

INSPIRED BY HOPE



ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL

(7 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINATION

BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation – Topical Studies

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading the group discussions but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials firstly provide you with a series of passages so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Secondly, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought and help you think through what the passages meant both at the time it was written and also what it means for us now. Because these studies are topical there is a much stronger progression of thought (than there would be in a passage based study). The dangers of such studies are that discussion can move quite far from the Bible. Yet this it is still the best way of covering broad subjects like this.

I would really encourage you to make use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are however only “tools”, they are there to help you and not to restrict you or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages and if the questions or notes do not help you, then don't use them!

I have included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

Steve McClure, Spring 2019

The subject of hope has been a huge theme for me over the past year. As a family we have had a particularly difficult couple of years during which God has stripped away many of the things that it is so easy to place our hope in, e.g. work, health, relationships and future. As I write this we are still very much on ‘the journey’ and have much to learn.

There have been moments over the past year when we have felt like God has ‘uprooted our hope like a tree’ (Job 19:10) and yet time and time again the ‘God of Hope’ (Romans 15:13) has drawn us back to Himself as our hope (1 Tim 4:10, Titus 2:13). This hope is described by Peter as a ‘living hope’ (1 Peter 1:3) and by the writer of the Hebrews as an ‘anchor for the soul, firm and secure’ (Hebrews 6:19) and by Paul as ‘Christ in us, the hope of glory’ (Colossians 1:27) and that which ‘inspires’ us to persevere (1 Thessalonians 1:3). This hope is about eternity but it is also a hope for here and now; so we have therefore sought to ‘set our hope’ on Jesus day by day (2 Corinthians 1:7-10, 1 Peter 1:13) so that we might ‘overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit’ (Romans 15:13). For those who hope in the LORD will ‘renew their strength’ and ‘will soar on wings like eagles’, will run and not grow weary’ and ‘will walk and not be faint’ (Isaiah 40:31). Indeed God says that He is “good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him” (Lamentations 3:25). We know that this doesn’t mean that we will have an easy road to walk but we know that whatever difficulties come our way God is still good, God delights in us and ultimately God is for us. A letter from a former pastor at our church reminded us “to remember in the darkness what we knew to be true in the light.” It has been a very difficult road for us to walk but even when it is felt like everything was ‘against all hope’ (Romans 4:18), Jesus has repeatedly proved Himself faithful and even in the darkest of times He has enabled us to remember the hope we profess, ‘Christ in us, the hope of Glory.’

Hope defined

In today’s secularised world defining the **nature of hope** has not been at all easy. Many definitions abound and it is clear that the way we use this word in everyday usage is very different to how the Bible uses this word. Vines Bible Dictionary defines hope as a “favourable and confident expectation” and says that it is to do with the unseen and the future. It also says that “Hope” describes (a) the happy anticipation of good (most frequently), (b) the ground upon which “hope” is based and (c) the object upon which the “hope” is fixed. So straight away we can see that Scripture uses the idea of hope from a number of different angles. Below are three quotes which also take a stab at a definition:

“Hope is the present enjoyment of a future blessing. It brings the future into the present...Hope is the peaceful anticipation gained through a relationship with somebody who is trustworthy.” Hunt

“Hope is knowing that God will do exactly what He has promised in His way. It’s the patient, disciplined and confident waiting for and expecting the fulfilment of all God’s promises in His timing.” Missler

“Hope is a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will.” Piper

What I have learned about hope is that when all is stripped down, Jesus Christ is our only hope both for today and for the future. This hope is not wishful thinking but a confident and expectant trust in Jesus Christ and especially in His promises. Indeed in Romans 15:13 Paul refers to the ‘God of Hope’ implying that God is both the **source and definition of Hope** in much the same way that God is also the source of other attributes such as light, truth, love and holiness.

While hope is rooted in our expectation of the future there is also an everyday reality impacts upon us in the here and now. We may cling with all that we have to our hope for eternity and yet be feeling somewhat hopeless here in the present. If Hope is primarily based upon the promises of God we must note here that God's promises are grounded both in the future and in the present. God wants us to hope in Him here and now. This hope is "an **anchor for the soul**" our mooring that holds us firm and secure. Yet we're also told that this anchor "enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain"; hope is what connects us to the presence of God. This picture is of an anchor that is "firm and secure" but which is connected to the unseen reality, to the world to come.

Nancy Missler writes that *"Hope does not depend upon what a man possesses or upon what he may be able to do for himself or even upon what any other human being may do for him. Hope's fulfilment rests only upon God, His promises for the future and how that individual appropriates these"* (Missler, *Hope against Hope*, pg. 183). If Hope depends only on God then His character matters. We should be asking 'can we trust Him?' My prayer is that our answer to that question would be a resounding yes and that is why we will spend two studies considering His Sovereignty, His Wisdom and His Love. These are not easy studies but we need this theological foundation in order to set our hope on God. Evelyn Underhill writes *"If God were small enough to be understood, he wouldn't be big enough to be worshipped."* I want a mighty God even though I can't understand Him rather than a cut down little God who can't really help me and who is no bigger than my own capacity to imagine?

The title of these studies is "**Inspired by Hope**" which comes from 1 Thessalonians 1:3 which says *"We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."* According to Paul faith produces work, love prompts labour and hope inspires endurance. Life is going to throw at us all sorts of challenges, sufferings, losses and sadness's. The thing which has helped me to hang in there, the thing that has inspired me to persevere is Hope. Not a wishful thinking that things will turn out well but a sure and firm belief in the promises of God. This truly is a "**living hope**" which has not disappointed. The continuing challenge for me right now is to not "**lose heart**" but rather to set my hope on Him who is and has proved Himself to be faithful. The challenge is to set my hope on Him who lives in me and who is the "**hope of glory**." Satan wants to destroy our hope and turn us away from Jesus. God doesn't force us to hope in Him but in doing so we can experience the "**power of hope**". My prayer is that you would join me in learning and experiencing this hope in your everyday lives.

These studies are the first stage of a study project that I have been working on since the autumn term. It has been hugely encouraging to devote time to these scriptures which speak of hope and to spend time reading the variety of Christian literature on the subject of hope and on the flipside, books which deal with the question of suffering. My prayer is that these studies would help and encourage you as you read and study them. In focusing on a subject like this there is a tendency to start seeing life through a "hope-shaped" perspective; indeed I feel like I am seeing 'hope' everywhere at the moment. Regrettably perhaps, in order to be functional a booklet can only be so long! Alas there is so much more I could have included but don't have space.

To Him be the Glory,

Steve McClure, Spring 2015

STUDY 1 – ‘THE NATURE OF HOPE’ – TRUSTING IN GOD’S PROMISES

INTRODUCTION: In this initial session our goal is to examine what we mean by ‘hope’ and think about what is distinctive about Biblical hope. We will consider the nature of this hope and its relationship with the Biblical notions of faith and God’s promises.

SETTING THE SCENE (MATT 8:23-27): What do you notice about the nature of the storm the disciples faced? Why did this storm cause the disciples (some of whom were fishermen) to lose hope? What storms have you faced that have caused you to question your hope (Additional Quotes 1)?

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WITHOUT HOPE (PROV 13:12, 1 THESS 4:13, EPH 2:12): What do these passages have to say about what it means to have ‘hope deferred’, to be ‘without hope’ or to ‘have no hope’?

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HOPE IN COMMON USAGE: What is your understanding and/or experience of the usage of the word ‘Hope’ outside of a Christian context? How does this compare with the dictionary definition below?

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“Hope is to want something to happen or to be true, and usually have a good reason to think that it might” or “something good that you want to happen in the future, or a confident feeling about what will happen in the future.” (<http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org>)

DEFINING HOPE (HEB 10:23, 11:1-2, ROM 8:24-25): Compare the secular notions of hope in Appendix 1 with the statements in Hebrews 10:23, 11:1-2 & Romans 8:24-25: what is it that makes ‘Christian hope’ so distinctive and different? (further definitions from Christian writers in Appendix 2)

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FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE (1 THESS 1:2-3, 5:8, COL 1:3-6, 1 COR 13:13): What do these verses have to say about how hope interacts with faith and love? What is the difference between faith and hope? How do you respond to Missler’s definition that ‘*faith is the promise believed; hope is the promise walked out, and love is the promise fulfilled*’ (Hope against Hope)?

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THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PROMISES (JOSHUA 23:14, HEB 11:14): Why is it so important that our hope be rooted in God's promises? Like Joshua 23:14, how could you testify that God has made good on the promises He has made to you? What are the promises that help you to have hope?

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TWO KINDS OF HOPE: To what extent do you agree with Missler's assertion that the Bible speaks of two kinds of Hope (see Additional Quotes 2)? What is the relationship between the two: i.e. what is your experience of living out your eternal hope amidst the challenges and storms of life here and now?

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HOPE AND TRUST (PROV 3:5-6): The Biblical words for 'trust' ('to expect or have confidence in') and 'hope' both come from the same root word and are sometimes used interchangeably: to what extent does this surprise you? How does the concept of a vigorous (not passive) trust in God enhance your understanding of the concept of hope?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (PSALM 33:16-22, 84:5-7): How does Psalm 33 contrast what it means 'to hope in the LORD' with hoping in human strength? Thinking of the Valley of Baka (valley of tears) in Psalm 84; where is God currently leading you on your pilgrimage? In what do you place your hope?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Discuss together your initial observations about the nature of hope. Share about the things you are hoping for and any storms of life that God is leading you through. Ask God to give you a strong understanding of the Biblical notion of hope and a growing sense of its implications.

MEMORY VERSE: PSALM 42:5, 11 OR 43:5

STUDY 2 – ‘A LIVING HOPE’ – REFINERS FIRE

INTRODUCTION: In this session we will consider what it means to have a living hope and how that can encourage us when we are being refined by the trials that life throws our way. We will consider the bigger picture of what God is doing in our lives through these difficult times.

SETTING THE SCENE (1 PETER 1:3-9): What do you think Peter means by a 'living hope'? How is this hope rooted in the past and critical for us both in the present and the future? Why can our hope (and inheritance) never perish, spoil or fade (v4)? Why is this so encouraging?

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SUFFERING & JOY: How do you respond to the tension between *rejoicing in hope* and *suffering grief in all kinds of trials* (v6)? What is the purpose of trials and sufferings (v7)? How do trials prove faith as genuine and why is the 'proven genuineness of faith' so valuable?

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INEXPRESSIBLE & GLORIOUS JOY: How have (or haven't) you experienced this joy' (v8) amidst trials & sufferings (also James 1:2-4)? In what way is the 'salvation of our souls' the end result of our faith (v9)? How would these verses have encouraged the suffering believers Peter was writing to?

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COMFORT & DELIVERANCE (2 COR 1:3-10): What do you think Paul means when he describes God as the 'Father of compassion and the God of all comfort'? What is your response to the idea that Christ's sufferings carry over to us (v5)? How have you experienced God's mercy and comfort meeting you at your point of need? How in turn do you think we can comfort others in their time of need?

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What can we glean about the kind of trouble (or pressure) and suffering Paul faced in Asia (possibly the riot in Ephesus in Acts 19:23-34)? How do you think this experience could have caused Paul to rely

not on himself but on God (v9)? What was the role of prayer in God's deliverance from this 'deadly peril'? Why does this experience cause Paul to hope in God (see also Additional Quotes 3)?

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SUFFERING PRODUCES HOPE (ROMANS 5:1-8): What does it look like to boast in the hope of the glory of God? What reasons does Paul give for why we should glory in our sufferings (v3)? Why does Paul say that suffering eventually results in hope? Why is this hope so trustworthy that Paul is able to say that it does not 'put us to shame' ('disappoint' in some versions)?

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GOD IS NOT IN A HURRY (JOB 23:8-10): How do these verses help us wrestle with this tension between trusting God to bring forth good whilst struggling with the wait? Why does maturity take so long and how can we learn to be content to wait, and go at God's pace (Additional Quotes 4)?

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SEEING THE BIG PICTURE: How might these 'big picture' aspects of what God is doing through our pain help us to persevere and to even consider our trials as pure joy (James 1:2-4)? In what ways does Additional Quotes 5 help develop this big picture?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER (JOHN 15:2): Why might Jesus' pruning actually be a real source of encouragement? Do you think you could ever testify that it was good to be afflicted (Psalm 119:71)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share and pray together about the troubles, trials and pressures that you are currently facing. Encourage one another to persevere knowing that God, our living hope is the God of all comfort is working to bring glory to His name.

MEMORY VERSE: JOHN 15:2

STUDY 3 – ‘THE SOURCE OF HOPE I’ – GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND WISDOM

INTRODUCTION: As we seek to set our hope on God there are 3 key truths that are foundational if we are going to trust Him; God is completely sovereign, infinite in wisdom and perfect in love. In this session we will consider the first two and think about how these truths impact on our topic of hope.

SETTING THE SCENE (ROM 15:13): In what and in whom, do people search for hope? What is the significance of Paul’s description of God as the ‘God of hope’? (See also John 9:5, John 14:6, 1 Peter 1:15-16). In what ways have you experienced Him as the ‘source’ of your hope?

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As we begin to consider the character of God how do you respond to Jerry Bridges definition of God’s love, wisdom and Sovereignty in Additional Quotes 6? Why do you think these truths are so important for us as we consider whether we can trust the ‘God of Hope’?

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THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD (PSALM 33:10-11, PROV 16:9, 19:21 &21:30): How do these verses help shape your understanding of the concept of God’s Sovereignty or Providence? What additional lessons can we learn from Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11 and Mathew 10:29-31?

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Bridges defines God’s providence as “God’s providence is His constant care for and His absolute rule over all His creation for His own glory and the good of His people”: to what extent do you agree? How do you understand the tension between God’s twofold objective of His own glory and our good?

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SOVEREIGN OVER EVERYTHING (LAM 3:37-38, ECC 7:14, ISAIAH 45:7): Why do we find the truths of these verses so hard to stomach? What are the dangers of limiting God’s Sovereignty to good rather than calamity (see Additional Quote 7)?

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OUR RESPONSIBILITY: How does the truth of God's Sovereignty impact our personal responsibility, i.e. if God is in charge does it matter what we do? (If you have time take a look at Philippians 4:6, Acts 4:24, 28-29, Acts 27:22-26, Nehemiah 4:7-9, 16-20, 1 Chron 5:18-20, Psalm 127:1, Esther 4:11-14)

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GOD'S WISDOM (PSALM 147:5, ROM 11:33): Wisdom could be defined as 'the ability to develop the best course of action or the best response to a situation'; what do these verses teach us about God's wisdom? How might wisdom help us respond better when we're struggling to see what God's doing?

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GOD WORKS FOR OUR GOOD (ROM 8:28-29, GEN 50:19-21): What is your immediate response to a verse like Romans 8:28? How does the following verse help us understand what Paul has in mind when he speaks of 'good' in v28? How is Joseph's story a good example?

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GOD'S WAYS ARE UNFATHOMABLE (JOB 42:2-6): Three Psalms begin with the word "why" and Job asks "why" 16 times; why are we so fixated on this question when Scripture repeatedly tells us God's ways are incomprehensible (Isaiah 55:8-9)? God's answer to Job is not "why" but "who"; what can we learn from Job's response to God here?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: To what extent are these truths (which are hard truths esp. during adversity) foundational to our sense of hope (or lack thereof) in our lives? In particular what comfort is there in the truths that God is completely sovereign and infinite in wisdom?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Discuss together how these ideas help you to trust in God even when things are hard and you don't understand what God is doing. Share with one another about the difficult situations you have been facing this week and pray for one another in these things.

MEMORY VERSES: ISAIAH 55:8-9

STUDY 4 – ‘THE SOURCE OF HOPE II’ – GOD’S LOVE

INTRODUCTION: The third foundational truth that we need to have if we are to trust the God of Hope is His loving care towards us. We shall see the way that even in the midst of adversity and pain God’s love, goodness and Sovereignty all go hand in hand.

SETTING THE SCENE: How do you hold in tension the truths of God’s Sovereignty and His love/goodness (Additional Quotes 8)? To what extent do you think we can have it both ways? Why do we find it so easy to question God’s love and His goodness in adversity?

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SPARROWS AND SHEPHERDS (LUKE 12:6-7, ISAIAH 40:10-11): How are the themes of God’s love and God’s Sovereignty expressed in these passages (contrast Luke 12:6-7 with Matthew 10:29-31 from last week’s study)? What is significant about your findings?

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GOD SHOWED HIS LOVE (1 JOHN 4:7-10, ROM 8:32): How do we see God’s love demonstrated at the cross? What is the difference between saying that God is love (also in v16) and describing God as loving? Why should the cross be our backstop when we are tempted to question God’s love?

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GOD IS FOR US (ROM 8:28-39): Looking again at these verses (previous study); how do you respond to Lucado’s distinction (Additional Quotes 9) between “all things” and “each thing”? In what ways does this help us to understand God’s goodness and love in relation to His Sovereignty?

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How does Paul’s continuing argument (v31-39) teach us about the various aspects of the love of God? What do you imagine causes Paul to be so confident in the truths that he mentions here? What from

these verses really speaks to where you are at right now and how do they help us start to make sense of the pressures, challenges and pain that we are experiencing in our lives?

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LOVING DISCIPLINE (HEBREWS 12:5-7, 11): How do these verses help us to see that hardship and/or discipline are evidence of God's love rather than its absence? How can we learn to trust God through such times? How have you experienced discipline producing a harvest of righteousness (v11)?

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GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US (ISAIAH 43:2&4): If God will not spare us from adversity how does His promise to walk with us through it help us to understand and experience more of God's love for us? When in your experience has God's presence felt particularly significant to you?

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EXPERIENCING GOD'S UNFAILING LOVE (PSALM 13, ISAIAH 54:10): Having started with the assertion that we tend to find it easy to question God's love during adversity, how do we see here that God's love is anything but uncertain?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: We will almost certainly struggle to believe that God loves us during difficult times but how do you think we engage with that struggle without allowing it to overwhelm us? What practical steps can we take to develop a deeper conviction and understanding of His love?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk together about the things that have touched your heart about the love God has for you and the struggles you have in believing the truth. Pray for one another that you would experience more of God's love in your life this week.

MEMORY VERSES: ROMANS 8:38-39

STUDY 5 – ‘THE POWER OF HOPE’ – AN ANCHOR OF THE SOUL

INTRODUCTION: In this study we will focus in on the first of the two hopes we introduced in study 1; our temporal hope based on God’s promises for our everyday lives. As we concentrate on the ‘power of hope’ to inspire and motivate us we will consider 4 pictures of hope...

SETTING THE SCENE: Contrast the power of hope according to the Hunger Games and Tim Keller (Additional Quotes 10 & 11). In what ways have you seen hope radically transform a person and/or situation? How does Proverbs 13:12 express the power of hope?

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#1: AN ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL (HEB 6:13-20): Hebrews was written to Jewish believers undergoing severe persecution and immense pressure to lapse back into Judaism: how would these verses speak into their situation and inspire them to keep persevering with Christ?

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How do these verses help us to have certainty about God’s promises? What does this image of an ‘anchor for the soul’ teach us about the nature of hope? What is the relationship between the two types of hope (eternal and temporal)? What additional insights does the background material in Additional Quotes 13 offer us as to how we understand this anchor for the soul?

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#2: HIS COMPASSIONS NEVER FAIL (LAM 3:16-33): In 3:1-20 the writer personifies the nation of Judah after its destruction by Babylon describing a sense of alienation and misery; what then was it that caused such a radical change of perspective as described in v21?

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How do these verses and in particular the truths that God’s compassion never fails (v22), great is His faithfulness (v23), He does not willingly bring affliction or grief (v33)? To what extent is your hope focused on God and His character as opposed to the situations and difficulties you face day by day?

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#3: MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU (2 COR 12:7-10): In 12:1-6 Paul refers to visions given to him by God and he says he was given a 'thorn in the flesh' (we don't really know what this was but possibly eye disease or defective speech) to stop him becoming proud. How might the answer God does give him provide hope and comfort to Paul in this struggle?

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How has God's power made perfect in your weakness? What has been your experience of the sufficiency of God's grace in the challenges and trials that you have faced? What is the relationship between this grace Paul describes and the hope we have been discussing?

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#4: SOARING ON WINGS LIKE EAGLES (ISAIAH 40:25-31): How can meditating on God and the wonder of His creation encourage us to renew both our confidence and our strength in Him? What exactly does it look like to hope in the LORD (v31)? How do you understand God's promises to those who do so? What is your experience of how hope has brought you such strength and perseverance?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How do these different pictures and promises encourage you to 'take hold of the hope set before us' and help you to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have (1 Pet 3:15-16)? What is God teaching you about the 'power of hope' in your day-to-day lives?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray for one another that you would have a deeper understanding of the hope we have. Pray too that you would allow this hope to transform our everyday lives and help us to hope in the LORD both in good times and in the hard times.

MEMORY VERSES: HEBREWS 6:19-20a

STUDY 6 – ‘THE SUBSTANCE OF HOPE’ – THE HOPE OF GLORY

INTRODUCTION: We will now look at the second of the two types of hope, our eternal hope based on God’s promises for the future. It’s a big subject so our focus here will main be to try and develop a hope for the future and consider how that hope should impact us here and now.

SETTING THE SCENE: How focused do you think we are on eternity and why (Additional Quotes 13)? Before we get going can you briefly explain your understanding of our hope for the future and how this impacts you now? On a scale of 1-10 how excited are you now about your eternal hope?

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HEAVEN’S PERSPECTIVE (COL 3:1-4): What do you think it looks like in practice to set our hearts and minds on ‘things above’ rather than ‘things on earth’? What difference do you think it would make to our lives if we lived with Heaven’s perspective?

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HOPE OF GLORY (COLOSSIANS 1:24-27, 1 JOHN 3:1-3): What do you think Paul means when he describes the mystery of the gospel (see also Ephesians 3:2-6) as ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’? What exactly is this glory that we are hoping for?

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How does 1 John 3:1-3 explore this idea further and help us think about its implications here and now? When might the thought of God completing His work in (Phil 1:6) us be of particular encouragement?

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WAITING IN EAGER EXPECTATION (ROM 8:18-25): What does Paul consider to be the relationship between suffering and glory (v18)? What signs are there that creation is under ‘bondage’, ‘groaning’ and ‘waiting in eager expectation’ for freedom and the ‘children of God to be revealed’ (v19-23)?

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Paul says that ‘in this hope we were saved (past tense)’; why is this a saving hope and to what extent would you say that this your hope for the future (Additional Quotes 14)? How do these verses encourage us to wait patiently and eagerly?

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VICTORY IN CHRIST (1 CORINTHIANS 15): This chapter is Paul's famous treatment of resurrection; firstly of Christ, then the dead and finally of our bodies. What can we glean from this snippet about what is in store for us when Jesus returns (see also 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)?

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What do you imagine our resurrected bodies will be like? Why should this teaching on 'resurrection' motivate us to 'stand firm' and 'give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord' (v58)?

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RENEWED HEAVEN & EARTH (REVELATION 21-22): What does this passage mean when it talks of a 'new heaven and a new earth' (Additional Quotes 15)? In what ways will this new creation be 'new'?

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What do you think it will be like to live in the new heavens and the new earth? What is your response to the claims in Additional Quotes 16 & 17? How do their views about eternity compare with what you believe and with the more stereotypical notions of heaven (clouds, harps etc)?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How should our eternal hope impact upon the way we live here and now (see Titus 2:12-13)? How do you think that our eternal hope should impact our temporal hope? In what ways has this study increased your desire for Jesus to return?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share your feelings together about how you feel about our hope for eternity. Pray for one another that you would live more expectantly and in light of all we have to come. Challenge one another to read some more on this and develop your 'hope of glory'.

MEMORY VERSE: TITUS 2:12-13

STUDY 7 – ‘AGAINST ALL HOPE’ – DO NOT LOSE HEART

INTRODUCTION: In this final study our intention is to encourage one another not to give up or become hopeless. To do this we will look at three case studies; Abraham, Jeremiah and the young Hebrew Christians before turning our attention to Paul’s great chapter on not losing heart.

SETTING THE SCENE: To what extent do you agree that “Hope” is the essential quality we need in order to inspire, motivate and encourage us to persevere and not lose heart? How do we see this exemplified in example of the Wharf Rats (Additional Quotes 19)?

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#1: ABRAHAM – BELIEVING IN HOPE (ROM 4:18-22): God made Abraham wait 25 years before giving him the son of the promise. God has promised Abraham that He would bless him and make him a blessing (Gen 12) and that he would make his descendants as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Gen 15 & 17). How hard would have been for Abraham to believe God and not lose heart?

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What do you think Paul means when he says that ‘against all hope, Abraham in hope believed’? What can we learn from Abraham’s example here of hope born out of faith the promises of God?

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#2: JEREMIAH – HOPE AND FUTURE (JER 29:10-14): In chapter 28 there’s a confrontation between Jeremiah and another prophet Hananiah who promised that God was going to restore Israel within 2 years. God’s says that Hananiah has “persuaded this nation to trust in lies (v15).” In this context how do you think Jeremiah’s letter prophesying 70 years of exile in Babylon would have been received?

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In what ways are the promises which God makes to His people here an encouragement to us 2000 years later? As God’s people under the new covenant, how might it be appropriate to lay claim to these promises for our own lives? How does this encourage us not to lose heart?

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#3: A CALL TO PERSVERANCE (HEB 10:19-25): How would the various instructions beginning “let us...” encourage these Hebrew Christians to keep going and not go back to their Jewish roots? What reasons does the writer put forward as to why we should do these things? What has been your experience of the value of community encouraging you to persevere in hope?
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TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY (2 COR 4): What are the reasons that Paul had for losing heart (v7, 8-9, 10 & 14)? What conversely seem to be the reasons why Paul is able to say ‘we do not lose heart (v1, 16) and that eternal glory far outweighs our ‘light and momentary troubles’? How in practice can we keep our eyes not on the ‘seen’ (and temporary) but on the unseen (and eternal)?
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Paul writes that Satan has ‘blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel’ (v4); in what ways is he also at work to cause us to lose heart?
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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Jerry Bridges writes about learning that “trusting God is first of all a matter of the will and is not dependent on my feelings. I choose to trust God, and my feelings eventually follow.” *Bridges, Trusting God, pg. 209.* At the end of our series how we can move forward on our journey in hope and trusting He who is faithful?
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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share with one another the things from this series that have really touched your heart and the steps God wants you to take in order to move forward. Pray specifically for one another in these things that against all hope you would continue to hope and trust in God.

MEMORY VERSE: HEBREWS 10:23

APPENDIX 1 – NOTIONS OF HOPE IN THE SECULAR WORLD

“With optimism, you look upon the sunny side of things. People say, 'Studs, you're an optimist.' I never said I was an optimist. I have hope because what's the alternative to hope? Despair? If you have despair, you might as well put your head in the oven.” **Studs Terkel**

“People don't want much. They want: Someone to love, somewhere to live, somewhere to work and something to hope for.” **Norman Kirk, NZ Prime Minister, 1970's**

“Strange as it may seem, I still hope for the best, even though the best, like an interesting piece of mail, so rarely arrives, and even when it does it can be lost so easily.” **Lemony Snicket**

“With optimism, you look upon the sunny side of things. People say, 'Studs, you're an optimist.' I never said I was an optimist. I have hope because what's the alternative to hope? Despair? If you have despair, you might as well put your head in the oven.” **Studs Terkel**

“The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation...In a universe of blind forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky and you won't find any rhyme or reason for it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.” **Richard Dawkins, River out of Eden**

“People don't want much. They want: Someone to love, somewhere to live, somewhere to work and something to hope for.” **Norman Kirk, NZ Prime Minister, 1970's**

“How do you pick up the threads of an old life? How do you go on, when in your heart, you begin to understand, there is no going back? There are some things that time cannot mend. Some hurts that go too deep ... that have taken hold.” **Frodo Baggins final words in The Return of the King**

“I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.” **Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom**

“The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof.”

Barbara Kingsolver, Animal Dreams

“We dream to give ourselves hope. To stop dreaming - well, that's like saying you can never change your fate.” **Amy Tan, The Hundred Secret Senses**

“Hope can be a powerful force. Maybe there's no actual magic in it, but when you know what you hope for most and hold it like a light within you, you can make things happen, almost like magic.”

Laini Taylor, Daughter of Smoke & Bone

“The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope.” **Barack Obama**

“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” **Desmond Tutu**

APPENDIX 2 – NOTIONS OF HOPE FROM THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

“What is hope? Is it a wishy-washy maybe or a kind of unsure optimism? The modern idea of hope is ‘to wish for, to expect, but without certainty of the fulfillment; to desire very much, but with no real assurance of getting your desire. In Scripture, according to the Hebrew and Greek words translated by the word “hope” and according to the biblical usage, hope is an indication of certainty. ‘Hope’ in Scripture means ‘a strong and confident expectation’” Though archaic today in modern terms, hope is akin to trust and a confident expectation. Hope may refer to the activity of hoping, or to the object hoped for—the content of one’s hope. By its very nature, hope stresses 2 things: (a) futurity, and (b) invisibility. It deals with things we can’t see or haven’t received or both.”

Quoted from <http://www.bible.org/article/hope>

“So ‘hope’ means confidently stepping out on God’s promises and being assured of His trustworthiness, even though we can’t see how His promises will be fulfilled or when they will be answered. Hope is knowing that God will be faithful to keep His Word, no matter what we see or what we feel. Hope is knowing that God will do exactly what He has promised in His way. It’s the patient, disciplined and confident waiting for and expecting the fulfillment of all God’s promises in His timing.”

Missler, *Hope against Hope*, pg. 53-54.

“Christian hope is when God has promised that something is going to happen and you put your trust in that promise. Christian hope is a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will.” **John Piper** quoted at <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-so-important-about-christian-hope>

“Christian hope is quite different from secular optimism. It is a confidence in God, kindled by the promises of God.” **John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* © 1992 IVP, pg. 175-176**

“Our hope is anchored in the past: Jesus rose! Our hope remains in the present: Jesus lives! Our hope is completed in the future: Jesus is coming.” **Clowney, *BST 1 Peter*, pg. 44-46**

“Hope is the peaceful anticipation gained through a relationship with someone who is trustworthy. Hope seems natural to all who love in Christ. The reason He is our ‘hope of glory’ is that His very person (in us) is hope itself (1 Tim 1:1), and that hope will endure. Hope is one of the three factors that will abide even if in a higher form (1 Cor 13:13).” ***The hope glory, TW and Melissa Hunt, pg. 120***

“Not until history has run its course will we understand how “all things work together for good.” Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.” **Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*, pg. 201**

“What gives me the most hope every day is God’s grace; knowing that his grace is going to give me the strength for whatever I face, knowing that nothing is a surprise to God.” **Rick Warren**

“Our worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God’s grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God’s grace.” **Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness*, pg. 19**

“The key is this: Meet today’s problems with today’s strength. Don’t start tackling tomorrow’s problems until tomorrow. You do not have tomorrow’s strength yet. You simply have enough for today.” **Lucado, *Traveling Light***

APPENDIX 3 – ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

QUOTE 1: “Crisis, when it comes, hits hard and fast. Pain knocks on your front door, shoulders its way inside, takes up residence without your permission, and refuses to be evicted...One way or another, you will have to walk through it. For Job, it was when his whole world came crashing down on his head in a matter of hours. For young Joseph, it was when his own brothers betrayed him and sold him as a slave. For Jesus, it was when one of His own handpicked disciples turned on Him. For you, it might be something else. A strong and unexpected storm has overtaken your little boat, utterly overwhelming you and swamping you. You find yourself wondering, *Will I even survive this? Will I make it through this alive? Is there any hope for me?*” Laurie, *Hope*, pg. 11-12

QUOTE 2: “Now what makes this subject of hope rather difficult and confusing is that there are really two types of hope in the Lord. First, there’s an ‘eternal’ hope that involves His phenomenal promises for the future; but there is also an earthly, ‘temporal’ hope that involved our day-to-day personal trust in Him here and now. This second type of hope (our temporal hope) is where so many of us are struggling and sinking at the present time.” Nancy Missler, *Hope against Hope*, pg. 53-55

QUOTE 3: “Over the years, I also came to realise that adversity did not merely lead people to believe in God’s existence. It pulled those who already believed into a deeper experience of God reality, love and, grace. One of the main ways we move from abstract knowledge about God to a personal encounter with him as a living reality is through the furnace of affliction. As C.S. Lewis famously put it, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain” [from *The problem of Pain*]. Believers understand many doctrinal truths in the mind, but those truths seldom make the journey down into the heart except through disappointment, failure and loss. As a man who seems about to lose both his career and his family once said to me, “I always knew, in principle that ‘Jesus is all you need’ to get through. But you don’t really know Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.” Keller, *Walking with God through pain and suffering*, pg. 5

QUOTE 4: “We must never forget that God is not in a hurry. However, when viewed from the human perspective it does often appear that God is taking a dreadfully long time over everything. We easily become frustrated at any apparent lack of progress, wanting immediate action and even becoming desperate if we do not seem to get it.” Rees, *Faith in the Furnace*, pg. 91

QUOTE 5: “I did not realise, however, that God wanted more than to simply remove my pain; he wanted to use it. God never wastes your pain; before He removes it, He makes it serve you...There are always two plans for your difficult times—Satan’s plan in causing them and God’s plan of redeeming them. Satan’s plan is usually obvious: heart failure. He wants you to give up, retreat from life, and turn from God. God’s plan, however, isn’t often seen until you emerge on the other side of the pain.” Sheets, *The power of hope*, pg. 96 & 127

QUOTE 6: “In the area of adversity, the Scriptures teach us 3 essential truths about God – truths we must believe if we are to trust Him in adversity. They are ‘God is completely sovereign’, ‘God is infinite in wisdom’ and ‘God is perfect in love’. Someone has expressed these truths as they relate to us in this way: “God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His Sovereignty He has the power to bring it about.” *Trusting God*, Jerry Bridges, pg. 16-17

QUOTE 7: “We might be tempted to walk away from the idea of the Sovereignty of God. We might be tempted to try and diminish God, tempted to try and get Him off the hook for the awkward and nasty

things in our lives. Here is a great lesson in life for us. It is precisely at those moments when life seems most uncertain and most fragile that we need to cling hardest to the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God...What do you want really, when life is tough? Do you want a mighty God even though you can't understand Him or do you want a cut down little God who can't really help and who is no bigger than your own capacity to imagine? I want the mighty God, the Sovereign God. This is the bedrock for our souls. This is our comfort and the source of our strength...the Sovereignty of God." *John Risbridger, http://abovebarchurch.org.uk/resources/sermons-and-talks/app/play/talk_971/title/confident-faith-in-a-mysterious-world*

QUOTE 8: "We were chatting and chewing when Paul & Debbie's 4yr old walked into the room and casually told her mum, "Jenna [our 2yr old] fell in the pool." We exploded out the door. Jenna was flopping in the water...Paul reached her first. He jumped in and lifted her up to Denalyn. Jenna coughed and cried for a minute, and just like that she was fine. Tragedy averted. Daughter safe. Imagine our gratitude. We immediately circled up the kids, offered a prayer, and sang a song of thanks. For the remainder of the day, our feet didn't touch the ground, and Jenna didn't leave our arms. Even driving home, I was thanking God. In the rear view mirror I could see Jenna sound asleep in her car seat, and I offered yet another prayer: *God, you are so good.* Then a question surfaced in my thoughts. From God? Or from the part of me that struggles to make sense out of God? I can't say. But what the voice asked, I still remember: *If Jenna hadn't survived would God still be good?*
Max Lucado, You'll get through this, pg. 80

QUOTE 9: "God at times permits tragedies. He permits the ground to grow dry and stalks to grow bare. He allows Satan to triumph. Isn't this the promise of Romans 8:28? God promises to render beauty out of "all things", not "each thing." The isolated events may be evil, but the ultimate culmination is good. We see examples of this in our lives. When you sip on a cup of coffee and say, "This is good," what are you saying? The plastic bag that contains the beans is good? The beans themselves are good? Hot water is good? A coffee filter is good? No, none of these. *Good* happens when the ingredients work together: the bag opened, the beans ground into powder, the water heated to the right temperature. It is the collective cooperation of the elements that creates good." Nothing in the Bible would cause us to call a famine good or a heart attack good or a terrorist attack good. These are terrible calamities, born out of a fallen earth. Yet every message in the Bible, compels us to believe that God will mix them with other ingredients and bring good out of them."
Max Lucado, You'll get through this, pg. 83

QUOTE 10: "President Snow is a dangerous but intelligent man. He once said, "Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear." You might be terrified of what your future holds, but you have to have hope that you'll accomplish your goals. When you believe that something is possible, your actions change. You can do anything, so long as you have hope in your heart." *Suzanne Collins, The Hunger Games*

QUOTE 11: "None of us is likely to be thrown to lions and torn limb from limb as people cheer, and probably none of us will experience a life of servitude and slavery. We have things that are weighing us down, but nothing like lions and whips. So if this great hope helped these other people face their problems, shouldn't it help you and me with the ones we are facing now?" *Keller, Walking with God through Suffering, pg. 317*

QUOTE 12: "The harbours were quite shallow in the Mediterranean Sea. Hence, a ship could not enter a harbour when a storm threatened, because the hull would shatter when the ship was tossed in shallow water. Furthermore, the Mediterranean floor was sand without rock, so it would not have

provided a secure anchor. Therefore, to secure a ship, the anchor was put into a shallow boat, this smaller boat was rowed into the harbour, and the anchor was secured to the shore. The author has this scene in mind when he portrays Christ as the forerunner "rowing" into the inner sanctuary and securing the anchor there." *Hebrews, Lifechange Series, NAVPRESS, pg. 91*

QUOTE 13: "The contemporary Western Church at large seems to me to have little belief in the afterlife. We are so temporal and comfortable. We can perpetuate the delusions of our own immortality for longer than any previous generation, but ultimately, unless our death comes instantaneously in earthly life, we must think about such things. We will be poorer if we do not. And so I have begun a solemn pilgrimage that some might deem a little morose. My aim? To envision eternity with Jesus." *Grieg, God on Mute, pg. 306*

QUOTE 14: "Human beings are hoped shaped creatures. The way you live now is completely controlled by what you believe about your future." *Keller, Walking with God through pain & suffering, pg. 314*

QUOTE 15: "Salvation, then, is not "going to heaven" but "being raised to life in God's new heaven and new earth." But as soon as we put it like this we realize that the NT is full of hints, indications, and downright assertions that this salvation isn't just something we have to wait for in the long-distance future. We can enjoy it here and now (always partially, of course, since we all still have to die), genuinely anticipating in the present what is to come in the future." *Wright, Surprised by Hope, pg. 210*

QUOTE 16: "Eternal life means enjoying the finest moments of life on Earth the way that they were intended. Since in Heaven we'll finally experience life at its best, it would be more accurate to call our present existence the before-life rather than call what follows the afterlife." *Randy Alcorn, We Shall See God, pg. 44.*

QUOTE 17: "Heaven is a picture of *present* reality, the heavenly dimension of our present life. Heaven, in the Bible, is regularly not a future destiny, but the other, hidden dimension of our ordinary life - God's dimension if you like. God made heaven and earth; at the last, He will remake both, and join them together for ever. And when we come to the picture of the actual End in Revelation 21-22, we find, not ransomed souls making their way to a disembodied heaven, but rather the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth, uniting the two in a lasting embrace." *Wright, Surprised by Hope, pg. 26*

QUOTE 19: "Some psychologists decided to do an experiment on some Norwegian Wharf rats. They wanted to see how long it would take for the rats to drown. Why they did the experiment in the first place, I do not understand. Nevertheless, they put the rats in a huge tank of water, let them flounder and begin to go under. It took only seventeen minutes for this to happen. But just before the rats went down for the last time, the psychologists rescued them, pulled them out, dried them off and took care of them for the next few days. Two or three days later, the psychologists again put the same rats in another huge tank of water to see how long it would take them to drown this time. The rats survived a whopping thirty seven hours! What made the difference? How were the rats able to survive over thirty six hours longer the second time around? The reason is that the rats had "hope" that someone would rescue them, as they had in the past! And it's the same with us. Once we know and experience faithfulness, we will hold on unconditionally because we know He will be faithful and do the same for us in the future. Experiencing God's Love and faithfulness in the past is what will allow us to "hope for the same" in the future. This kind of hope is what sustains us in suffering and gives us strength to endure the waiting process." *Missler, Hope against Hope, pg. 68*

MEMORY VERSES

STUDY 1 – “THE NATURE OF HOPE” – TRUSTING GOD’S PROMISES

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.” **Psalm 42:5, 11 & 43:5**

STUDY 2 – “A LIVING HOPE” – REFINERS FIRE

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” **John 15:2**

STUDY 3 – “THE SOURCE OF HOPE I” – GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND WISDOM

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” **Isaiah 55:8-9**

STUDY 4 – “THE SOURCE OF HOPE II” – GOD’S LOVE

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” **Romans 8:38-39**

STUDY 5 – “THE POWER OF HOPE” – AN ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL

¹⁸We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.” **Hebrews 6:19-20a**

STUDY 6 – “THE SUBSTANCE OF HOPE” – THE HOPE OF GLORY

¹²It [the grace of God] teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” **Titus 2:12-13**

STUDY 7 – “AGAINST ALL HOPE” – DO NOT LOSE HEART

“Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” **Hebrews 10:23**

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