

Theology: Hope

Hope

"I hope I pass my driving test."

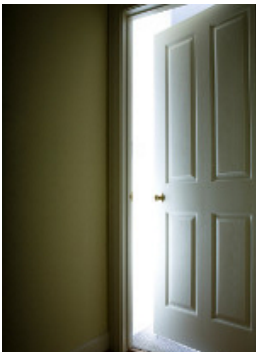
"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

"We need sources of hope in troubled times."

"He doesn't have a hope of succeeding."

Although often tempted to despair by the state of the world, the human heart insists on hoping for something better. However, many of us tend to use the word *hope* to express uncertainty or an optimism that has, at best, a weak foundation: "I hope it is sunny tomorrow," we say, with no confidence about the weather. We also tend to express hope as a feeling, a sense of cheery optimism that things will improve: "I hope my team wins the trophy this year."

Look at the following pictures.



What do they communicate about hope?

What way of living, thinking, and feeling do they suggest?

Christian hope is not the same as optimism. It is about learning to place a growing confidence in God, who does not fail and who keeps his promises. God loves us, has made himself known to us, and has promised that his purposes for us will not fail; rather than being the strength of our own faith at any given moment, these are the grounds for Christian hope. Because our hope is founded on God and not on human achievement or feelings, we do not have to *feel* a sense of optimism or rely on things going well to have hope. Hope often is what keeps us going in difficult situations. It is closely linked to perseverance, for without hope we despair and give up.

In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians see God's triumph over sin and death. Although evil is still present and active, its ultimate defeat is sure. One day this world will be made anew, without all the evil that currently mars it. One day there will be no death, sorrow, or pain; sin and death do not have the last word. This forms the focal point of the larger biblical story of God's faithfulness to his people and his ongoing work of bringing life and renewal into the world, until that time when all things are made new.

The Bible sees hope as living the future now: living, here and now, the values and relationships of the kingdom of heaven and becoming agents of change, bringing hope to the world around us. Christianity is about living a way of life that testifies that good is stronger than evil, that love is stronger than hate, and that life is stronger than death.

Hope in God is not the only aspect of Christian hope; we also have personal hopes for the future. Society often encourages an attitudes of "Wish hard enough, and it will happen" or "Follow your dream." This usually is all about the hopes and dreams of the individual. In contrast, our Christian hope is communal and provides an undergirding framework for the particular directions that our individual lives take. Our individual ambitions might be disappointed or redirected, but Christian hope in God's renewal of us and of the world remains as the larger backdrop. At the same time, this larger Christian hope can begin to shape the ways we imagine our own individual futures and the things we hope for others. It can affect the things we desire and pursue and the outcomes we think possible. Our hopes for our future and for the future of those around us, as well as our sense of what we might do to bring them to fruition, are then imagined within a relationship with God and with others.

In community we can support each other as we seek to let Christian hope shape our ideals and our actions. In community we practice forgiveness when we fall short and take steps that lead to change and growth. This is true also of the school community. The ways in which we speak about the future of our society or about the futures of individual students will communicate something about the shape of our own hope. The ways in which we respond to student failures, whether they are behavioral, moral, or academic, will communicate (or fail to communicate) a sense of hope. The things that students learn in school about what is true and how the world works will inform their own sense of hope, positively or negatively.

