



HOPE

HOPE CAN HELP YOU COPE

A school system in a large city had a special program to help hospitalized children keep up with their schoolwork. One day a teacher who worked in the program received a routine call asking her to visit such a child. She was given the child's name, hospital, and room number. Her instructions were to help the boy with lessons in grammar.

That same day the teacher went to see the boy. No one mentioned to her that the youth had been badly burned and was in great pain. Caught off guard by the boy's disfiguring burns, his bandaged face, and his obvious physical pain, she struggled through the lesson. When she left the hospital room, the teacher was disappointed with herself and felt she had not accomplished much with her hospitalized student.

However, upon returning the next day, a nurse asked her: "What did you do with that boy? Ever since you visited yesterday his attitude toward recovery has improved." The teacher was surprised and listened carefully as the nurse explained that the entire staff was worried about the youth. He had not been responding effectively to treatment, nor was he showing much improvement. "After your visit he became more responsive to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live," the nurse explained.

The explanation for the boy's remarkable transformation came two weeks later when the boy quietly explained he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization that he expressed this way: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work with me on grammar if I were dying, would they?"

Elements of that story are worth examining closely. At the end of the story the boy is still in physical pain. The sight of his burns is no less disturbing and frightening. Bandages over his face continue to keep him in the dark. Yet, even in the darkness, he begins to experience the light of hope. This story makes this crucial point: hope is essential to recovery from trauma.

Especially insightful is the nurse's statement about the boy: "It's as though he's decided to live." Her comment brings out the truth that the attitude we take toward our painful situations is a matter of choice. We have the option of being full of despair or hopeful, tragic or triumphant, victims or victors. Hope is a powerful attitude which opens doors where despair slams them shut. A hopeful attitude helps us see the best, work for the best, and, ultimately, experience the best in life.

Perhaps that is why Paul cites hope as one of the three great pillars of the Christian faith (1 Corinthians 13:13). Here are strategies for opening the door of hope into your life.

Begin With the Commitment of Making Hope a Habit

No matter what life crisis or trauma you may face, always think hopefully, speak hopefully, work hopefully, and act hopefully. Do all you can to make hope a daily habit. Remind yourself that regardless of what transpires in your life, you always retain the option to choose hope.

John Homer Miller, an eighteenth-century writer, offers this poignant insight: “Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens. Circumstances and situations do color life, but you have been given the mind to choose what the color shall be.”

Be Open to Messengers of Hope

Even though your heart may be breaking, or you are caught in the tight grip of despair, maintain an openness to individuals who try to bring you hope. No matter what storms rage in your life, remember that God sends special individuals to buoy your sagging spirits. These bearers of hope are unique women and men. Some of them have suffered themselves and, thus, are highly sensitized to the suffering brought on by life’s traumas. Others are simply compassionate people who, upon seeing a hurt, try to comfort and heal. Your messenger of hope may be a family member, a neighbor, a friend, or even a complete stranger. Remain open to these messengers of hope.

Consider the experience of Susan Strohm. In an article, “The Gift of Hope,” she tells of being at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, awaiting the results of a battery of neurological tests. Doctors were searching for the mysterious cause of her periodic blurred vision and profound fatigue. With Strohm in the waiting room was another patient also waiting for the results of her tests. As strangers sometimes do when they face a similar crisis, Strohm and the older woman shared fears and problems. The older woman talked about grandchildren, and Strohm spoke lovingly of her two grade-school children and worried husband.

After several hours the older woman was called into a private office. She emerged relieved and smiling, telling Strohm her only problem was a slight elevation in blood pressure. “I hope your test results are as promising as mine,” she told Strohm and added: “If they aren’t, please try to find comfort in this little message.” She extended her hand and pressed a small laminated plastic copy of Reinhold Niebuhr’s serenity prayer into Strohm’s palm—“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Almost immediately Strohm was called to the neurology department, where the physician told her she had multiple sclerosis. The doctor told Strohm there were three distinct types of MS, but she had the “best” kind. It would not likely cripple her nor result in her death, he explained. “I don’t enjoy having the ‘best’ kind of MS, but I find immeasurable contentment in the message a caring stranger gave me,” she says. “When hopeless depression threatens, I read those simple, fulfilling words and am reminded a higher power offers hope and refuge to all. Receiving that message was the most thoughtful gift I’ve ever received.”

Rinse Your Mind With Words of Hope

Whenever painful events come pounding into our lives, the mind becomes polluted with negative, fearful thoughts. Rinse your mind and fortify your spirits by reading and rereading words of hope. Buy a book of quotations or take one out of the library and read the sections on hope or attitude. There you will find such uplifting and inspiring words as these:

“It all depends on how we look at things, and not how they are in themselves.” ~ Carl Jung

“It isn’t your problems that are bothering you. It is the way you are looking at them.” ~ Epictetus

“People can alter their lives by altering their attitudes.” ~ William James

Also use Scripture passages with the word “hope” in them to further rinse and cleanse your mind. Some powerful biblical citations include:

“Why am I so sad? Why am I so troubled? I will put my hope in God, and once again I will praise him” (Psalm 42:11, TEV). *

“Your troubles will fade from your memory . . . Your life will be brighter than sunshine at noon . . . You will live secure and full of hope” (Job 11:16-18, TEV).

Further fortify yourself spiritually and emotionally with the biblical view that God “will make Trouble Valley a door of hope” (Hosea 2:15, TEV).

Think of People Whose Problems Are Worse Than Yours

This is not a negative exercise to make you morbid, nor is it for the purpose of gloating over others who are struggling. Rather, it is an exercise that will restore balance and perspective to your own life.

Consider, for example, the tough background from which actor James Cagney emerged. His father was a New York City bartender who died in the flu epidemic after World War I. His widow was left behind with no financial assets and four Cagney teenage boys. A baby sister was born shortly after the elder Cagney’s death.

“We had no money. We four boys went to work, supported ourselves and our mother and sister, and kept on going to school, too. Two of my brothers worked their way through medical school, and they’re successful doctors today,” Cagney explained. His own schedule was a grueling one for a young teenager. “I got home from school at 2:00 in the afternoon. I’d do my homework and take a nap before going to work as a bellhop at the Friars’ Club. I worked until 3:00 in the morning, and I had to be back in school at 8:00.” In spite of those harsh circumstances, Cagney said: “It was good for me. I think if you learn how to take the knocks when you’re young, you’re a lot better able to handle them later on.”

Here’s the way to make a personal application of that type of story: If James Cagney can count his blessings and say, “it was good for me,” then most of us can certainly do the same.

Remind Yourself You Have Acted Hopefully in the Past

Recall the troubles and trials you have experienced in the past—times you have weathered difficulty in relationships, gone through a hard professional crisis, battled a major illness, or experienced a period of grief. Remind yourself that you tapped into hope during those times and can do so again.

Here is an insightful observation from minister and author Norman Vincent Peale: “Have you ever stopped to wonder what it is that keeps you going from one day to another? What lies behind your ability to fight your way through periods of discouragement or depression? What makes you believe that sooner or later bad times will get better? It’s a little, four-letter word that has enormous power in it. Power to bring failures back to success. Power to bring the sick back to health. Power to bring the weak back to strength. It’s hope.”

Here is one final thought concerning the power of hope that comes from eighteenth-century British poet and songwriter, Isaac Watts. He offers this superb and motivating insight: “Hope thinks nothing is difficult; despair tells us that difficulty is insurmountable.”

Written by Victor M. Parachin courtesy of Vibrant Life.

** Bible texts credited to TEV are from the Good News Bible—Old Testament: Copyright © American Bible Society 1976; New Testament: Copyright © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976.*