

HOPE FOR THEN AND NOW

KEEPING THE HEART 5

Hope keeps the heart focused on God and His glory.



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Hope for Then and Now
Keeping the Heart 5
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Welcome to *Hope for Then and Now*

Fear is the first affection of the heart that we must get right. If we fear God, and nothing in this world, then all the other affections will fall into place accordingly. Fearing God leads to loving Him, and loving Him, we love our neighbors. Love is the greatest of the affections, in no small part because it brings so many other powerful affections in its train.

Thanksgiving is the most practical affection, both because it's the easiest to practice and because, by practicing it, we train our hearts for the right use of all affections.

Next comes hope, which is the focusing affection. Hope derives from fearing and loving God, and from giving Him increasing thanks, praise, and obedience. We hope when we fix our gaze on the Lord, to know Him in His glory, both in the coming Day of glory, and in each day of our lives. Many things would distract us from hoping in the Lord, and we must recognize these, but only as gifts of God, and not as objects of hope in themselves.

Hoping in God and His glory exerts a powerful and observable impact on our lives.

Hope for Then and Now is Part 5 of a multi-part study on the heart, the affections, and how we can exercise diligence in making sure that what issues from our hearts is what the Lord by His Spirit intends.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Living Hope

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29.11

Affections

We are investigating the primary affections that harbor in our heart, so that by understanding and nurturing them, we may keep our hearts with all diligence, so that they will beat with the heart of God.

Thus far we have seen that *fear* is the first affection to be cultivated. When we fear God, and not men, then we will tune all other aspects of our soul and life to hear His Word, obey and serve Him, for we know Him to be sovereign, powerful, and intent on shaping us for righteousness, even if He must discipline us from time to time.

As we fear and obey God, we find Him to be gracious and lavish in His goodness, which leads us to *love* Him and to *give thanks* for His mercy and many gifts. Love is the *greatest* of all affections, because it brings with it so many others, such as patience, kindness, compassion, and forbearance. Thanksgiving is the *most practical* affection, since it is easy to put into practice by giving thanks in all things, and because, as we do so, we exercise those faith muscles needed for nurturing all our affections as God intends.

We must guard our heart against mere self-love, which we do by growing in the mind of Christ and the knowledge of God, and by practicing love for our neighbors according to the teaching of God’s Word. This is the life of redemption to which we have been called in Jesus Christ; and with it comes the hope of glory for all who sincerely believe in and follow the Lord.

The focusing affection

The simple fact, as every believer will understand, is that finite, sinful people are neither smart enough, selfless enough, nor strong enough to overcome the downward pull of self-interest and self-preservation that characterizes all of us some of the time, and many of us most of it. We need a power from beyond ourselves that can re-energize our vision, revive our hearts, rebuild our consciences, and renew our strength so that we are able to lay hold on the precious and magnificent promises of God in ways that lead to real hope and meaningful change.

Hope is that disposition of the soul which looks beyond present circumstances – whether favorable or otherwise – and strains toward a higher, more desirable, and more glorious objective which lies in the future. God has prepared a plan for us which He promises will bring us a future and a hope. It is the affection which enables us to *focus* all the priorities of our lives toward a certain outcome, which may be realized truly now, but only fully beyond time.

Paul says that, because we take our stand in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we may exult in the “hope of the glory” (Rom. 5.1, 2). Peter further clarifies Paul’s meaning in 1 Peter 1.3-5: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Let’s take a closer look at this passage.

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What Paul refers to as the hope of glory, Peter calls a “living hope.” It is this hope to which we have been born again through Jesus Christ. But what is it? What is this “hope of glory,” this “living hope” which can focus our hearts and lives in all aspects of our Kingdom-and-glory calling?

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Peter explains that it is a heavenly inheritance which does not fade. This inheritance is God and His glory, and the joy and pleasure which can be known in Him (cf. P. 16). God Himself is our exceeding reward and inheritance (Ex. 15); eternal life consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ (Jn. 17.3). This great hope and inheritance is being prepared for us even now, so that we shall be able to enjoy it fully and forever in the new heavens and new earth to come. God keeps and sustains us to the day when we shall at last realize this blessed hope. And though for now we must know trials and difficulties (1 Pet. 1.6ff), still, we may increasingly realize and enjoy this great salvation in these last days, if we will persevere in our Kingdom-and-glory calling (cf. 2 Pet. 1.5-11).

The Christian's hope is the hope of glory, of realizing the inheritance God has prepared for us by welcoming us into His presence, now and forever. Nothing compares with this hope. As we begin to glimpse it, nothing can eclipse or obscure it, and everything in our lives finds its proper orientation as we strive to attain this hope, this great salvation which is ours by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

This living hope must be our constant guide (1 Pet. 1.13-16), with the result that we increase in holiness, and holiness becomes the defining attribute our time during these last days. When all our hopes and aspirations are focused on knowing the Lord, growing in Him, and realizing more of His presence, promise, and power, everything else in our lives will line up with God's holy purposes for our blessing and His glory.

For reflection

1. What is hope? How does it function in people's lives?
2. What kinds of things do people hope for in our day? That is, what are they striving, working, and longing to realize? Are such hopes reliable? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to hope "in the glory of God"? Why is this a "living hope"? If everything in your life were focused on this hope, how would this affect your attitude toward everyday life?

Next steps – Preparation: Go before the Lord in prayer, and ask Him to reveal the things you hope for in this life. That is, ask Him to show you plainly everything you're longing for and striving after, which you think is going to make you happy and fulfilled. How do these compare with the living hope of knowing Him?

2 To Know God

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever... Romans 1.18, 25

Two kinds of people

The Bible teaches that people fall into one of two camps. As we have seen there are those who, by faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, have entered the Kingdom of God and bask in the light of His truth. Having been redeemed by grace through faith, they stand in the living hope of knowing God in His glory. Hungry for God, they find through Jesus the truth that sets them free and equips them for good works of love for God and their neighbors.

On the other hand, there are those who, because they suppress the truth and prefer to believe the lie of their own presumed autonomy, live in the darkness of unbelief and sin. They do not give thanks to God for all His many benefits, so they turn from Him to self and things, and become darkened in their understanding and ignorant of their real purpose in life. They cling to false hopes, and seek only those changes that promise to improve their material wellbeing.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful, through the righteousness of Christ, to help those who are captive to the lie break free from its grip into the glorious truth of God and the living hope of knowing Him, now and forever. They who have come to know the living hope of the glory of God will not allow lesser hopes to divert or distract from their Kingdom-and-glory calling in Jesus Christ. Instead, they devote themselves to bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1; cf. 1 Pet. 1.13-17).

False hopes

Peter explains how this living hope affects the way we conduct our lives (1 Pet. 1.13-17). When we are fixed on the living hope which is ours in Jesus Christ, we will get our minds in gear for a lifetime of seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (v. 13). We'll take seriously our calling to glorify God in every area of our lives, expecting to know a measure of God's glory now, which only enhances our longing for more of it in the days to come. We will not allow the lusts of the flesh and the love of this world to cause us to fix our hope on things, people, or circumstances, for we know that these, as important as they can be, are no solid place to stand for the hope that springs eternal in our hearts (v. 14). The hope we cherish leads us to seek greater knowledge of the Lord Who gives us such hope, as we grow through His Word and Spirit to refract His character and holiness into the world (v. 15).

In the *fear* of God (v. 17), as we resist the tendency to *love* self more than God, we can keep the things and circumstances of our lives from becoming idols. We do not trust in these, but receive them with *thanksgiving* as gifts from the Lord, and use them as resources for seeking and advancing His rule of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit.

As we grow in the knowledge of *God* the *false gods* of this secular age will hold less and less allure. For the *living hope* that is growing in our hearts enables us to know joy, satisfaction, and increasing fullness of salvation as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.10-18).

Know the Lord!

God is working overtime to make Himself known to people. As Paul writes, God is revealing Himself in all the things He has made (Rom. 1.19), as well as in His Word (2 Tim. 3.15-17). In the blindness of their sin and the foolishness of their presumed autonomy, many people simply will not open their minds and hearts to what God is revealing. Instead, they look to other explanations for the origin and nature of things, the nature

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of truth, and the meaning of their lives, embracing evolution, relativism, pragmatism, and any number of equally futile notions as they suppress the truth of God. Rejecting the knowledge of God, they place their hope in created things, and make idols out of the fleeting, crumbling things and circumstances of this world. Such hope slips away with shifting circumstances and unforeseen eventualities, or leaves people asking at the end of their quest, “Is that all there is?”

But the salvation and living hope that come through the righteousness of Jesus Christ liberate people to embrace the truth of God, and through that truth, to know the Lord in personal, intimate, transforming ways. This is not a condition to which people arrive because they’re so clever or smart. The Gospel is power, real power, power to break through the darkness of sin, overcome the bondage of unbelief, and shatter the shackles of the lie, so that people may be born again to the living hope that God grants them by His mercy and grace.

And having come to such a hope, we grow in it as we increase in the knowledge of God, seeking out as much as we can of His revelation, seeing Him in all His exalted beauty, goodness, and truth, and bringing all our other hopes into line with the living hope of knowing God Himself – now, truly and joyfully, but then, in the fullness of unfathomable joy and pleasure.

For reflection

1. How should our living hope help us to organize goals and priorities for the here and now?
2. Can we expect this living hope to be the *guiding* and *focusing* hope of our lives apart from growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? Explain.
3. How can Christians encourage one another to stand more squarely and consistently in this living hope of glory?

Next steps – Transformation: Spend some time meditating on Jesus Christ, exalted in glory. How do you expect to be transformed into that image today (2 Cor. 3.12-18)?

3 Looking Up

*The LORD said to my Lord:
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”* Psalm 110.1

The ascension of Christ

We will not make much progress in our living hope until we begin to concentrate our *minds* and *hearts* on the One in Whom that hope coheres – our Lord Jesus Christ. I suspect that when most Christians think about Jesus, some image from the period of His incarnation comes to mind. Looking back on Him then, we imagine His tenderness, compassion, kindness, and love, and want to emulate that in our own lives.

It’s good for us to do this. Looking *back* at Jesus can help us to lay hold on our living hope, so that He increases and we decrease in every area of life.

But looking *back* at Jesus is only one of three “looks” we must sustain if we are to be captivated by our living hope and focused on the Lord in every area of our lives. In addition to looking *back*, we need to learn to look *up* and *ahead* if we want to gain the full scope of the hope in which we stand.

The doctrine of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is one of the most overlooked teachings of the Christian Church in our day. Having risen from the dead, Jesus was lifted to heaven as the apostles stood by, watching Him ascend (Acts 1.9). Luke leaves us, like the apostles, looking into the heavens, staring at the cloud which took Jesus out of their sight, scratching our heads and wondering what happens next.

Beyond that lifting cloud a good deal more went on, and we can learn about the details of Christ’s ascension and enthronement by looking into the book of Psalms. From what we see there, the exaltation of Christ to His throne of glory is much more important than most of us perhaps tend to think.

The order of the exaltation

Let’s note first the *order of events* surrounding the ascension of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is foretold in Psalm 16.10, as Peter indicated (Acts 2.27-31), thus setting the stage for the events of the Ascension.

First, there is *Jesus’ appearing in the courts of heaven*: “God has gone up with a shout, The Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!” (Ps. 47.5, 6) When Jesus emerged from that cloud into the unseen realm of God, the angels, and the departed saints, a great victory shout arose spontaneously, as all rose and applauded and sang and hurrahed to welcome their triumphant King.

Next comes the *invitation of the Father*: “Sit at My right hand” (Ps. 110.1). This word from the Father, welcoming His Son home and His King into glory, was to acknowledge that He had completed His work on earth, and now He was ready to continue His work from heaven.

At this the Father solemnly *declared the purpose of Christ’s enthronement*: “You are My Son... Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations *for* Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession” (Ps. 2.8). Lest there be any misunderstanding on the part of any creature, Jesus was now appointed to rule not only in heaven, but throughout the creation, over every creature and every nation. His mandate, seated at the Father’s right hand, is to establish His rule to the very ends of the earth and, by extension, throughout the vast cosmos.

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With that, Jesus was *anointed with the oil of gladness and given the scepter of uprightness* with which to rule and advance His Kingdom (cf. Ps. 45.2, 6). The Kingdom of Jesus Christ is a Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, which He is working to advance as He rides out among His people and equips them for Kingdom work (Ps. 45.3-6, cf. Rom. 14.17, 18). From His throne in glory, Jesus the all-glorious and all-sovereign One is filling the world with Himself, through those He has called into His living hope (Eph. 1.15-23; 4.8-10).

Unseen, but real

All this happened somehow, by some means, in the realm of unseen beings – God, angels, departed saints. Yet it’s very real; indeed, it is the ground for all our hope as Christians. The psalmists use rich metaphors and vivid language to describe the splendors and glories of the exalted Christ (cf. Pss. 90, 93), but these are but feeble tools for communicating the richness and wonder of that unseen realm, and cannot really convey to us the utter magnificence and overwhelming power of the rule of King Jesus.

Still, it’s what we’re encouraged to “see”, if only with the eye of faith. And we are called to see it, to set our minds, as Paul puts it, on these things above, where Jesus is seated in heavenly places, and from where He is continuing His great work of making all things new (Col. 3.1-3). The more clearly we see these things, and the more firmly we believe them, the greater will be our hope, and the more will appear in our lives of the holy evidence of the unseen, but very real power, of the risen and reigning Christ (Heb. 11.1).

For reflection

1. What’s the difference between something being “unseen” and “unreal”? Can “unseen things” be real enough to make a difference in our world? Explain.
2. In your own words, describe the scene in heaven when Jesus emerged from the cloud that lifted Him up from the apostles. How often do you contemplate this scene? Does this matter for our faith? Why or why not? What does it suggest about the nature of Christ’s rule (Kingdom)?
3. How would you counsel a new believer to begin practicing Colossians 3.1-3?

Next steps - Preparation: Take time today to contemplate Jesus risen in glory, using the psalms mentioned in this article. Focus on the glorious image of King Jesus revealed there. Then practice “looking up” like this during some part of every day.

4 Looking Ahead

*The LORD said to my Lord:
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”* Psalm 110.1

A continuing struggle

Our living hope is strengthened as we look *back* at Jesus, during the time of His incarnation, and look *up* at Him, exalted in glory. But we also need to look *ahead* to see what we expect Jesus to be doing now, in these last days, as we await the full revelation of our living hope.

And for this, we will look further at Psalm 110. Here we find an overview of the work of King Jesus as He rules from the right hand of God, and this can help us in thinking about what lies ahead for us as we continue to seek His Kingdom and righteousness.

From His place at the right hand of God, Jesus extends His scepter of righteousness (Ps. 45.6), declaring His intention of furthering the eternal decree of God unto the restoration of the world for God’s pleasure and glory (v. 2). He is commanded to rule even in the midst of His enemies, to take the fight, as it were, to the very gates of those who oppose Him (v. 2).

Jesus carries on this struggle through His people (v. 3), who offer themselves freely to Him, day by day, to be used for His purposes in seeking the progress of His rule on the ground as it is in heaven. The people who know their King go forth, clothed in the righteousness of God’s Law (v. 3), and in the power of His Spirit (v. 3), to bring the refreshing and renewing grace and truth of Christ to the whole world (v. 3).

Meanwhile, our King intercedes for us, representing our interests according to the promises of God in line with His eternal decree (v. 4).

An advancing Kingdom

The King brings His rule to the kings of the earth, as His people wield the Sword of the Spirit, bringing the light of truth and the weight of judgment against every person on earth (vv. 5, 6; cf. Ps. 149.6-9). The Kingdom of God grows like a vast mountain (Dan. 2.44, 45), filling the world with the presence and fragrance of Jesus, increasing in righteousness without end (Is. 9.6, 7), and bringing the Good News of living hope to the ends of the earth.

In the process, Jesus overthrows the work of the devil and brings the light of truth into the darkness of unbelief (1 Jn. 2.8). Even those who do not believe in Him, indeed, even those who despise Him, will find it to be in their best interest to conform to His advancing reign and glory, though their eternal disposition will not be altered by such half-hearted works of feigned obedience (Ps. 66.3; 81.15).

The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, abounding in living hope and proclaiming that hope to the world, grows and increases in presence, power, and influence in these last days, as people from every nation, tribe, and tongue “stream up” to the mountain of the Lord’s house, seeking the hope they see in us, and to which we bear ready witness (Mic. 4.1-8; 1 Pet. 3.13-15).

When all is done and every enemy has been subdued, King Jesus will refresh Himself with His people besides the waters of life, and lift up His head and theirs in joy (Ps. 110.6, 7; cf. Rev. 21).

The nature of the struggle

In the book of Psalms the Lord’s struggle against the rebellious people of the earth is described in military

terms. This was necessary for the time in which these psalms were given, because the Spirit of God had not yet been given, and military conquest was the only means for subduing those who opposed the Lord and His people.

But we must read these psalms more broadly, in the light of the Spirit's coming and the spiritual warfare in which we are incessantly engaged (Eph. 6.10-20). How, in that light, does God the Father subdue the enemies of King Jesus, and what is our part in this struggle?

First, the Lord in the psalms calls us to *prayer* against the wickedness and rebellion of the enemies of our King (cf. Pss. 3, 72, 137, etc.). Second, the Lord uses *His Word* to shield His people from the lies of an unbelieving age (Ps. 12) and to fit them with wisdom and understanding (Pss. 19, 119). Third, Christ our King *deploys His angels* to act on behalf of His people as they struggle for the progress of His rule (Pss. 35, 91).

The Lord overcomes His enemies by converting many of them so that they come to trust in Him (Ps. 107) and by shaming others so that, if nothing else, they will seek Him (Ps. 83.16). Sometimes, when His people gain a controlling interest in the affairs of men and nations, King Jesus subdues His foes by persuading them to "go along" with the divine economy, as in their own best interests, though they yet harbor hatred of Him in their hearts (Ps. 81.15).

Make no mistake about it: The enemies of Christ are fleeing before Him in this Kingdom age (Ps. 48.4-8). The Light of Truth has dawned, and the darkness is being driven back increasingly, over all the earth (1 Jn. 2.8). It is part of our living hope to see *ahead* to the progress of Christ's Kingdom on earth, culminating in His glorious return, and in our being taken home with Him to the new heavens and new earth.

For reflection

1. Putting Christ's enemies under His feet doesn't necessarily mean destroying them. Meditate on Romans 5.10. How did Christ put *you* under His feet?
2. Read Psalm 107. With which aspects of these various "testimonies" can you identify? Why?
3. Meditate on 1 Peter 3.15. What is the believer's role in being used of King Jesus to put His enemies under His feet? How does this work out in your own life?

Next steps – Preparation: What evidence do you see that God is putting the enemies of Christ under His feet? How is He doing this in your life?

5 Antidote to Depression

*Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.
O my God, my soul is cast down within me;
Therefore I will remember You...* Psalm 42.5, 6

Looking in

The living hope that finds us standing in and longing for the glory of God comes from looking back, up, and ahead to our Lord Jesus Christ – all that He is, has done, is doing, and will do to bring glory to God, and us into God's presence.

As long as we are *focused* on Jesus, our hope can grow, and be truly lively, so that it fills us with joy, courage, faith, and readiness to obey the Lord.

The problem, of course, is that it can be difficult to continue focusing on *unseen things*, like Jesus exalted in glory, or His Kingdom-advancing work in the world. Too often what happens is, like Peter, walking on the water, we become distracted by things that seem new and unfamiliar, or that threaten us in some way, and we take our eyes off Jesus and focus our hope on circumstances and conditions. It doesn't take long for us to figure out, if only at the unconscious level, that we cannot control our circumstances, are not sufficient for everything that comes at us every day, and are therefore always at the point of losing our hope, our joy, and our peace.

That's when we start to feel depressed. Instead of looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12.1, 2), we look to our circumstances, and our own limited resources, and we conclude that, well, we're not going to make it. Or at least, we're not going to be as happy and fulfilled as we'd *hoped*, given the uncertainty of our circumstances.

Soul check

Whenever you begin to feel "cast down" in your soul – your heart sinks, you can only think dark and negative thoughts, and you feel like your inner person is shutting down – it's because you've lost your focus. You have let your concentration drift from our unchanging, indestructible King, to your changeable, uncertain, and potentially threatening circumstances. Instead of being buoyed by the strong weight of glory, emanating from the face of Jesus, your soul sinks under the weight of uncertainty, deriving from your circumstances.

What do you do then?

Follow the counsel of the psalmists: "Hope in God!" The reason you are feeling *cast down* in your soul is that you have not continued *looking up and ahead* at the Lord. The antidote to your rising depression is to renew your hope in the Lord.

Getting back to hope

So how can you do that? The sons of Korah, who wrote Psalm 42, can guide us here. First, you need to *recognize that you're out of focus*, and, if necessary, chastise yourself for allowing your focus to drift (v. 5). It doesn't really matter *why* your soul is cast down. Whatever may be threatening your peace or obscuring your living hope, it's neither stronger nor greater nor more durable than Jesus. It has simply diverted your attention from Him for now, and the first step to getting back on track is to acknowledge that by confessing your sin and turning back to the Lord.

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The quickest way to renew your hope in God is to *begin praising Him* (v. 5). Here there is a distinct advantage to being familiar with the psalms of praise to God, for you can call them to mind, or otherwise resort to them, to enumerate the many excellent virtues and magnificent powers of our Lord. To pray or sing through a psalm like Psalm 103, Psalm 104, or Psalm 136, can bring your focus back to the Lord with renewed vigor. Give praise to God for all the ways He is making Himself known to you in your immediate environment – creation, food, clothes, work, tools, home, family resources: all these are good gifts from our good God, and by praising Him for them, you remind yourself of His greatness, goodness, constant care, and love.

Third, call out to God to *let His face shine upon you again* (v. 5). There is help to be found in *seeing* the face of our Lord, like John did in Revelation 1. Focusing on the glory that is to be found in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ – His penetrating eyes, steady and loving gaze, truthful and grace-laced mouth, holy visage, and thorn-scarred brow – can renew your living hope, because it focuses you on the very *Source* of that hope (2 Cor. 4.6).

Finally, *recall the ways God has blessed and been good to you* – and to all His people – in times past (v. 6). Remember especially His great work of redemption in Jesus Christ. Sing the Gospel to yourself. Use a psalm to review your own salvation. List the many ways God has blessed and cared for His people in the past, and for you as one of His people, then praise Him for being the God Who never changes and Who will never fail us nor forsake us.

Your circumstances may not change as you turn from them to hope in God, but if you can be renewed in your living hope, they won't matter. At least, they won't matter as much as they did, because you will have the focus of your heart renewed on the living hope of the glory of God, and you'll be able to say, "It is well with my soul."

For reflection

1. What kinds of things typically tend to cause you to get a little "down"? Why?
2. Meditate on Hebrews 12.1, 2. How did Jesus deal with the adverse circumstances of the cross? How does the writer counsel us to "run our race" with all its difficulties and diversions? How can we do that?
3. How can Christians encourage one another to hope in God whenever we're feeling a bit low?

Next steps – Transformation: Recall our teaching on giving thanks in everything. Can you see now why mastering the discipline of thanksgiving helps us in nurturing right affections, such as hope? Share this observation with a Christian friend.

6 Hope Observed

And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...
1 Peter 3.13-15

Hope made visible

We all know people who exude hope. They're always optimistic, forward-looking, full of energy, and beaming with excitement. Shouldn't we expect the living hope of the glory of God to have such effects on us? The Apostle Peter certainly did. As we nurture hope as the *focusing* affection of our souls, our minds will be saturated with the vision of Christ, exalted, advancing His Kingdom, and coming again in glory. Our consciences will naturally default to the priorities that line up with our Kingdom-and-glory calling. And, by our words and deeds, we will demonstrate in every aspect of our lives the real and living hope that focus us in whole and part, regardless of the circumstances of our lives.

One of the great mysteries of the Christian life is that we can know blessings from God that override and overcome the sorrows and sufferings we may experience in this life. It's not clear how that happens, but, when we are in the blessing of God, focusing on our living hope, we know peace, joy, contentment, confidence, and strength, regardless of how difficult, challenging, or painful our temporal circumstances may be.

There is power in a life well lived. The Christian's hope is to enjoy God in His glory and to show that glory to the watching world in every aspect of our lives (Rom. 5.1, 2; Hab. 2.14; 1 Cor. 10.31). When we are truly living in this hope – engaging with God in His glory and knowing the joy and power of His transforming Word and Spirit (2 Cor. 3.12-18) – our lives will show the blessings of God, even in the midst of difficulties and trials.

This is the result of looking *back* to Jesus, *up* to our exalted King, and *ahead* to His blessings and Kingdom progress, as we stand squarely in the living hope of His glory. People notice when we live this way, and some will want to know how it is possible for us to have such peace, joy, and hope. We must be ready with an answer.

That will take the form of an explanation for why we are the way we are – what we believe, how God has worked in our lives, and why our hope has such sustaining power to bless. We must be gentle and respectful as we answer, not overbearing, preachy, or putting others down. By giving our answer we may suffer even more. So be it; the joy that comes from our living hope will flow just that much more to us and through us.

Reason to hope

Our hope is in Jesus Christ, and that hope fills us with confidence, joy, and Good News for the world. What Jesus has done for us is twofold. First, He fulfilled all the righteous requirements of God to live eternally in His presence and glory. Thus He opened *through His own life* a way for us to come to God as well. Second, Jesus endured the greatest suffering any man could ever know, bearing our sins in His own body on the cross, so that we might be forgiven and saved.

And what Jesus is doing for us now, having risen from the dead, is reigning at the Father's right hand so that we might know joy and pleasure in Him, and press on in good works and witness. This is the life of holiness and blessedness that comes from focusing on our living hope.

The way into such blessedness is through faith and obedience, beginning with rejoicing and thanksgiving. As

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we stand in hope of the glory of God, and rein in the sinful tendencies of our flesh, we bring good and peace into the lives of those around us, like the refreshing dew of the morning. King Jesus sees as we serve Him thus; He hears our prayers when we cry out to Him for mercy and grace in our times of need, and He intercedes for us with the Father. He will never fail nor forsake us. He will bring His wondrous blessings to us, even though others may persist in wishing or doing us ill.

For our parts, we must be zealous for what is good, focusing on our living hope and letting the joy in our hearts become the joy we live and proclaim.

A hope and a commission

Peter understood that Jesus has commissioned us first to *be* witnesses and then to *do* witnessing out of the context of a life well lived. When we focus on the living hope that is ours through Jesus Christ, we become transformed from within, in our hearts, minds, and consciences, so that the hope in our souls becomes the hope others see in us. And when that hope is powerfully visible, others may ask for an explanation of it. At that time, we must be ready as witnesses to proclaim the living hope of Jesus Christ.

God Himself is the power for our witness (Acts 1.8; Phil. 2.13), so we only need to concentrate on believing and obeying the Lord unto good works, regardless of the circumstances in our lives. If we will, open doors for bearing witness will be flinging wide before us every day. Our living hope provides the conduit for God's power to rise from within us, when the opportunity to give a reason for the hope that is within us comes precisely because people *see* what we *experience* in our living hope.

For reflection

1. How would you expect the living hope of God's glory to be manifest in your life?
2. How would you explain the reason for that hope to anyone who might ask?
3. What can you do to improve your focus on our living hope, and to make sure you're ready when the opportunity to give a witness arises?

For reflection – Preparation: Jot down a brief outline presentation of the reason for your living hope. Share this with another Christian, and ask his help in making your witness as clear as possible.

7 Hope to Encourage

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5.9-11

One-anothering

The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is a community of hope. We are one Body, comprised of many members, but we only have one Head and Lord and King. As we look together to Jesus, standing in His grace and focusing on the living hope of His glory, we become together a presence and force, greater in potential impact than any one of us could ever achieve on our own.

To encourage us in becoming this powerful presence in the world, the New Testament urges a variety of kinds of *one-anothering*, by which we build one another up in our hope and as the Body of the Lord.

The list is considerable: love one another; bear one another's burdens; teach and admonish one another; pray for one another; correct one another; help one another; comfort one another; stimulate one another to love and good works; and so forth. All this reaching out to one another, with the view to building each other up in the Lord, is simply a more corporate way that we demonstrate our living hope to the watching world.

Salvation bound and blessed

As Paul reminds us in our text, we are salvation bound, and salvation blessed. Regardless of how this old world comes to its end, or our lives in it, we know that Jesus Christ has secured our salvation, that He ever lives to intercede for us, is preparing a place for us in the glorious dwelling place of God, and will come again to raise our bodies, take us to Himself, and fete us forever around His eternal banquet table of glory. We *know* this, that we are *bound* for salvation, but, like Peter on the water, we can sometimes become distracted. And, when we are distracted, it can be hard to refocus on our living hope.

This is where we can help one another, by praying together and searching the Scriptures, to remember all that has been accomplished and is being prepared for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. We need our fellow believers if we are to grow in and keep focused on the coming hope of glory that Jesus is preparing for us.

But we are not only salvation *bound*, we are salvation *blessed* as well. We know, and expect to know even more, the *reality* of our living hope by all the ways the Lord blesses and uses us in the here and now. But sometimes we need the help of our fellow believers to remind us to count our blessings, or to count them for us. When we feel our souls cast down, and the hope within us is no longer so obvious, we need other believers to come alongside, as instruments of God's Holy Comforter, to set our hearts back on our living hope.

The practical benefits of living hope

The living hope into which we have been begotten by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is not just something to be enjoyed for ourselves. We hope in the glory of God – to be with Him forever, and to see and live for His glory day by day – and as we do so, our souls fill with peace, joy, and courage to live and bear witness for Christ.

But we also want to comfort and edify those who, like us, have a share in this living hope, and therefore should enjoy it more fully and advertise it more consistently to the world.

The word in our text rendered *comfort* can just as truly be translated *encourage*. To focus on our hope is to possess a great resource for *encouraging* – literally, building courage into – the hearts of all who share this hope. And as we are encouraged, we are also built-up in the Lord, and we become more like Him, both individually

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and in our communities. Thus the living hope in which we stand is magnified by our encouraging one another in the Body of Christ.

We are guarding our hearts with all diligence, therefore, when we keep our hope focused on that which does not change, on Him Who has accomplished our salvation, and Who will keep and preserve us to the Lord and in His glory forever.

Many false hopes will try to insinuate themselves into the driver's seat of our souls. In this materialistic age, we are continuously challenged to seek our happiness in things and circumstances, rather than in the Lord. At times, we will need the help of our brethren in Christ to keep focused on Him, His glory, His rule, and His return. If we can stay focused individually on the living hope we have in Jesus Christ, we will be ready, when needed, to help our fellow believers recover that focus, and know the peace that passes understanding and the hope that nothing can overthrow.

For reflection

1. What encourages you? What does it mean to encourage another person? How can our living hope serve as a source of encouragement for our fellow believers?
2. Suggest some ways church members might consistently encourage one another to keep focused on our living hope.
3. Explain the relationship between fearing God, loving God and neighbors, giving thanks, and living in hope. Why are these affections so important in watching our hearts with all diligence?

Next steps – Demonstration: Whom can you encourage in our living hope today? How? By what means? Make sure to do so as often as you can.

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Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What is our living hope? Why is it *living*? How does it function as *hope*?
2. What kinds of things can distract us from our living hope? Why should we resist these? How can we do so?
3. How would you counsel a new believer to practice focusing on Jesus? Why should he or she do so?
4. How does focusing on our living hope help us in practical ways to fulfill our callings as followers of and witnesses to Jesus?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study about the Christian's hope? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Items for prayer:

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.