

Believers Refuse Jesus When They Refuse This Kingdom Virtue

“Hope” is a four-letter word that often confounds. It is meant to encourage, but is certainly a challenge to embrace.

Where does hope come from? Can hope be bought or sold? How can just four letters make such a profound difference in the life of a desperate man or woman?

Can you smell hope? Does it bloom only in the spring?

Is there a store that sells hope? If so, where is that store, and how much does hope cost? I am sure at times that hope is way too expensive for me as I take stock of my current life circumstances.

Is there a radio station that plays hope? I must know—I simply must know—what does hope sound like? Will I recognize its melody if I hear it?

Is there a restaurant that serves hope on its menu? Does it have taste? Is hope meant to be a main course or a dessert? Am I allowed to take more than a nibble?

I have discovered in my lifetime that hope may be the most valuable intangible I ever embrace. If I refuse to hope, I am refusing to believe. And I am ignoring an umbrella of faith.

I have also come to acknowledge the fact that you can have hope without faith—but you can’t have faith without hope.

Life is hard, and it is in the “hard” of life when hope becomes the most valuable resource a person can tap into. Your money will run out from time to time, and it is then that you certainly need hope. Your body might betray you, and the only

cure for a broken, weakened body is hope.

Difficult people may come in and ravage your world, and in that devastation, what you need is hope.

Hope is not a Pollyanna-like attitude that ignores the facts of life. I have found it much more difficult to live without hope than I have found it beneficial to ignore facts. I will choose hope over facts any day. Every day, choosing hope really is the best possible choice.

But the question is this when I am in the cave of despair: Is it possible for hope and facts to co-exist? Are they compatible or mutually exclusive?

This is what I do know: My facts don't tell the end of my story. What I see with my natural eyes may actually be the pretense. What I am unable to see with my eyes may be the solid stuff of life.

And so, I hope. I believe. I refuse discouragement and shake off despair. When my circumstances whine and scream and demand, I choose the quiet whisper of hope.

When the facts of my life thunder and quake and pontificate, I choose the sweet smile of hope.

We all choose. Our choices are hope or despair. Our choices are hope or discouragement. Our choices are hope or anything.

I don't know what circumstances are shrieking at you today, but I can tell you that if you can choose to hope, you are choosing strength. If you choose hope, you will also receive its twin, whose name is joy. And by embracing hope, you will also be wrapping your heart around new purpose and refreshed possibilities.

Perhaps the facts we face are actually only the fog that surrounds and therefore clouds our view from the truth of hope. Maybe when the cloudiness of our human existence lifts,

what we will realize is that hope was not ignorance, but it was substance and held more truth than the fog. Perhaps what we will know then that we ignore now, is that facts mask what is true, real and genuine.

And maybe, just maybe, what I need to remind myself every day is that hope is the foundation of the life that was meant for me.

And so, I will embrace and develop a friendship with hope. I will wrap my mind around all that hope declares and promises. I will speak in hope and think about hope. I will use hope as the anchor of my very fragile soul.

“Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord” (Ps. 31:24, NASB).

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical biblical messages mixed with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books: *No More Ordinary*, *Holy Estrogen!*, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart*, *Defiant Joy!* and *Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire*. Her teaching DVD *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming.

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