

Living in Hope

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'

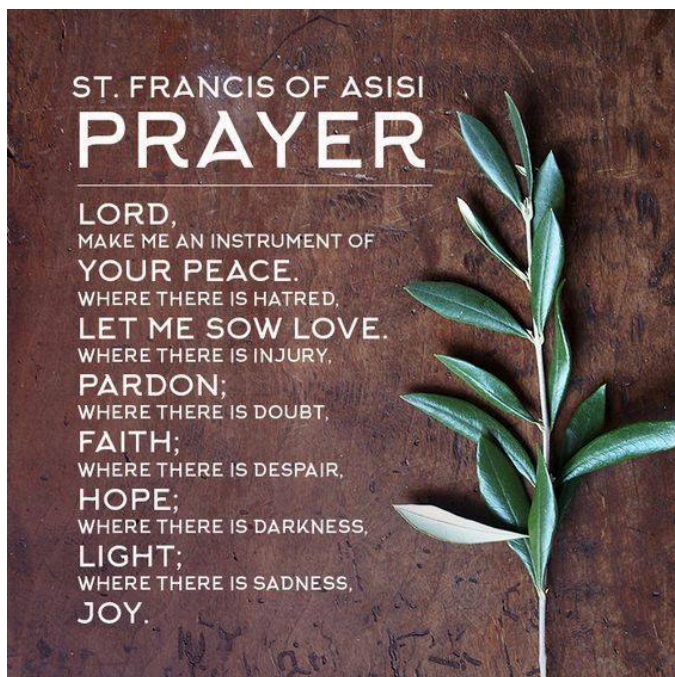
ROMANS 15: 13 NRSV

What is Hope?

Hope can sometimes be wishful thinking. We might often say:

'I hope it doesn't rain today' or
'I hope my bus comes soon'.

- Wishful thinking is often an avoidance of reality.
- It is passive in nature.
- It expresses a belief, or doubt, in the hand of fickle fate.
- It tends to have a fixed understanding of what the desired outcome is and how it will be achieved.



Christian hope:

- Begins with what 'is', facing this reality.
- Hope sees not just what is, but what can be; it is not blind to obstacles; it takes them seriously and is practical in addressing them.

- Hope is active, flowing from the activity of the Holy Spirit within us
- Hope is an expression of God who is enduringly creative and resourceful within what is.
- Hope flows from belief in God who is ever incarnate in what 'is'. In Christ God continually enters our broken, suffering and disunited world and by his living, dying and rising makes all things new.
- Hope is a work of the Holy Spirit within us, leading all that is divided into unity.
- Hope is not only about what we believe but what we live.
- Hope is the overflow of the Spirit engaging us in bringing about a new creation in Christ
- Hope moves us into God's vision for ourselves, our church and our neighbourhood.

Hope is co-operation with the Holy Spirit

Hope expresses our willingness to work in partnership with God. In our lives and in our work we seek to understand what the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives and around us as and to co-operate with this work.

Hope involves waiting

We wait **actively**...working, and searching, for life is in our hands. It is the one who seeks who finds, and the one who asks who receives, and the one who knocks who will find the door opened.

And yet we also wait **passively** – for the right time to come, for growth to take its course, and to receive by gift what cannot be ours by effort alone.

Hope leads us to act **purposefully** in the present as we anticipate the work of Love in the future through drawing on the memory of love received in the past.

Some biblical stories of Hope

The Exodus: Israel's Deliverance Assured

Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. [Exodus 6:6-7]

Ezra's Prayer : The rebuilding of the ruined city of Jerusalem

For we are slaves; yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to give us new life to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judea and Jerusalem. [Ezra 9:9]

Jeremiah buys a field in a besieged city

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel...for thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. *Jeremiah complains to God:*

See the siege ramps have been cast up against the city to take it... yet you, O lord God, have said to me, 'buy this field and have witnesses'.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 'Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?'

[From Jeremiah 32]

The wilderness renewed

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom ...

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God... He will come and save you.'

[From Isaiah 35]

The Valley of Dry Bones

The vision of Ezekiel in exile :

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones ...*The Lord speaks:* 'These bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost; we are cut off' ... Thus says the Lord God... And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, [From Ezekiel 37]

Water Flowing from the Temple

The vision of Ezekiel in exile

This water flows towards the Eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and when it enters the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh ... so everything will live where the river goes [From Ezekiel 47: 1-12]

An Invitation to Abundant Life

Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. [From Isaiah 55:]

The Parable of the Sower

Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. [Mark 4: 8-9]

Feeding the Five Thousand

And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied.

[Mark 6: 30-44]

A Harvest of Joy May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him. [Psalm 126]

Waiting and working in hope

This is what the kingdom of God is like: a man throws seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how he does not know. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come. [Mark 4: 26-29]

Living in hope

Prayer and reflection exercises

1. Witnesses to hope

Read through the passages about hope in a prayerfully reflective way – in God's company. You might want to take one each day and dwell with it. As you begin ask God to deepen your ability to see and act in hope. Read the passage slowly – perhaps more than once, dwelling on lines or phrases that seem to connect with you. Consider what they say and how this speaks to you – share with God thoughts and questions that emerge. Then read the passage again and let it lead you into a time of simply resting in God's presence.

2. The hope we carry

Look back with God on your life and faith journey. As you reflect on your experience of life and the goodness of God what is the message of hope you have to share with others?



3. Waiting and working

Hope involves waiting and working. Gardening symbolically expresses this partnership in hope. We sow seeds and nurture them as they grow, but the growth itself is a work of wonder.

Identify a hope that you sense God has planted within you. It might be to do with your own life and growth or about others whom you labour and care for. Sow seed in a seed tray or small pot, following any instructions supplied with them. When the seeds are big enough plant them out in your garden or in a larger container.

4. The light of hope

Bring an area of your work before God in prayer. Imagine hope to be a light. Where are the darkest corners in need of this light? Move the light of hope so it shines into these dark place – into every deep recess where light has been absent. What hope do you begin to see revealed?

5. Acting in hope

Hope is an action more than a feeling. We remember the works of God in the past and so anticipate the work of God in the future, leading us to act purposefully in the present. We recognize that we are invited to co-operate with what God desires to bring into being. Read one or more of the biblical stories about acting in hope – for example Jeremiah buying a field in a besieged city. Ask God to show you an action you can take as an expression of hope, whether this in relation to your own circumstances, or someone you care for or the community or the church you are part of.

