

The Beauty of Hope: Just a peek into its power

By Peter Nieman Martin, Sr.

That we are facing difficult times in these United States there is no doubt. Newspapers and news programs greet us with stories of an economy brought to its knees by greed and mismanagement. The worries of those who can no longer support their families because they are no longer working, and the tears of those who have worked hard to buy a home just to see it in foreclosure because the complex mortgages which benefitted the mortgage companies were not sufficiently explained to the buyer are the just the tip of the iceberg of our troubles. One could go on about the many other kinds of troubles, but they are known all too well. What good would it serve? This paper is about the power to endure under these great pressures. No doubt you have heard that coal when subjected to great pressures over time becomes a diamond.

As Christians we are told by the man who knew what suffering was all about that “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” We have been given the capacity to withstand even the most difficult episodes if we would only take it. I want to talk about a powerful ally in our struggles – HOPE. How many times have we used that word in daily conversation without looking into its properties? The design of this writing is not to exhaust all the possibilities of HOPE but rather to examine a few aspects of it so as to give us an anchor for the time being. Know this that the more you grow in the Lord, the heavier your anchor will become – and the heavier the anchor, the more you will be able to secure your vessel (soul). In your patience possess ye your souls. But for the moment let us give HOPE a face. We will take it from its abstract appearance and transform it into something we can handle with our minds, molding it at will by the strength of our faith. Each letter will stand for something relevant to us.

H – Happiness, O – Optimism, P – Patience, and E – Expectation

We are familiar with these words, and it is with them that we are going to fashion a garment fitted for HOPE by each of us when situations arise. Bear with me as I try to do this correctly (I indeed need your longsuffering here). HAPPINESS is something that we have known and loved all of our lives. It is the state of being that we constantly aspire to be in when we can. The fruits of our labors are for this very thing. We judge our success in life by the degree of HAPPINESS we have obtained. But is this real happiness? In order to be really HAPPY, we need to look at HAPPINESS in a different way. That “new look” is the bible’s definition of it. The introduction to the Sermon on the Mount will suffice as an introduction to this “new look” –consider Matthew 5:1-10 from the Amplified.

1. Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.
2. Then He opened His mouth and taught them saying:

3. Blessed---happy, and to be envied, and spiritually prosperous [that is, with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions]---are the poor in spirit (the humble, rating themselves insignificant), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!
4. Blessed and enviably happy, [with a happiness produced by experience of God's favor and especially conditioned by the revelation of His matchless grace] are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted! [Isaiah 61:2.]
5. Blessed---happy, blithesome, joyous, spiritually prosperous [that is with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions] ---are the meek (the mild, patient, longsuffering), for they shall inherit the earth! [Psalms 37:11.]
6. Blessed and fortunate and happy and spiritually prosperous [that is, in that state in which the born-again child of God enjoys His favor and salvation] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (uprightness and right standing with God), for they shall be completely satisfied! [Isaiah 55:1, 2.]
7. Blessed---happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous [that is, with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of outward conditions]--are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy!
8. Blessed---happy, enviably fortunate, and spiritually prosperous [that is, possessing the happiness produced by experience of God's favor and especial;;y conditioned by the revelation of His grace, regardless of their outward conditions]---are the pure in heart, for they shall see God! [Psalms 24:3, 4.]
9. Blessed---enjoying enviable happiness, especially prosperous [that is with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions]---are the makers and maintainers of peace, for they shall be called the sons of God!
10. Blessed and happy and enviably fortunate and spiritually prosperous [that is, in the state in which one enjoys and finds satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of his outward conditions], are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (for being and doing right), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!
11. Blessed---happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous [that is, with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of your outward conditions]---are you when people revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things against you falsely on My account.
12. Be glad and supremely joyful, for your reward in heaven is great (strong and intense), for in this same way people persecuted the prophets who were before you. [II Chronicles 36:16.] (These beatitudes are in Matthew 5:1-12.)

I have set these beatitudes before you that you may see that the idea of happiness does not necessarily follow how we see it. Favorable outward conditions are the standard by which many if not most of us judge happiness. A successful marriage, respectful children, money in the bank, a nice house, car, enviable job, latest clothing, network of professional friends, and a jaw-dropping retirement account are the ways

we measure happiness. After all, this is the thinking of the world. Oddly enough, for those of us who are considered “old-school,” the poor in our and previous generations seemed the happiest. Smiles beaming across the faces of grandparents, mothers, fathers, and bare-footed children would light up the room in a house that would scarcely be considered a place where one would want to invite company in today’s world. The happiness of these poor is far closer to the kind that Jesus had in mind than the kind brought on by the trappings of capitalism.

Happiness is not based on outward conditions but rather the state of the heart. This was what Jesus was teaching in the beatitudes. The happiness here is long lasting; it is not affected by bad times. Indeed it has learned to prevail even in the worst of times. The apostle Paul is a case in point here. Listen to our brother reflect on happiness, and judge for yourselves.

3. Moreover---let us also be full of joy now! Let us exult and triumph in our troubles and rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that pressure and affliction and hardship produce patient and unswerving endurance.
4. And endurance (fortitude) develops maturity of character-- that is, approved faith and tried integrity. And character [of this sort] produces [the habit of] joyful and confident hope of eternal salvation.
5. Such hope never disappoints or deludes or shames us, for God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.
(Romans 5:3-5.)

Such magnificent words of divine inspiration tend to fill one with the power of optimistic thought—or *The Power of Positive Thinking* (a book written by Norman Vincent Peale). The “O” in HOPE stands for “optimism.” Webster’s definition of the term says that, “*The doctrine that the goods of life overbalance the pain and evil of it, that life is preponderantly good. The inclination to put the most favorable construction upon actions and happenings, minimize adverse aspects, conditions and possibilities, or anticipate the best possible outcome; a cheerful and hopeful temperament.*” I have grown to appreciate the writings of Norman Vincent Peale because of their focus on the problems of humanity and solutions to deal with them which are bible-based. Listen to a quote from the good doctor, and you will see what I mean. The book is called *The Tough-Minded Optimist*. In a chapter entitled “Have What It Takes To Take It,” Peale says the following:

The first thing is to develop some real inner toughness. Inner toughness, tough-mindedness is a quality of top priority. Actually there are two kinds of people in the world, the tender-minded and the tough-minded. The tender-minded cannot take it, Criticism just cuts them to the quick. It hurts and wounds them terribly. Problems and obstacles appall them. Adversity and opposition overwhelm them. The poor, miserable tender-minded.

But there are also the tough-minded. They do not like criticism any better than anyone else. But they know how to receive and handle it. They carefully extract from criticism all the know-how it contains and simply blow the chaff away.

Problems and obstacles only serve to challenge them and they are completely unabashed by adversity and opposition. They are quite some people, the impressive and inspiring tough-minded. They have grown strong on the inside. They have what it takes.

The very text that I used above (Romans 5:3-5) will serve as an example of OPTIMISM--not only that text but the beatitudes as well. The belief that good things are possible in this lifetime is attested to by someone we all know well – King David. He surely had his days! There were many times when the king despaired of life itself. Were we to sit in his chambers and listen to him, this is what he would say to us.

Out of the depths have I cried to You, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If you, Lord, should keep account and treat [us according to our] sins, O Lord, who could stand? [Psalms 143:2; Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16.] But there is forgiveness with You, [just what man needs] that You may be reverently feared and worshipped. [Deuteronomy 10:12.] I wait for the Lord, I expectantly wait, and in His word do I hope (Psalms 130:1-5.)

There is optimism in David's words! Look at them carefully, and you will see it as "big as day" nestled in his supplication. Man sins, yes – but God stands ready to forgive! He who forgives sin will also answer petition and supplication! David, on another occasion, said, "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. (Psalms 27:13, 14.) Optimism is a thing of beauty. I will quote Norman Vincent Peale's book again for the purpose of closing out the idea of optimism. Optimism is based on faith, hope, and expectation; and there is therapeutic value in the mere act of hoping. The bible recognizes this also in a moving passage: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance, and my God." (Psalms 42:11.)

Patience is the "P" in HOPE. But what exactly is it? Ralph Earle, in his book WORD MEANINGS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, defines patience in the following manner: the real meaning is "patient enduring, endurance. He quotes Joseph Henry Thayer (author of A GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT) WHO SAYS, "In the new Testament the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety (holiness) by even the greatest

trials and sufferings.” Another author, C. Jerdan, who wrote on The Book of James for Pulpit Commentary had the following to say about it:

James, throughout his Epistle, exalts and inculcates (persistently impresses) this grace. His word for it here means “persevering endurance.” Christian patience is not the submission of indifference, or merely the determination of an obstinate will; it is inspired by living piety (being godly), and is therefore full of intelligence and manliness. Patience consists in the holding still of some parts of our nature in calm waiting upon the Divine will, in order that other parts may be exercised and educated. James’ words show that he regards this grace of endurance as inexpressibly precious. He looks upon its possessor as in the truest sense a wise and wealthy man.

I think Mr. Jerdan has made quite a contribution in that he provides a handle on this thing called “patience.” In his words, “holding still of some parts of our nature in calm waiting upon the Divine will, in order that other parts may be exercised and educated.” Fixing our thoughts on that will help us to know that learning never stops, and that all learning does not happen in a classroom.

The “E” in HOPE stands for EXPECTATION. The very thought itself takes us to the future in our minds where we hope that a present concern will play itself out in a good way – a problem now will work itself out later on. Expectation takes us to something we hope to realize or see. Paul dealt with this when writing to the Romans. He took us to this thing called HOPE and broke it down for us. Regarding our adoptions as sons and the redemption of our bodies, Paul says, “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. (Romans 24, 25.)

God’s faithfulness is the hook upon which we hang our HOPE. All in the past who have ever done so were not ashamed. Study the word of God; reflect on it deeply by drinking in its value knowing that the spiritual nutrients it possesses will always reach the vital areas of the spiritual man that need rebuilding. We all need HOPE every day, every hour. I pray to God that this small effort which he has allowed me to do will help you to discover the HOPE needed to help you as a child of God.