

How Do I Give Hope?

By Andrew Rogers

Learn how to give hope. That is one of the essential skills a biblical counselor must develop. One skilled in giving hope will be a balm to a hurting soul. Some counseling moments are formal and last a few hours, but many are informal and may only last a few minutes. In both situations and every one in between we should develop our skill to use the truth of God's Word to provide people hope. That means that any equipping we do in the church must include teaching people how to give hope to one another.

Hope is the expectation of good that is based on the promises of God (Ps 31:24; Rom 8:28). Hope is based on the grace of God and is inseparably bound to our relationship to Him and to our exercise of the disciplines of grace (Ps 130:5). When we learn to think biblically about life and entrust our selves to God we engender hope.

Hope Gives Life

Hope is vital to bringing comfort and confronting sin. Hope gives us stability and assurance that we will spend eternity with Christ. It gives us boldness and confidence. It gives us gladness. Hope enables us to withstand trials and turn away from sin. It gives us the strength to work hard and persevere. Hope causes us to sing praise and offer continual thanks to God (Lam 3:18-25).

Without hope we are tempted to disbelieve and disobey God. This is the concern of many of the New Testament writers as they wrote to churches facing the turmoil and trial of life affected by sin. "Stand firm," "believe," and "remain confident" are common exhortations. This is easy to say, but it is difficult to practice. And what makes it even more difficult is that we must stand firm over and over and over. We can't just stand firm once and be done. We must remain steadfast.

Steadfastness is essential to living the Christian life. How do we remain steadfast? Have hope! Hope in the promises of God, which are substantiated by His character and His Word, engender steadfastness (2 Cor 4:17; 1 Thess 1:3). Steadfastness yields Christlikeness and assures us of our future home where we will be with Christ and He with us forever.

Give Hope

Here are some ways to help people develop and maintain an attitude of hopefulness:

1. Help them develop a vital relationship with God and with hope-filled people.
2. Help them focus on the attributes of God that are most relevant to the issues they may be facing. For example, if someone is facing the consequences brought about by their own sin then direct their attention to passages that particularly reveal God as merciful such as 1 John 1:9, Ephesians 2:4 and Deuteronomy 8 where we see the testimony of God walking with and providing for the Israelites while they experienced the painful consequences brought about by God's discipline.
3. Help them make the scriptures relevant to their situation. For example, if a child is experiencing the daily onslaught of a mean classmate, minister to them the words of Romans 12:21, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (ESV). Ask, "Has Hannah been mean to you?" "Has she done evil?" "What does God say we should do when someone treats us poorly?" "What good can you do to Hannah?" "Let's brainstorm ways you can do good to Hannah."
4. Help them consider how often people just like us have faced similar difficulties successfully, especially Jesus (Heb 4:14-16).
5. Help them pray and learn to take charge of their thoughts, talking to themselves instead of listening to themselves (Phil 4:8).
6. Help them recognize that we as believers are free from slavery of sin and external circumstances (Rom 6:11).
7. Help them identify and confess their own sin, taking responsibility for their sins and laying out a specific biblical procedure for change (Ps 32:1-5; 1 John 1:9)
8. Be more interested in them than their problem.
9. Point them to Christ (Heb 12:2).
10. Pray for them (Col 1:3-14, esp. 6, 9-12).
11. Be compassionate (Heb 2:14-18).

12. Be gentle and humble (Matt 11:28-30; Gal 6:1).
13. Take pains to communicate well (Eph 4:29).
14. Take pains to listen well (Prov 18:13; Ps 116:1-2).
15. Love them (1 Cor 13:1-7).

One-Minute Hope

While the list above sounds good, much of the ways assume that we are spending a substantial period of time with someone. Yet, many of our counseling opportunities are in the spur of the moment after a Sunday morning worship service or even in the store. What can we do when someone lays upon us the story of his trial extemporaneously? It isn't the place to go into 50 questions and we won't have enough information to discern the problem, rendering us incapable of providing clear biblical instruction that truly addresses the issue. Then what can we do? We can give hope!

In the moment, I don't have to have all the answers to one's situation. But, I do know who does. What I can do in that moment is point the person to Christ and help him see Christ's sufficiency in the matter. I can assure him that I care and will walk with him. One good thing for us is to minister to them Scripture that we go to when we need hope. For example, I often rely on Psalm 46:1-3, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling" (ESV). This passage gives me a hopeful perspective about my trying situation. I realize that no matter the severity or intensity of my trouble, God is there and gladly receives and listens to me to give me rest and strength to face and endure my trial. Have passages like this ready at all times, so that in the spur of the moment you can give hope.

To what Scripture do you turn for hope? What Scriptures will you prepare to minister to others? How do you give hope? How will you give hope?