

Bill Johnson: Living With Hope in a Hopeless World

When Jesus declared that the last days would be filled with war, famine, earthquakes and other disasters, He wasn't trying to discourage those who followed Him. Instead, He was describing the conditions into which He was sending His last-days army. Hope isn't just a feeling we search for; it's something we grab hold of and bring into every situation in our lives.

We recognize how easy it is to become overwhelmed with personal problems, not to mention pandemic diseases, economic disruptions and political unrest. And yet the kingdom of God is real and present. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is at hand. In other words, the kingdom is in the here and now; it's within reach.

Jesus modeled this beautifully when He slept in the storm. He is our example who can and must be followed. He was able to sleep in the storm because the world He dwells in has no storms. Period. He modeled living from heaven to earth. He shows us what it was like to dwell in heavenly places before the apostle Paul found language for it in Ephesians.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and He raised us up and *seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (Eph. 2:4–6, author's emphasis).

The point is, this reality is far too great to hold as a belief when unaccompanied by experience. To be truly seated in heavenly places in Christ must be measurable by the change in perspective and thinking that has occurred in my life.

Revelation of biblical truth is an invitation to experience

that truth. For example, God would never reveal Himself as a Savior merely to increase our spiritual intelligence. He shows us who He is as our Savior that we might experience His salvation. This knowledge of salvation is of little benefit if it is not accompanied by the salvation He promises. In the same way, He doesn't just enable us to see Him as our provider to make us smarter; He does it so that our hearts would be opened to experience and trust Him for His provision in the daily parts of our lives.

Being seated in the heavenly places is a wonderful truth, but it must be accompanied by experience for its purpose to be fully realized. We know that the promise to be seated in heavenly places has become our own experience when we see and think differently. We see from His perspective, and the mind of Christ becomes our norm. This is the ongoing challenge of every believer that we must constantly affirm.

Biblical meditation is probably one of the most forgotten biblical disciplines. And yet it is here that these wonderful truths of Scripture take root deeper than the lies given to us by the surrounding culture. Eastern meditation is different in that it requires its practitioners to empty their minds. That is dangerous, as there are many powers that look for vacated places to fill. Biblical meditation is where we fill our minds with truth and bring it up over and over again for consideration. The word meditation can be translated "to mutter" which speaks of our willingness to repeat a truth over and over to ourselves. Oftentimes in that journey, the Lord adds to our understanding until that truth becomes a part of our character, our personality. As some would say, truth becomes cellular. It becomes a part of who we are.

Bound by Design

Our purpose is revealed in our design. But whenever society removes the concept of a Creator from its consciousness, it creates liberties we were never designed for—which actually

work to destroy us. Once the designer is removed, so is design. You can't have design without a designer. When our design is gone, our intended purpose is undermined.

When purpose is removed, so is our destiny. When we have no God-given destiny, we have no need for accountability, which destroys all that's left of the fear of God—the beginning of wisdom. This helps to explain the erosion of society where if a man feels like a woman, he has the right to choose to be one. Such nonsense is only logical when the boundaries of design are ignored.

We find that we were created in the image of God Himself. That is a stunning design, revealing a purpose that is beyond our capacity to dream for ourselves. Whenever we remove the idea of being created in the image of God, we lose the value of human life. Abortion testifies to this tragedy, as do many similar atrocities. The absolutes must be held in place. They serve as anchors in turbulent waters. Without them, we are at the mercy of every whim and fancy of what is popular in culture at the moment.

The boundaries set by our design are restrictions. But all of God's restrictions are for the purpose of increased life. None of them are punishments. They are avenues of liberty, discovered identity and increase. They result in the greater freedoms and experiences we were all made to delight in. A "no" in one part of life is a "yes" in another part of life. He is a life-giver! His restrictions are to keep us from the things that kill, steal and destroy.

Think of it as the double yellow line painted down the center of the road on a two-lane highway. Cars traveling in opposite directions at high speeds come within a few feet of each other countless times. This happens day after day, with no problems. But without the restriction created by that painted line, there would be certain death and suffering for countless numbers of people. Yet because of the restriction created by

the lines, we get to our destinations safely. God's restrictions are guidelines for safety but also ultimately for enjoyment. He created all things for His delight and for our pleasure.

The Irreverence of Hope

We were designed with purpose and destiny. Survival is important but should not be a lifetime goal. We were designed to soar. Real wisdom comes in managing our intake of information to fuel our purpose.

The thought of soaring during times of crisis almost seems flippant to many. And yet trials don't affect our destinies. They only affect the journey. And considering that our Father is the one who uses all things for His glory and our strength, we must hold on to hope. Even the most undesirable situation can be used for our promotion.

Deliberately feeding ourselves on the things that make us useful in crises is paramount to our fulfilling our design. We were born to live and thrive with hope!

Hope is the soil that faith grows in. Hope doesn't cower in the face of a mountain, but it is faith that removes the mountain. Hope is a general approach to all things in life. Faith is specific and intentional. Faith is not the result of striving. It is the result of surrender. Yielding to the purposes of God, and more specifically, yielding to the Word of God creates the pathway of great hope and faith.

Hope has to have a foundation. And that foundation is the goodness of God. A person without hope has either lost sight of His goodness or was never convinced in the first place. Regardless, the solution is simple. Return to Him. Return to the One who loves us beyond measure. It doesn't get any simpler or more profound than this.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten

Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

That is pure, unadulterated goodness. Paul adds to this truth with:

" He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

His gift to us was so extreme that everything else needed in this life, and throughout all eternity, was automatically included. Meditating on such truths should give us the courage and hope to approach life with certainty. It's not a certainty of knowing what will happen and when. It's a certainty that no matter what happens, we are held in His hand and are automatically positioned for forward motion and increase.
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