

**“A Hope That Does Not Disappoint”**

**Hope**

**How long can humans live without food? Most doctors agree that healthy humans can go up to eight weeks without food as long as they have water. [People have gone longer and been fine, and people have starved to death in less time. Being strong and in good physical shape can help you survive longer, but so does having extra body fat.]**

**How long can we live without water? Assuming you're in reasonable shape and in ideal conditions -- that is, not in the heat or cold and not exerting - a human can probably live for about 3 to 5 days without any water. Healthier humans can live another day or so longer.<sup>1</sup>**

**But how long can we live without hope?...not very long, actually. Even those who have access to water and food, but have no hope, may well die in a short period of time.**

**In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul wrote about “a hope that does not disappoint;” a hope that springs up even in the midst of suffering. How can that be? How can there be hope in the midst of suffering? From where does that hope come?**

**First, as Paul says, our hope comes through peace with God. And that's good because life is full of trouble and adversity, even harshness and evil. We wish it were different but the truth is we never know when life is going to throw us an unexpected curve. You've got life on cruise control, everything seems to be going great, then all of a sudden you find yourself in a sideways slide or a head-over-tail flip and you can't figure out how you got there. You're suddenly out of a job, or diagnosed with cancer, or there is the death of a loved one in your family, or an emergency swallows all the money you've saved for something really big. Some times life just reaches up and slaps you - and it always seems so unfair.**

**To be honest, there are times when we bring trouble on ourselves. Maybe we don't eat right or exercise and it contributes, if not causes, ill health. We don't pay attention when we're driving . . . or working . . . or we put our marriage and family on hold while we work like crazy at our job. We neglect those who need us, and those whom we need. All of these things are tragedies just waiting to happen.**

**Two little boys were sitting at the lunch table at school. The first little boy looked in his lunch box and with a forlorn look on his face said, “My mom made me broccoli sandwiches for lunch today. Yesterday she made me liver**

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<sup>1</sup>Charles W. Bryant, “How long can you go without food and water?” May 25, 2010, [health.howstuffworks.com/live-without-food-and-water.htm](http://health.howstuffworks.com/live-without-food-and-water.htm)

sandwiches. The day before it was peanut butter and sardines. I think she's still getting even with me for that lamp I broke."

Some people mistakenly think that's the way God acts, too. Some want hope in their life. Some want peace with God, but they're afraid God will just try to get even for all the stuff they've done. But the fact is: God doesn't want to get even. God wants to redeem.

Through Christ we can have peace with God. God, the Creator and Author of all that is, wants you to be part of His family, to have equal access to the promises of the kingdom through Christ Jesus....

Of course there are times when a faithful Christian may suffer just for being Christian. In May 1998, the Voice of the Martyrs staff carried relief aid to the Sudanese Christians in the village of Ayien. Abraham Yac Deng, a deacon at the Episcopal Church, was overjoyed by the missionaries' gift of 600 Bibles. As the pastor for some 400 people, he owned the only Bible in the congregation. With extreme care, he took it out of his shirt pocket and showed it to the staff. It was a well-worn Bible, with one page in particular that was especially worn away. It was chapter 8 of Romans. The words from verses 35-39 brought Abraham comfort:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

On June 3, 1998, National Islamic Front troops entered the town of Ayien. They assassinated Abraham Yac Deng and then burned the 600 Bibles that had just been delivered. But they could not extinguish the hope of Abraham Yac Deng. Wow! How could they have hope in such circumstances? Like Christians before them, Christians like Abraham Yac Deng, and others in southern Sudan, have a hope born in their relationship with God, through the grace of Jesus Christ. It is a hope that is foundational to all other hopes. It is a hope that does not fade even in circumstances which may grieve us of life itself.

Hope is born in our reconciliation to God, through Christ who paid the price of our sins. Because of that, we have hope of sharing in the glory of God. This is the hope that gives life to all our other hopes.

### **Rejoice in Sufferings**

St. Paul goes on to say, "...not only that, but we also rejoice in our sufferings ..." At first glance that's a strange if not stupid thing to say. In some Eastern

**religions suffering is considered illusory and therefore meaningless. A materialistic worldview sees suffering as a result of bad luck or someone's own fault; neither reason brings honor. In our day we strive mightily to avoid suffering: we work so that our kids will have it "better" than we did; we seek to ease the suffering of those who are critically injured or ill; and when someone dies, we often say, "At least he/she didn't suffer at the end." Suffering is to be avoided at all costs it seems. [Interestingly, that is a major part of Buddhism; to remove oneself from suffering by avoiding any passion, which causes suffering in this life.]**

**But just here the Christian faith stands apart. Christianity is the only life that gives value to suffering. Value, you say? How can there be value in suffering? Let me explain. Firstly, Christianity affirms that there is evil and suffering in life; we don't try to gloss over it or spiritualize it away. We also affirm the need to confront evil, destroy it in some cases to prevent wider suffering, and we seek to alleviate suffering according to our abilities. Yet there is more: Christians also look for opportunity to wrench some good out of evil and suffering. It was evil that crucified Jesus and he suffered for our sins. Yet out of that tragic event came our redemption. Redeeming value from evil and suffering, that's what God does. That is the context in which Paul can say, "...we rejoice also in our sufferings..."**

**God can redeem even our most difficult circumstances, and bring good out of our challenges and tragedies. This is no platitude but a truth of godly living. Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint.**

### **Hope and the Holy Spirit**

**Hope that comes from God does not disappoint because God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. So, how do you get this love of God in your heart? How does this kind of peace come into your life?**

**The answer is quite simple: a letter of recommendation... I read or heard about a pastor during the American Revolution who was a friend of George Washington. In this pastor's hometown there was a man who was one of those thorns in the flesh. This gentleman did just about everything he could think of to oppose and humiliate that pastor. One day the troublemaker was arrested for treason and sentenced to die.**

**You would think this pastor would have been relieved. But instead he traveled over seventy miles on foot to Philadelphia to plead with General Washington for the life of this traitor. After Washington heard his plea, he said, "No, I'm sorry. I cannot grant you the life of your friend."**

**"My friend!" exclaimed the old preacher. "He's the worst enemy I have."**

**Washington was astounded. "You've walked seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts it all in a different light. I'll grant your pardon." And he**

**did. That pastor walked home with the man who had deviled his life for so long. Only it was then a journey of friends, not enemies.**

**To have peace with God and receive His hope we don't need any other letter of recommendation but Christ's. His word and his nail-scarred hands are all we need to have peace with God. And the Holy Spirit is given us to remind us of this truth. Hope that comes through the Holy Spirit does not disappoint, although it may frighten at first. It comes as a reminder that we are forgiven, which, of course is a reminder of the burden we once bore, the burden of our sins. [The Spirit first reveals to us the truth about ourselves. When God wants to show you what human nature is like apart from Himself, He must show it to you in yourself. The Holy Spirit will teach you about your shortcomings, mistakes, misdeeds, confusion, your sins, and all the wounds inflicted on your soul by others, no matter how far in the past. When His Spirit is at work in you He will give you a vision of what you are apart from His grace. He guides you into all truth about yourself.]**

**[When the truth is known and surrendered, all those sins and wounds can be nailed up on the cross with Jesus, to die, and be gone when you arise with Him. The Spirit is here to remind us of that, and how relieved we were when the burden was lifted.]**

**But when the burden of sin is lifted hope arises. The Spirit reminds us that our sufferings are not the measure of our lives. We belong to God and nothing can separate us from His great love. This hope can endure anything.**

**Come to the Son. Pick up for the first time or renew your recommendation. Experience firsthand, the hope that does not disappoint.**