

Where Is My Hope?

The Scriptures have such a beautiful and profound way of illuminating the human experience. As they come from our Creator, it makes sense that Scripture would describe us better than we can describe ourselves. One example of this is *Proverbs 13:12* - "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life." Hope can be a roller coaster of emotions. We know what it is like to hope for something and the disappointment we feel when it does not occur. Yet we can also relate to the great rejuvenation we can feel when we hope for something and it happens.

For many of us this past year could be described as having our hopes deferred, having things hoped for which have not come to fruition. This past year has also revealed several things I have taken for granted - things I had started to view as guarantees and when they changed, it was painful. Reflecting on *Proverbs 13:12* has led me to consider two questions. First, what kind of sickness has inhabited my heart because of deferred hope and secondly, what does this reveal about hope.

As I consider the disappointment of the past year in my life, I acknowledge most disappointments have been relatively small. For example, my children's school year has not gone as expected; there have been many cancellations and my hope for a return to "normal" has repeatedly been dashed. As disappointments accumulate and uncertainties loom, I notice my disappointment growing to anger and anger shifting into resentment. Regrettably, this has led to viewing others and their perspectives in harsh and unfair ways. To say it plainly, I can see how unfulfilled hopes have contributed to or revealed my sick heart. Deferred hope has exposed the reality that I need ongoing transformation.

Acknowledging my heart sickness has been painful but necessary. Yet I notice my natural conclusion to the experience of disappointment is to set hope aside. I view hope as the problem and therefore deem it far too risky and something that will lead to more sickness. On the other hand, I notice how much my heart is prone to hope. I hope for a good night of sleep, connection with friends, going out to eat, church to look the way I want, people to have the same perspective as me and so on. Along with noticing how I have a natural inclination to hope for things, I also recognize the Scriptures do not condemn hope but rather paint hope in a positive light. *Romans 15:13* tells me my God is the God of hope who fills me with joy and peace "that I may abound in hope." This verse among others clearly tells me hope is not the problem and I should not set it aside.

If hope is not the problem but actually something the Scriptures encourage, then what is the problem? Sadly, my natural conclusion is to blame my circumstances. To abound in hope, I often look around and identify what needs to change for me. Yet as I consider *Romans 15:13*, I realize my circumstances are not the problem either. Circumstances will certainly affect me and deferred hope will lead to disappointment, but circumstances are not the source of my problem. The problem is deeper and can be framed as realizing the difference between hoping for something and hoping in something. When I hope for something, I anticipate an outcome and experience disappointment when it does not occur. On the other hand, when I hope in something, I place my confidence, whether consciously or unconsciously, in something I am viewing as sustaining or life-giving. Placing my hope in things that cannot deliver leads to devastation. The past year has exposed this difference - I have put my hope in things that I should only hope for. I have placed my hope in circumstances turning out the way I want them to or think they should (i.e. schooling, church, connections, activities), instead of placing my hope in the One who is truly sustaining and life-giving in the midst of all. It is reasonable to have desires, dreams, and plans, but it is vital that our ultimate confidence and hope is only in God.

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As I step into the coming months, I pray my hope will be in the One who can and will deliver. His promises are sure and will come to pass. The path toward those promises being fulfilled may not be what I hope for or look the way I think they should, but I can and should put my hope in Him. He is trustworthy in the midst of these unmet expectations. This past year has helped expose some of the idols in my heart, and this has been both painful and good. My prayer is that I can learn from this deferred hope so I am able to hope for things while being very careful to only put my hope in Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 6:11-20 “And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”