



HOPE

What if I feel hopeless?

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Have you ever thought about how crazy it is to wrap a gift, place it in the middle of your everyday life to walk past constantly with the person's name to whom it is for in bold print, and then give them a several week countdown to open it? It's cruel! I'm with all the children around the world asking, "Is today Christmas yet?" Because seriously, is it? The anticipation is boiling inside of us. But isn't that why we do it? The unwrapping is the dopamine hit we are waiting for. Underneath that shiny sparkling wrapping and perfect bow might just be exactly what we hoped for. The wild thing about this exchange in our American context is how much more often we are left with torn wrapping paper, a polite smile, and a sigh. It was not all we hoped it would be. Parents around the world know the pressure of measuring up to this impossible bar. The perfect gift. The perfect number of perfect gifts. The perfect Christmas dinner. The perfect day. The perfect family gathering. Let's be real, those words really cannot dwell in the same sentence, am I right? Anticipation seems to be a part of us. Our hopes and dreams are not bad within themselves. Yet when misplaced, they can turn into anxious hearts.

I will admit that this tainted pattern of misguided hopes has left me a little cynical when it comes to the holidays. Christmas cheer, while trying to press it into the front of my mind, is quickly stomped out by, "But what if it isn't." But, what if plans get canceled again? But, what if we argue again? But, I don't have the money for that. But, what about the people I am not ready to see? But, I am still grieving those who I cannot see. Where is the hope when I feel so hopeless?

We can find two Hebrew words translated "hope" in the Old Testament - *yakhal* and *qavah*. *Yakhal* is a Hebrew word meaning to wait, to hope, to trust, or to expect, while *qavah* denotes more specifically the tension of the action in longing for, expecting, waiting, hoping for. Psalm 130:5 says, "I wait (*qavah*) for the Lord, my whole being waits (*qavah*), and in his word I put my hope (*yakhal*)."
This tension of waiting and hoping is complexly intertwined. *My whole being waits*. It anticipates. It longs for the things God, *the word*, is going to do next. We are desperate for it. *My whole being*, hopes. Or at least, it tries to, but sometimes the anticipation drifts between hope and anxiety.

Psalm 42:11 "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?"

Hope (yakhal) in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

As the psalmist illuminates for us, sometimes our soul is down and out, but that does not mean our call to act in hope has ceased. Here, line for line, in tandem, his soul remains both *cast down* and still choosing to *hope in God*. This tangible hope that fills our being is the same for the psalmist as it is for us, and as it was for the arrival of Jesus to the world.

Matthew 12:18-21

18 “Here is my servant whom I have chosen,

the one I love, in whom I delight;

I will put my Spirit on him,

and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

19 He will not quarrel or cry out;

no one will hear his voice in the streets.

20 A bruised reed he will not break,

and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,

till he has brought justice through to victory.

*21 In his name the nations will put their **hope**.”*

Generation upon generation had waited, hoped, and longed for the arrival of a Messiah to set them free. A righteous king. A victor over their enemies. A God who always makes a way. They were often in the middle of injustice, troubles, and frustrations. They had to deal with grief, hunger, and quarreling. They could not always see where God was in the suffering. And yet again, He made a way. The hope of generations was long-lasting and required great persistence. Only a few carried that hope with unwavering strength, because **hope endures within the trial, not after**. Jesus was wrapped in torn cloths in the forgotten space of a manger. This was not the expected form for the Savior of the world to appear. It wasn't a worthy timeline or circumstance to welcome a King. It was far from our idea of a perfect moment. And yet, He is the perfect gift. He was, and is, and always will be.

The Lord knew our anticipation sometimes blind our heart to hope. While we can plan and get caught up in how the gifts, the gatherings, the traditions, and the details never pan out how we imagined, we are invited to choose hope within every moment of these trials. We also get the added benefit of being on the flip side of Jesus's arrival. We get to celebrate in every season that He is never far away and dwells with us all the days of our lives. In Him, there is always hope.

Reflection Questions:

1. Where do you feel Jesus is within the hopeless moments?
2. How can you welcome hope into the waiting?