

cautions us not to sin, we are still given the assurance that "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ" (1 John 2:1). The devil loves to make us feel like we have fallen so far that God cannot reach us, but God's reach is longer than your sin. The Bible says, "the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Isa. 59:1). While we at times fall into despair, God promises, "'for a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you' says the Lord, your Redeemer" (Isa. 54:7, 8). That's a promise you can trust.

A Better Day

I know as well as you do that life has its share of bad days, bad months, and even bad years. These times come all throughout our lives, but we can still find hope in hard times. The next time your life starts spinning out of control, let Jesus take the steering wheel of your life. Cry out to him. On a road trip with my mother and aunt, our car lost control on the ice and started weaving sharply back and forth. In horror, I said a prayer in my mind, crying out for God to help. When I prayed, the car caught and straightened out. Some may claim that was a coincidence, but it wasn't. God heard my prayer. And just as God took control of the car that day, He can help you take control of your life if you will let him. If you will just give your life to Jesus, He can give you a better life than you could possibly dream of. He has great plans for you, "to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). Just as we hope in our children, God's hopes and dreams are wrapped up in your life, so take a moment to talk to God right now. He is waiting to hear from you and wanting to help you through whatever you are going through. All you have to do is ask and patiently trust Him. If you do, He will get you through.

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NEED A LITTLE HOPE?



Purpose in Pain

Just like you, I have seen my share of trials. I know what it's like to feel lonely, stressed, guilt ridden, depressed, helpless and hopeless. I've had friends desert me. I've had loved ones die. I've flunked out of school. I've suffered divorce. I've lost jobs. I've been in jail and so much more. I don't say these things to lament my past, but so you know that the author of this paper is not sitting on some cloud above you without knowing what it's like to be in your shoes. Chances are, I've been there and you have too or else you probably wouldn't still be reading this.

The fact is all of us have gone through seasons of pain in life. All of us have suffered in countless ways and while some will start to accuse God in their trials, the reality is that these trials are not God's doing. While God at times lets trials come into all of our lives, He assures us, "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). You see, God can bring good out of pain if we let Him. While no trial "seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). Trials, troubles, and tribulations in this serve a specific purpose. This gives us reason to hold onto hope even in the midst of difficult times.

Hope in Death

I've heard some say that all suicide victims are automatically lost, but this is not true. Samson committed suicide and he will be saved. It's not our job to judge who is saved and lost. That is God's job, but as Christians we can cling to hope even in the face of death. Concerning the sleep of death, Paul says, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope" (1 Thes. 4:13). Cling to those words. Let that verse marinate in your mind. Even in the face of death, there is still hope. We may not

understand why God permits people to die when they do, but God knows best. Since God knows future, He may even allow innocent children to die in order to save them from an evil future (Isa. 46:10). Perhaps they would grow up and become lost so He permits them to die young so their "spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5). Think about it. If you could let someone die today but live forever in heaven or live one hundred years on earth and die for eternity, what would you do? God sometimes lets people die in order to save them because He knows best. Even if you have been diagnosed with terminal cancer, your health is failing, and your time is running out, there is still hope. The thing we must remember is that this life is not all there is. In fact, this life is simply a drop in the ocean of time. If death can inspire us or others to turn to God and make it to heaven forever, then even death can serve a greater purpose. God has promised that "the dead will be raised" (1 Cor. 15:52) and if we are faithful, we will see our loved ones who have passed on before us again and we can have the assurance of life beyond the grave. We can cling to this hope only in Jesus Christ, so turn to Him. Give your heart to Him, for through Christ, "death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

Hope in Trials

We often get so caught up in the "cares of this life" that we lose perspective (Luke 21:34). This is the reason many experience trials. When we lose a job, our car breaks down, a lover runs off and leaves, or whatever the case, the danger is that we lose perspective during these times and fall into feelings of hopelessness. The danger comes when we become "choked with cares" (Luke 8:14). So often the things of this life become such a priority that they consume us and we begin to think that life is nothing without them. We make gods of our possessions, our money, our children, our spouses, our lovers and more until these things become the center of our

lives. When we lose perspective we start to feel empty and hopeless. I know what it is like to sink into depression, feeling utterly hopeless, but I also know that there is a way out. Christ is offering us hope and peace and you can have it today. Depression may plague you. Sorrow may drown you. Painful experiences may overwhelm you, but there is hope in Christ. I am fortunate to have had four brothers who have each been an encouragement, but the Bible says, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). That is Jesus Christ. I would encourage you to turn to Jesus, "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

Hope in Guilt

Some have sunken into hopelessness as a result of their sins. This is one of the darkest and most fearful places we can be because we bring it on ourselves. Guilt weighs heavy on the soul, robbing us of peace. As a result, many make resolutions, determining to leave the life of sin that they have fallen into, but our promises are like ropes of sand. We fall again and again. Some feel that they have gone so far that they are without hope, but I would encourage you to cast away those thoughts at once. Satan loves to represent God as an evil tyrant who wants to destroy sinners, but the Bible gives an entirely different picture of God. Beyond the fearful thundering of God's judgment, the Bible reveals a God who is, "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6, 7). If you are sunken in the despair of guilt, meditate on God's goodness and love for you. Think about it. Jesus didn't really go through all the suffering and agony of the cross just to let you go that easy? God loves each person with an everlasting love and yet many struggle with doubts because they fail to believe Jesus can forgive them and save them from their sins. Believe. While the Bible