

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Have you ever felt like you were in a hopeless situation? Perhaps a better question isn't "have you" but rather, "When have you?" I'd like to mention a few life situations that can cause us to lose hope. These are serious circumstances that knock us in the gut, slam us to the ground and make wonder if we will be able to get up. The examples are not made up. I'm going to give you examples of actual situations that are going on in the lives of our members right now. But I'm not going to name names, and I'll keep things general enough that we won't put anyone on the spot. And in all the examples I'm going to give, there is more than one member dealing with this... so if you think I'm talking about you, I probably am. But I'm probably talking about one or two or ten others too!

Circumstances that cause you to lose hope:

- **Struggling with a habitual sin.** That sin you keep committing could be anything: Internet pornography, taking things from work, gossiping, intimate relations outside of marriage, unfaithfulness to your spouse, cheating. You try not to do it, but you fall back into it. Every time you're conscience troubles you greatly, but you do it again. You lose hope as you see yourself as weak, dirty, or a failure as a child of God.
- **The death of a loved one.** Someone you care about deeply has died. You know you won't talk to them on this earth ever again. You miss them deeply. There's an ache... a hole... in your heart.
- **Relationships** can be a cause for lost hope. Strained marriages. Children who are rebellious and disrespectful. Some think: "I don't have any real friends. No one really cares about me." Maybe a string of bad relationships has really robbed you of hope.
- **Pain or chronic sickness:** When we don't feel good, it's easy to lose hope.
- **Lost job and/or economic challenges.** Americans so much equate their identity with their employment and possessions that if you lose either, it can be a blow that causes you to lose hope.
- **Mid-life crisis:** They don't always happen at mid-life, but the crisis is this: what have I done with my life? In all the years I've been around on this planet, what have I made of myself? Who am I? Is this really all there is to life? Does my life need a drastic course change?

Those are all serious circumstances that knock you off your feet. Did any of them resonate with you? Or are there other circumstances that are sapping away hope and leaving you scared? Let's look to the Bible for hope. Now you're sitting there thinking, "Now Pastor will tell me some Bible passage or story that's going to make it sound all easy and simplistic. But ultimately it's not going to work for me. I'll still feel hopeless. I'm hopeless in my hopelessness."

Would it surprise you to know that the Bible is full of examples of believers who felt hopeless? I find this surprising! If I was writing a something and claimed it was from God, I would only write about success stories, and things always turning out well. Yet the Bible doesn't do that at all. Let's look at a few examples. Our main text today is Job 7, but I want to bring up several examples from Scripture to let you know that if you feel hopeless, you are not alone in

that feeling. You will be surprised at how many great people of faith had times where they lost all hope. Listen to Job here. (Context of what he lost.)

**Job 7:1-7 “Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. [In addition to losing everything, Job also lost his health. He had very painful sores all over his body. They kept him from sleeping. They made him restless all night long. Have you ever had a sleepless night due to pain, or conscience, or burdens? It’s a unique torture. This led Job to say: “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.”**

In my sermons I don’t typically quote a lot of Bible passages. My reason for that is that I want to focus on the particular text before us so that we can learn one thing well. Throwing out a shotgun blast of passages doesn’t really help us remember. But today I’m going to do exactly that. The Psalms are full of examples of the writer feeling hopeless. I’m going to shoot a bunch of passages at you, knowing you might not remember any one of them. But I think you will be left with a strong impression: You are not alone in feeling hopeless. See if you can associate with the feeling being expressed here:

Psalm 13:1-2 How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Psalm 77:4-9 You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired: “Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”

Psalm 89:46-49 How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? Remember how fleeting is my life. For what futility you have created all men! What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave? O Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?

Psalm 6:1-7 O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faint; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long? Turn, O Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love. No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave? I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes.

Psalms 38:1-18 O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes. My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away.... I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth; I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply.... I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me.

And how about all the great heroes of faith who went through challenging times and experienced feelings of hopelessness? In addition to Job, there is **Abraham** (who once felt that his and Sarah's aging bodies could never produce a son, even though God promised.) **Moses**: How hopeless must he have felt during the 40 years in Midian, isolated from his people and culture, probably feeling his life was a total waste... until the Lord called him from a burning bush. **Joseph**: I wonder how hopeless he felt in the bottom of a cistern... sold into slavery by his brothers... sitting a couple years in an Egyptian prison, etc. **David**: When pursued relentlessly by Saul, every day his life on the line. **Paul**: on numerous occasions, shipwrecked, in prison, stoned almost to death, beaten, etc.

We don't highlight such verses and stories often, do we? When we think of Job, don't we often quote his famous line: "**Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised**" (Job 1:21). We use such passages to almost lay a guilt trip on those who feel hopeless. Yet read through the whole book of Job and you find a believer who struggled mightily at times with feeling of hopelessness. It's too bad we gloss over those areas of Scripture. Maybe this is why you feel like a horrible believer when you feel hopeless. Believers have always gone through such times. You are not alone! There is no shame in feeling this way. Now let's see where we can find hope when we've lost it.

If "misery loves company" then maybe what I've said so far gave you a little comfort: you're not suffering alone. But that doesn't give much consolation, does it? So let's get on to the real comfort and hope Scripture gives us: **As hopeless as you feel, you are not completely hopeless.** You have not lost all hope. How do I know? Because you are here. Somewhere inside you know that at least here, hope is to be found. And you're right. All the examples above of people feeling hopeless: They're crying out to God to express these things to him! As hopeless as they felt, they still recognized the resolution would have to come from God.

**Why do situations happen that make us feel hopeless?** Honestly, there may be as many specific reasons as their people and circumstances. But in general, the Bible does tell us that bad things happen to remind us that God has marked us and this world "Perishable." We tend to think they are not. This world is messed up. It's broken. We are messed up. We are broken. This is why trials and problems come into our lives. More than anything, God wants us to recognize, our help...our hope...will not come from this world. It can't ultimately come from other people (although they can help.) And most importantly, our hope and our help will not and cannot come from within ourselves. And isn't that the real nature of our hopelessness? We

finally recognize that if all I have is my own strength, my own intellect, my own resources... I'm doomed. I can't do it!

This was the point to which God led Job... and Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David, Paul and... yes, you too. In his love and in his mercy, God teaches us that until we despair of the fake power source and hope center (self), we will never turn to the true power source and hope center (God.) God is gracious enough to help us identify the things we have made our gods by taking them away from us. He smashes our idols so he can provide what is needed. He is graciously leading us to himself, the one true God. The only one that provides true help.

And true hope, he gives us, friends. **Psalm 39:7 “But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.”** In that shotgun blast of verses and stories I gave you earlier, I read the part where the believer expressed hopelessness. If you would go back and read the whole context, you'd find in every Psalm the ultimate recognition that hope is found in the Lord. If we went back and read the whole life of Job, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David, and Paul, their hope was not misplaced. God kept his promises. God pulled them through. They grew strong as they recognized their strength comes from the Lord, not from self. Your strength, too, dear friends, comes from the Lord, not self.

In Job's situation, God proved his love by restoring what he lost... and more. God gave Job 10 new children, restored his reputation in the community, gave him double the wealth he used to have, and restored his health as well. God proves his love for you as well. Will he choose to restore what you have lost? Will you get a job? Restore the relationship? Will the pain go away? That I can't say for sure, because God hasn't promised it. But I can tell that God has proven his love for you too. When you struggle with your faith, flee to the cross. At the cross you see the perfect Son of God hanging, bleeding and dying, purely because of God's love for you. Your sin and guilt are on him. He smiles at you as he willingly pays the price so you can be set free and declared not guilty. Hear Jesus call out to you personally, looking you straight in the eye, saying, “It IS finished.” The payment is complete. Your guilt is atoned for. You're sins forgiven. Life is given. And you are granted and close and intimate relationship with the Creator of all things forever and ever and ever.

“How do you have so much peace?” the doctor asked his patient, a woman dying before his eyes. She had advanced, terminal cancer. She was a younger woman, married with three children. She was in her final days. Yet she seemed so peaceful. And so the doctor had to ask, “How do you have so much peace?”

The woman said, “I believe God is in control. I believe God is caring for me right now. And although you don't see those things from your perspective, I see them because I saw what God did for me on the cross. I saw Jesus die for me. I saw him rise from the dead. I know that my Redeemer lives, and that I will see him when I die, and that he will take care of my family when I'm gone.” The doctor walked away baffled by what she had said. He had never met anyone like that before. He could see what was happening to her from the outside. But he couldn't see she was clinging to the cross of Jesus more than ever before, and that Jesus gave her the hope, strength, peace... even joy... that she needed even in the midst of this suffering.

Friends, whatever you face in this life that might lead you down the path of hopelessness, abandon whatever you used to turn to for hope, and cling only to Jesus. Go to the cross and look, not with your eyes, but with your heart. Look and you will find hope, even when you've lost all hope. Amen.