

Romans 15:13 ~ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Understanding what hope is:

Hope has always been understood by man as a concept, feeling or faith that allows us to reach out for the proverbial lifesaver in the darkest seas of life. Hope becomes a word that we throw around with very little meaning or feeling. The truth is, we do not understand the emotional, social, and faith implications of hope in both its purist spiritual meaning and its scientific effect on our lives and mental well-being. Hope is seen as something you can feel and while it can be, in order to have true hope, much more is required. The following study is on what hope is and isn't through the eyes of God and supported by the science of today.

Hope is not: a passive feeling, it is a positive action

Hope requires action. This is a change in the way we have traditionally thought. We tell ourselves that as long as we have hope there is a chance that things will turn out well for us. This leaves hope with little foundation and instead becomes a passive wish that all will be well. Dr. Rick Miller from Arizona State's Center for Hope states, "hope requires both positive thinking and positive action to achieve one's goals. In psychology, hope is a cognitive practice that involves the intentional act of setting goals and working toward them with purpose. Hope is not passive it is intentional. God has already shown us this in his scripture.

One such scripture is Jeremiah's letter to the exiles of Nebuchadnezzar imploring them to live their lives and thrive while they are in exile. He states in **Jeremiah 29:11** **1 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity.**

In this scripture the Lord is stating that his people will:

- Call on him
- Seek him
- Pray to him

All of these are actions that accompany hope and are required to make hope alive.

Hope without effort is just a concept. When you call upon God you are stating that my hope belongs in you and creates the foundation of faith. When you seek God you are putting your hope in him first and this increases your desire to find him. Prayer waters that hope in God and grows it daily make it less of a feeling and more of a belief. Hope is alive and active and must be constantly worked on for it to live.

Hope is not: optimism

While optimism serves a very important function it should never be mistaken with hope. Dr. John Parsi a professor of social sciences explained, "Hope is an active process. Dreams and optimism are just belief

structures,” he explains. “When you’re an optimistic person, you believe things in the world will turn out just fine, no matter what happens.” Parsi says that because optimism doesn’t require a person to do anything, it can be a form of toxic positivity. But from the working scientific definition of hope, hope can only do good for a person.

“Hopeful people cannot just wish things into existence,” he says. “Hope requires a person to take responsibility for their wants and desires and take action in working towards them. Optimistic people see the glass as half full, but hopeful people ask how they can fill the glass full.” Or in the case of believers, how God can fill the glass full.

We can not just think that everything will be alright while we curse God by serving man. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Just because we want to do good does not mean we are doing good or in this case serving God. Optimism is not faith, hope is faith: **Isaiah 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.**

Hope is: alive

1 Peter 1:3 ~ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Hope is quite literally a living thing. In the aspects of how we maintain life hope should also be treated this way. Hope must be watered with prayer, fed with scripture, exercised through prayer and housed in our hearts. If we fail to do these things, hope will begin to slip away just like the life of any creature. When hope for God is alive in us it nurtures and grows and becomes infinitely bigger until we neglect it and it withers and dies.

Hope is : a choice

Science has examined how hope works and has come to some solid conclusions on what hope is and how it is acquired. Dr. Rick Miller states, “Since the first century of the common era, hope has lived alongside with faith and love in the New Testament. The Old Testament also addresses hope dating back to 1200 B.C. But it wasn’t until the 1990s that hope took its place at the research table beside other scientific interests. Science began to examine the “DNA” of hope to better understand why some people have a lot of it; some a little; and why so many people have none of it at all, considering people who are found to be of high hope do better in life, physically, socially and economically, than those who score low in hope measures. We now better understand that hope is a more a cognitive function than a series of loosely defined emotional sensations.

Dr. Shane Lopez states, “ We are often asked if hope is a conscious choice we make or are we shackled to a genetic predisposition where nature trumps nurture? The good news is hope is a choice — as is, unfortunately, hopelessness. Hope can be taught and learned like other skill sets such as learning to ride a bike, understanding math, practicing reading and writing, or learning to cook. We also know that when you choose to hang around people who are pessimistic or hopeless you begin to pick up on their traits and behavior. Conversely, when you choose to be with people who are positive, optimistic, resilient and hopeful you find yourself adopting their behaviors. As a social species, we want to belong. It’s a lot healthier physically, emotionally and intellectually to associate with hopeful, positive people who know they are able to control their own destiny.

While God gives us eternal life only through his grace, like the writer states we can control our destiny by who we choose to associate and believe in. The scriptures state that if we choose to control our destiny by giving our life to God we have the assurance that he will not fail us.

Hebrews 10: 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful

We choose to serve our God and he chooses us as his children. We must remember that God has already chosen us first and is waiting for us to obey. The moment we do, we choose hope and that hope is enduring.

How do we find hope:

Setting hope as a goal (Bryce, Frasier, Parsie, 2022).

1. Set a goal for today and make a list of actions to help you achieve that goal then envision a longer term goal and see how your actions of today will help you reach that goal.
2. If you are not excited and enthusiastic about reaching the next step in your goals you may need to readjust them.
3. Define what hope looks like to you
4. Remember that hope takes practice. This requires reevaluating and reprioritizing constantly.
5. Foster a culture of hope. Prioritize the people you associate with, the activities you do and the faith you believe in to make sure you are in the most conducive community of hope.

Hope is a function of faith in God. We choose to have it, foster it, evaluate its growth, practice it in our lives and use it to provide hope to others. "My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness. If we place our hope in other people or other things we will fail and they will fail us. Hope is from God and God is eternal hope. We have a responsibility to spread this hope to all around us and this hope will lead us to Heaven.

Psalm 33: 20 We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.21 In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. 22 May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.