out," "enduring." No giving in here. No room for a victim mentality! We're fighting through the adversity.

In fact, the very fact of adversity or affliction is Proof Positive that we're on the right track! If the broken world around you thinks you're doing just fine, then you are part of the problem. When the world pushes back against God's new work in your life, you know that you are making a difference.

**Prayer:**

But the most important part of the equation is the thing that holds the two together in such a way that God's power is let loose in your life and your world.

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*Romans 12:12c NIV*

*...faithful in prayer.*

Commentator James Dunn writes:

*"...only by maintaining an 'open line' to God in the Spirit can the tension [between hope and affliction] be experienced as a positive sign and creative force." (Dunn, Romans 9-16)*

In the no-man's land where Hope and Affliction pull you in opposite directions, Prayer is the one thing that will keep you on course. Prayer turns that tension into God's creative power to make you a new person. Prayer is the key to having a renewed and transformed mind – the mind of Jesus.

**A Hope and a Prayer****The mind of Jesus:**

When we pray, Jesus Himself speaks into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. His thoughts become our thoughts. We can start to see our troubles in true perspective.

Jesus faced more persecution and affliction than we will ever know. So how did He handle it? The writer to the Hebrews writes:

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*Hebrews 12:2 NIV*

*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

What was the "joy set before him"? Resurrection! Focusing on that great Hope, He chose to "endure the cross." Here is the same word that Paul uses

when he tells us to be "patient in affliction." With that perspective, Jesus could "scorn" the insults, the shame, the rejection, the affliction He was suffering. His eyes were on one thing only: the great Hope that He knew would come to pass when this ordeal was over.

### **Putting it all together:**

Every day you will face the challenge of how to move forward in the no-man's land of life. Trouble will come knocking on your door and you'll be tempted to wallow in self-pity or give up on what God has put in your heart. The flame of Hope will seem like a candle in the wind. When that happens, it's time to dig deep and push back.

Michael Jordan became one of the greatest basketball players of all time. But did you know that when he tried out for his high school varsity basketball team, *he didn't make the cut?* His failure motivated him to try harder.

Muhammad Ali was evaluated for his boxing skills and failed in every department. He wasn't a natural fighter, but he didn't let that stand in his way!

In Peyton Manning's rookie season his team went 3-13. Not an auspicious beginning. But he won two Super Bowls.

And then there's Tom Brady: drafted in the 6<sup>th</sup> round, stood on the sidelines until the starting quarterback was injured. Since then he's never looked back.

### **A hope and a prayer:**

God has so much more than a fistful of Super Bowl rings for you! You are His child, His precious possession. He knows what you are experiencing in the no-man's land of life. And He wants to walk you through it, talk you through it.

So when Trouble comes knocking, make sure you have a Hope and a Prayer! If you do, then, like Jesus, you can endure the affliction and scorn this world's shame. You are destined for nothing less than a seat at the King's table!

So get praying.

