

While circumstances can affect our feelings, feelings of hopelessness and despair are determined by how we see the future, but we must learn to rise above our feelings! Let me illustrate. My father, being a pilot, has often taken me up on flights, and I can still recall the thrill of breaking through the clouds on a dark and dreary day. On the earth below, the clouds lingered heavily above us, casting shadows of darkness and gloom all around us, but as the plane would pass through, breaking above the layer of clouds, I was amazed to see the beautiful bright sun still shining in the sky even on the darkest of days. We must learn to rise above dark feelings and see the sun by faith, even on the darkest days.

Imagine that you were having the worst day of your life! You woke up late, got in a fight with your spouse, and got in a car accident on the way to work. Finally, you got to work only to get fired, and then you get back home just in time to see the firemen putting out the last embers on your house, which has burned down. With no money in the bank, no job, no home, no car, and an angry spouse, you go sit down in an alley and start crying. As you cry, a poorly dressed man comes up to you and hands you a check for one million dollars, and says, "All you have to do is go cash it. Trust me." What you believe about this offer will affect how you feel and change the way you live.

Think about it. Your circumstances have not changed. You are in the exact same place. You still have no car, no job, no home, and since the check is not cashed, you still have no money! The check itself has no value. The money is not yours until you cash the check, so your circumstance is exactly the same. The only thing that has changed is in your mind, but this makes all the difference! The hope of a bright future changes you, but that hope is dependent on faith. If you believe the check is real, then it will change your mood, your attitude, and your life. If you don't believe it is real, nothing will change. Still, you must have some basis for this hope.

Since the man was poorly dressed, you may have little hope, but if you looked down the alley and

saw a chauffeur opening the door as the man got into a limousine, then you would have a basis for hope. That's the hope of the Christian. You see, God has promised us something more than a million dollars. He has promised us joy, peace, and fulfillment in this life, as well as hope beyond the grave (Mark 10:30). As the basis of this hope, He has given us evidence in nature (Rom. 1:20; Heb. 3:4), fulfilled prophecies (Isa. 46:10; John 14:29), the voice of conscience (Rom. 2:15), and the evidence of personal experience and changed lives (Job 42:5; 2 Cor. 5:17). He has even given us His Spirit as a deposit (2 Cor. 5:5).

The Christian has been given the hope from God that is even more powerful than death itself. Paul says, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). Cling to those words. Let that verse marinate in your mind. Even in the face of death, there is still hope, for in Christ, "death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). That means we not only have to face the future unafraid, but we can even face death with hope! This hope is the powerful medicine that keeps the Christian going through the darkest days on this earth. Hope makes all the difference.

Tragically, while this hope is offered to all, most people refuse to accept this hope. As a result, they live their lives in fear, looking to the future with fear, which creates the opposite effect of hope. While the hope of a bright future cheers you up, the prospect of a fearful future leads to depression and despair. The irony is that our future is not bright if we don't believe in God. Those who don't believe in God think we are products of the big bang and evolution. They believe life is an accident and has no real meaning, and after death, there is nothing else. We simply cease to exist, so they live for the pleasures of this life, which bring seasons of happiness but lack true peace, joy, and fulfillment in life.—And no hope.

While the atheist may hope something exists after death, this is a foolish hope. It is false hope. To

say, "I hope I get to heaven," without ever praying, reading the Bible, or going to church is a foolish hope. It would be like sitting in the alley and trying to cheer oneself up by saying, "I hope someone comes by and gives me a million dollars." That is far different than if someone actually gave you the check and said it was for you! There is a big difference between the hope of the atheist and the hope of the Christian who has been given assurance of the promise. Only those who step out in faith can obtain an experience with God as a deposit, as the Bible says. Let me illustrate.

After you see the man get into the limousine, you decide to take a step in faith and go to the bank to cash the check. When you show them the check, they look at the information and determine that it is authentic. Then they tell you, "We are a small bank. We don't keep that much cash in the bank, but we can give you a portion of the money as a deposit for now." Even though you cannot get all the money at the moment, the deposit is evidence that the check is real. Similarly, God has given us a deposit. The King James Version of 2 Corinthians 5:5 says God has "given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." Christians know God is real because we have received the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says that the Spirit is a deposit of things to come! What are those things to come? They are life after death, seeing dead loved ones again, eternal life with Jesus in heaven. Outside of heavenly glories, God also offers us joy, peace, and fulfillment in this life. God has great plans for us in this life. Even if you don't feel like God loves you, you must rise above your feelings and take God at His word. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). God is offering you a future full of hope, but in order to obtain this hopeful future, you must first take a step in faith.

In the illustration, let's say you did not believe the check is authentic. If you don't believe the check is real, why would you cash a false check? It would be foolish. On the other hand, if the check was real,

it would be foolish not to cash it. Still, you will not know for sure unless you take a step of faith. You must choose to believe that the check could possibly be real. If you don't choose to at least believe there is a possibility that the check could be real, you will fail to gain the money. However, that choice must lead you to take a step in faith and go to the bank. Without this, you will never gain the money. Similarly, we must choose to believe in God's promises and take a step on those promises. This will change your life.

You have two choices. You can choose to live in fear, allowing the dark clouds of current and future problems haunt you, or you may choose to rise above the clouds and take hold of hope. While atheism and the popular scientific theories only offer emptiness, meaninglessness, and hopelessness, God is offering you a bright future full of peace, joy, and hope, but the choice is up to you. The check has been written, it has been placed in your hands, and it is full of God's amazing promises to supply you with all you need to make it through this life abundantly. The power of hope is amazing. It will change your outlook on life. It will change how you think and how you live.

On the good days, hope will lift you above the highest mountains, and on the bad days, hope will carry you through the darkest valleys. Hope is not a feeling. At times we will feel like God doesn't love us, or like God is not there, or like we are too sinful for God to save, but the Bible says, "the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Isa. 59:1). The devil would love to drown you in despair, but you must rise above these feelings by faith and cling to the bank of God's hope. God has shown you the money. Now it's up to you. Go to the bank and cash the check because an amazing hope awaits you!

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