

Dutch Sheets: 'You Can Die From Sorrow!'

In a study reported in the May 2010 issue of *Atherosclerosis*, participants who were persistently depressed had a twofold increased risk of coronary atherosclerosis. This is the same magnitude of increased risk that one sees in comparing a pack-a-day smoker to a nonsmoker.

Incredible. Hopelessness, if not checked, is a death sentence.

A recent study in the *British Medical Journal* confirms this, reporting that people with serious depression were two-thirds more likely to die prematurely. Even those with mild depression had a 16 percent higher risk of dying compared to individuals who were distress free. You can die from sorrow!

God told us of this a long time ago. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (NASB). Most of us think of our emotional or spiritual heart when we read this, and that is certainly appropriate. But science is now proving that the verse speaks true of our physical hearts as well. Hope deferred creates a diseased heart, both emotionally and physically. And with a diseased heart, no one can run life's race effectively.

What causes this condition described by the Scriptures as "hope deferred"? It's really very simple: unfulfilled or shattered hopes and dreams. Death, divorce, financial ruin, unanswered prayers, sickness—many things cause hope deferred.

Experiencing this condition doesn't make you bad, weak or unspiritual. No one makes it through life without suffering some level of this disease. Hope deferred is the common cold of the soul, except that this virus can kill. The symptoms of this illness appear in varying degrees and different forms, ranging from discouragement to depression, doubt to cynicism,

and grief to suicidal tendencies. The loss of hope produces resignation, fear, unbelief, loss of passion, retreat from life and a host of other heart disease maladies.

God wants to heal you of this heart disease!

Consider Abraham and Sarah. Their faith for a child was dead; they were cynical. But their story didn't end there. The God of resurrection stepped in. Listen to His final witness of a restored Abraham and Sarah, who broke through into faith and fulfillment, just as you are going to do: "In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, 'So shall your descendants be'" (Rom. 4:18). Also: "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised" (Heb. 11:11).

If Abraham and Sarah could move from such an extreme stage of hope deferred to strong, vibrant faith, you can as well. "In hope against hope" is a powerful phrase. It means that in the face of absolute hopelessness, Abraham hoped anyway.

Then there was Moses, the heart-diseased cynic who refused to believe God could ever use him again. Who can blame him? After all, 40 years of failure and isolation is a lot of hope deferred! Consider his response to God's commission to lead Israel out of Egypt: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11)

The account in Exodus 3-4 makes it clear that Moses had completely run out of hope. His tank was empty, and he was past believing. Any faith he had for fulfilling his destiny and helping his fellow Israelites had been dead for a long time. But the God who brings hope to the hopeless re-entered his life through a burning bush, opened up his clogged arteries, gave him a good shot of adrenaline, and said, "Let's

go, Moses. I'm not finished with you." I'll say! Moses became perhaps the greatest leader the world has ever seen.

And God isn't finished with you, either. Your setback and the pain it has caused you is not the final verdict. God has another chapter for your story. Don't give up!

Dutch Sheets, author of *The Power of Hope*, is an internationally recognized teacher, conference speaker, and author. He is the executive director of Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas, Texas and has written more than twenty books, translated into over thirty languages. His first work, *Intercessory Prayer*, sold nearly a million copies and is being used to empower believers worldwide for passionate prayer and societal transformation. He and his wife, Ceci, make their home in the Dallas area.