

Hold on to Hope



Christopher News Notes

*“Who hopes for what is seen?
But if we hope for what we do not see,
we wait for it with patience.”*

—Romans 8:24-25

ALL OF US, AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, HAVE EXPRESSED THE DESIRE FOR SOMETHING WE REALLY WANT TO HAPPEN. Perhaps it is to pass an exam, get a good job, or mend fences with a friend. The odds of achieving these goals, however, might be overwhelming.

What often gets us through is hope.

Playwright Vaclav Havel, who rose to political power in his native Czechoslovakia, said, “Hope is an orientation of the spirit,

an orientation of the heart. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”

Through hope we have the confident expectation that if we hold on—persevere, endure—and trust in God, we will get through the darkest times.

Jerry Dahmen is a successful radio announcer. But if he had listened to those who put him down as a child, he would not be. In school, Jerry was discouraged from playing sports because he was “skin and bones.” Next, he began having severe speech problems. In junior high school, an English teacher forced Jerry to read aloud a scene from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. That humiliating disaster made him determined to accomplish what nobody thought he could do: become a public speaker.

Jerry found a college professor, Mary Patterson, to be his speech therapist. Results were slow, but she constantly praised his efforts. Within a few years, he was winning speech contests. Jerry’s determination—and Mrs. Patterson’s confidence—helped him to hold on to the hope that he would make something of his life. And he did.

People powered by hope

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

—2 Corinthians 4:8-9

- A Wisconsin woman was overwhelmed after her husband’s death. There were people to be called, funeral arrangements to be made, the Social Security office to be notified. “I was confused and frightened,” she recalled. “I didn’t know where to begin.” Then a friend told the woman: “I’m here for you. Whatever you have to do, wherever you have to go, I’ll do it with you.”
- Wilma Rudolph, stricken with polio as a child, tried out for her school’s basketball team at age 12, but failed. For the next year she practiced virtually every day. She made the team. In time, she won three gold medals as a member of the 1960

Take My Hand

This is a prayer that a daughter found among her recently deceased father’s things:

“I cannot pray, dear Lord. I cannot find the hopes, recovery, health and peace of mind. And yet, although You suffered more than I, this does not help, no matter how I try. So, take my hand, and take my feeble frame, and give me strength, and help me bear my pain. And though my future plans may go astray, in all my fears be near; show me the way. I am so weak; give me the strength. I need to know that with Your help, we will succeed. So help me in these long and tiring days to know that someone sings a song of praise; the friends who care, who pray instead of me for healing, and a quick recovery. So, take my hand, and let me cling to Thee, and, clinging, know no harm can come to me.”

U.S. Olympic track team. More than three decades later, the sports champion was instilling her “never give up” spirit in young people: “I let them know that they can grasp anything they want to grasp as long as they are willing to work for it.”

Agents of hope and change

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”
—Psalm 46:1

- Joe Ehrmann, a pro-football star playing in Baltimore, lost his younger brother to cancer. He recalls: “After the last ‘amen’ was said and everybody left, and I was standing by the grave, there was a burning question in my head: ‘What is the main purpose in life?’” Having grown up in a poor urban neighborhood, Joe was struck by the gap between the “haves” and the “have nots.” Then and there, he decided to do something positive. He started The Door, a Christ-centered ministry to help families, offering tutoring for children and counseling for adults.
- Franciscan Father Benedict Taylor took \$500 and an abandoned building in Harlem and began Project Create, a storefront providing community services such as drug counseling and housing assistance. “In everything,” the priest says, “we need to build self-esteem. People need to feel God loves them. When they learn to love themselves and return to school, get a job, it’s like they discover their personhood.”

- Jackie McNeil found her neighborhood in San Francisco invaded by drug dealers. The situation robbed people of a safe—and hope-filled—future. Jackie wouldn’t settle for these conditions. She printed up flyers, held house meetings, and rallied neighbors to do round-the-clock surveillance, taking pictures and writing down the license plates of dealers to report to the police. In the end, three crack houses were eliminated, and dealers were jailed or run out of the neighborhood.

A history of hope

History is filled with people who held on to hope, who believed that their desires would reach fruition—despite the odds. Alexander Graham Bell was laughed at for his invention of the telephone as a “crank who says he can talk through a wire.” Fyodor Dostoevsky survived four years in a Siberian prison camp and the problems of epilepsy to become one of the world’s greatest novelists. Ludwig van Beethoven composed most of his music during the years of his steadily worsening hearing loss. Abraham Lincoln failed in business twice and was defeated in elections nine times. One of the few times he did succeed, he became America’s 16th president, instrumental in bringing about an end to slavery and preserving the Union. Helen Keller, blind and deaf at 19 months old, went on to graduate from Radcliffe College, with honors, and to become a world renowned author and lecturer who said, “The world is full of suffer-

ing. It is also full of the overcoming of it.”

Hope sparks confidence

“Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours...You need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”—Hebrews 10:35,36

- Linwood Johnson recalls sitting in a fourth grade classroom in Nashville and hearing his teacher say, “Linwood, you’re just plain dumb. You’ll never amount to anything.” Eventually, he quit school, never learning to read. Then at 35, he dared to dream: “I’m sick and tired of taking a back seat to everyone. If I only could learn how to read, the sky would be the limit.” He admitted his problem to his boss, who encouraged him to seek help. After enrolling in a literacy program, Linwood Johnson was on his way to newfound freedom. Eventually, he received his high school diploma—and his dream became a reality.
- A mother whose son committed suicide credits her support group with helping her cope with her loss. “Before I joined the group, I wanted to read to family and friends the letter my son left behind,” she says. “But nobody wanted to really hear it. The people who have gone through this experience know how important that is and are willing to take the time to listen and to share.”
- A group of homeless men, aged 17 to 50, from places such as Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, attended an English course offered at the Los Angeles Mission. “I want to

learn more and improve myself so I can find work and do a good job,” said one of the men, Ricardo Ramos. All joined the course, they said, to erase the stigma of homelessness.

- Audrey McKiver’s sixth graders helped shop owners in the aftermath of riots in Los Angeles. The children sold popcorn, ice cream and punch to raise money for the storekeepers whose stores were looted. “We felt sad; we had to take action,” said 12-year-old Shona Gonzales. She and classmates carried carnations and read poems to store owners. “We felt good because the little kids could see us and want to do the same thing,” said Leonar Colindres, 12.

How to hold on to hope

- **Pray.** Open your heart to Jesus, the hope of the world. Let Him be your strength, knowing that “nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Share your fears, frustrations and doubts with Him. For Jesus Himself asked us “always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).
- **Know your purpose in life.** God made you for a reason; you have a job to do that no one else can. Your situation could point your way.
- **Know that discouragement will come.** But don’t get trapped in negative thinking: it can stifle initiative and breed despair. Trust your hope.
- **Know that perseverance pays off.** It may be easier to quit, but where would we be if the Wright Brothers had given up on flying, or if Jonas Salk had thrown in the towel before developing a polio vaccine?
- **Draw strength from others.** How can your neighbors, family and friends help you? Ask also who needs you. Share your gifts, your time and your compassion.

“They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”
—Isaiah 40:31

“It’s better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.”

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