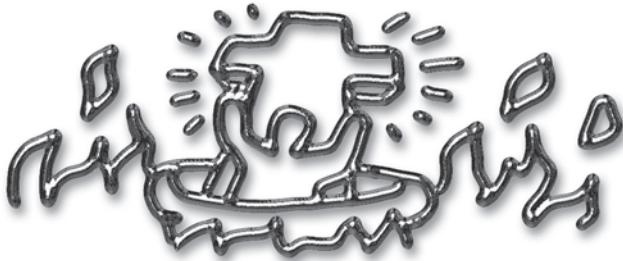


Indestructible Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 38–41, Isa. 41:8–14, Jer. 29:1–10, Hab. 1:1–4, Heb. 12:1–13.*

Memory Text: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (*Romans 5:5, NIV*).

When in church surrounded by smiling people, how easy it is to talk and sing about hope. But when we find ourselves within the crucible, hope does not always seem so easy. As circumstances press around us, we begin to question everything, particularly the wisdom of God.

In one of his books, C. S. Lewis writes about a make-believe lion. Wanting to meet this lion, a person asks if the lion is safe. They're told that he's not safe, “but he's good.”

Even though we don't always understand God and He seems to do unpredictable things, that doesn't mean that God is against us. It simply means that we don't have the full picture yet. But we struggle with the idea that for us to have peace, confidence, and hope, God must be understandable and predictable. He needs to be, in our thinking, “safe.” As such, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

The Week at a Glance: How does our understanding of the character of God help us maintain hope in the crucible?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 17.*

The Big Picture

When we are hurting, it is very easy to presume that what happens to us is the only thing that matters. But there is a slightly larger picture than just “me” (*see Rev. 12:7, Rom. 8:22*).

Read Habakkuk 1:1–4. What did Habakkuk face?

You might expect that God would say something like “That’s really terrible, Habakkuk; let Me come and help you immediately.” But God’s answer is the opposite. He tells Habakkuk that it is going to get worse. Read this in Habakkuk 1:5–11.

Israel had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, but God promises that worse is coming: The Babylonians will now carry away the people of Judah. Habakkuk cries out again in verses 12–17, and then waits to see what God is going to say.

How does God’s introduction to the promised destruction of Babylon in Habakkuk 2:2, 3 bring hope?

Habakkuk 2 is God’s promise of the destruction of the Babylonians. Hebrews 10:37 quotes Habakkuk 2:3, hinting of a messianic application to this promise in the future. With the same certainty that the destruction of Babylon was promised, so we also have the certainty of the destruction of “Babylon the Great” (*Rev. 18:2, NIV*).

Habakkuk was trapped between the great evil surrounding him and God’s promise of worse to come. Yet, this is precisely where we find ourselves in salvation history. Great evil is around us, but the Bible predicts that much worse is to come. The key to Habakkuk’s survival was that he was brought to see the whole picture. Therefore, in chapter 3 he is able to pray an incredible prayer of praise because of what God will do in the future.

Read Habakkuk 3:16–19. What does Habakkuk identify as his reasons for hope? What is the hope of God’s people as we wait for the last prophetic scenes to unfold? How can you make this hope your own?

Who Our Father Is

Oswald Chambers writes, “Have you been asking God what He is going to do? He will never tell you. God does not tell you what He is going to do; He reveals to you who He is.”—*My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), Jan. 2.

What do you think Chambers means by this idea?

As we know, the book of Job begins with great personal tragedy for Job. He loses everything, except his life and his wife, and she suggests that he “ ‘curse God and die!’ ” (*Job 2:9, NIV*). What follows is a discussion in which his friends try to work out why it has all happened. Throughout all of these discussions, God remains silent.

Then suddenly in Job 38 God appears and speaks: “ ‘Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?’ ” (*vs. 2, NIV*). Without pausing, God asks Job about 60 jaw-dropping questions. Open your Bible and scan through these in Job 38 and 39.

After the last question, Job replies, “ ‘I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more’ ” (*Job 40:4, 5, NIV*). But God is not finished. He then begins again and asks another set of “big” questions in succession.

Read Job’s final response in Job 42:1–6. What was God trying to tell Job, and what was the effect on him?

God never answers any of the “why” questions of Job’s friends. But God does paint a picture of His unparalleled greatness as revealed through the astonishing works of creation. After this, Job certainly does not need any answers. The need for explanations has been eclipsed by an overwhelming picture of the magnificence of God.

This story reveals a fascinating paradox. Hope and encouragement can spring from the realization that we know so little. Instinctively, we try to find comfort by knowing everything, and so we become discouraged when we cannot know. But sometimes God highlights our ignorance so that we may realize that human hope can only find security in a Being much greater than ourselves.

Are things that you just can’t understand happening now? If so, focus on the character of God. How can doing that give you the hope that you need to persevere through what’s for now incomprehensible?

Our Father's Presence

“**For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you**” (*Isa. 41:13, NIV*).

Someone once said, “When God seems far away, who is the one who has moved?” When problems strike, we presume that God has deserted us. The truth is that He hasn’t gone anywhere.

God’s presence seemed very far away to the Jews in exile. Yet, through Isaiah God assures them of future deliverance. However, while the actual return to Jerusalem was still many years in the future, God wanted His people to know that He had not moved away from them and that there was every reason for hope.

Read Isaiah 41:8–14. What reasons for hope can you identify for people waiting eagerly for future deliverance? How does this promise help us as we wait for our exile on earth to end?

One of the most powerful images in these texts is found in verse 13. The sovereign God of the universe says that His people do not need to fear, because He is the One who takes “ ‘hold of your right hand’ ” (*NIV*). It is one thing to imagine God guiding events on earth from a big throne light-years away from our earth. But it is an altogether different picture to realize that He is close enough to hold the hands of His dearly beloved people.

When we are busy, it can be hard to remember that God is so close to us. But when we do remember that He is Emmanuel, “God with us,” it makes such a difference. When God’s presence is with us, so are His purposes, His promises, and His transforming power.

Over the next few days, try an experiment. At every moment possible, try to remind yourself that the God of the universe is close enough to you to hold your hand and is personally promising you help. Keep a record of how this changes the way you live. Be prepared to discuss your experience in class on Sabbath.

Our Father's Plans for Us

Everyone is looking for hope. But from where is it found? For some people, hope is found in the smile of a friend. For others, hope grows from financial security or a stable marriage. Where do you normally look for hope and courage?

In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is writing to people who had lost hope in their exile. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (*Ps. 137:1, NIV*). But even though they are heartbroken, Jeremiah lays out reasons why they should not give up hope.

What reasons for hope are given in Jeremiah 29:1–10?

In this passage, there are three important sources of hope worth highlighting.

First, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because their situation is not the result of chance or unpredictable evil. For God Himself says, “I carried [Judah] into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon” (*vs. 4, NIV*). Though evil seems to surround them, Judah has never left the center of God’s hands.

Second, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He can work even within their present difficulties. “ ‘Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper’ ” (*vs. 7, NIV*).

Third, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He is going to bring an end to their exile at a specific time. “This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place’ ” (*vs. 10, NIV*).

After God explains how He was in charge of their past, is in charge of their present, and will be in charge of their future, He then beautifully conveys His tender care for His people (*see vss. 11–14*).

Read verses 11–14, saying your name after the word *you*, as if God is making these promises to you personally. Apply these promises to yourself in whatever your present struggles might be.

Our Father's Discipline

Read Hebrews 12:5–13. What's the message to us here, and how does it fit in with what we have been studying this quarter?

In Hebrews 12:5–13, the author describes trials in the context of discipline. In the NIV Bible translation, the word *discipline* appears nearly ten times. In the Greek world, this word was the most basic word for *education*. So to understand *discipline* is to understand how God educates us in the school of faith that the author has been describing before in Hebrews 11.

Throughout Hebrews 11, the author has been painting pictures of men and women of faith. Their faith was what kept them going when they were faced with all sorts of trying situations. As we enter chapter 12, the author turns to us, the readers, and says that since so many people have persevered against incredible odds before us, we also can run and finish the life of faith. The key is to fix our eyes upon Jesus (*vs. 2*) that He may be an example when times are difficult (*vs. 3*). Reading chapter 12 is like being given a set of reading glasses. Without these glasses our vision or understanding of hardship will always be fuzzy. But if we look through these glasses, it will correct the blurred explanation of suffering that our culture presses upon us. Then we will be able to understand clearly and be able to respond to trials intelligently.

Read through the “glasses” of Hebrews 12:1–13. Now concentrate on verses 5–13. What is

the source of discipline?

our response to discipline?

the goal of discipline?

Read through Hebrews 12:1–13 again. Make a list of all the reasons you can identify with as grounds for hope. How have you experienced this hope in your own times of spiritual “education”?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The School of the Hereafter,” pp. 301–309, in *Education*; “Help in Daily Living,” pp. 470, 471, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Ellen White says that “all” of us experience times of “keen disappointment and utter discouragement.” How well do we notice each other as we go through such times? How can we better learn to be agents of hope for each other when we experience such bitter disappointments?
- 2 As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final question. What difference did it make in your life as you kept the reality of God’s nearness ever before you?
- 3 In class, read aloud sections in Job 38–41. What kind of picture of God does it present? What do you learn that gives you hope and encouragement? How does the Sabbath fit into this picture? How does it help keep before us the nature and character of God?
- 4 Hope that transforms comes from heaven. This means that we can pray for hope to be brought into each other’s lives. Spend some time praying for those whose hope has been faltering recently, that their hope may be renewed. More than that, what can you do for others who are in a losing struggle with hope?
- 5 If someone is willing, ask that person to recount a time when despair and trials caused him or her to lose hope and faith. What turned that person around? What can we share with one another that can help when we are in times of doubt and despair?

The Lost Bank Card

by SHARON BRUNTON AND YUAMB

It was Friday afternoon, and Yuamb, a literature evangelist, stood in line at the bank in Papua New Guinea, waiting to withdraw money for bus fare to return home. She reached into her bag to take out her bank card, but it was not there. She found a Bible promise card instead. Worried, she removed everything from her purse, but her bank card was not there.

Frustrated, she complained to God. “Lord, how can You let this happen to me on Friday afternoon? I have no money to get home, and there is no time to sell books to earn some money for bus fare.” She read the promise card she held in her hand. “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all” (*Ps. 34:19, NIV*).

Yuamb bowed her head again and asked God what He wanted her to do. Then she began walking. She passed several shops and turned down a side street. She stopped before a nightclub, then stepped in, not sure who she would meet there or what she would say.

A young girl named Joyce greeted Yuamb as she entered. Yuamb introduced herself as a literature evangelist, and the woman invited her to sit down. Soon Yuamb was showing Joyce the books she had with her. “Are you an Adventist?” Joyce asked. Surprised, Yuamb answered that she was.

Joyce explained that she had once been an Adventist. She bought a book, which provided Yuamb’s bus fare. “Please come back on Monday,” Joyce asked, “and bring *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy*.”

Yuamb left that nightclub rejoicing that God had led her to this hungry soul in a place she might never have entered. Yuamb returned on Monday with the books Joyce had asked for. Joyce introduced Yuamb to Roslyn, who also bought several books, and several other young women in the club who enrolled in Bible studies.

When Yuamb returned to visit her new friends several weeks later, one girl complained that her copy of *The Desire of Ages* had been stolen. She ordered two more copies. Three months later the owner of the nightclub turned the club into a restaurant, and is giving the girls Sabbaths off to worship. Joyce and Roslyn and another friend are attending the Adventist church in their area.

Yuamb praises God for her lost bank card that led her to lost souls searching for truth.

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