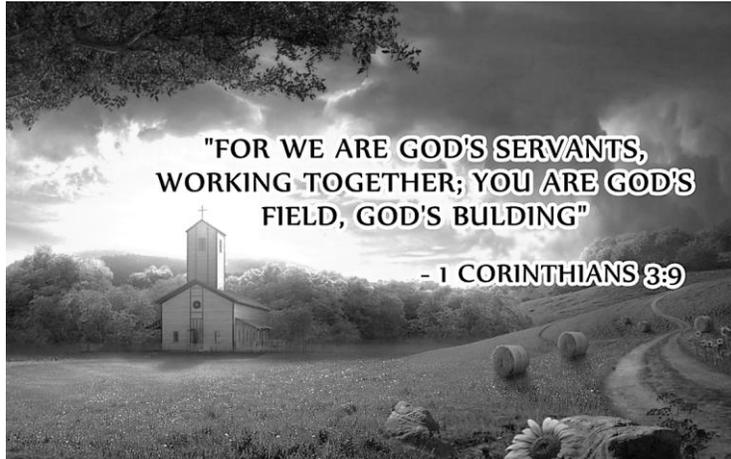


YOU ARE THE HOPE



Scripture:

Psalm 119:1-8

¹Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD. ²Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, ³who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways. ⁴You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. ⁵O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! ⁶Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. ⁷I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous ordinances. ⁸I will observe your statutes; do not utterly forsake me.

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What if you were the hope of the world? How would you live your life differently knowing that you have the power to save us?

You might laugh and say, “Oh, I’m too old,” or “I’m too young,” or “I’m too tired.” But maybe you are a late bloomer or you just haven’t realized your calling yet?

You might also wonder, “What do you mean by world?” You might be the hope of your little corner of the world, but you also might be the hope that starts a positive ripple effect here in our church that spreads out across all of Santa Rosa and beyond.

Then you might wonder: “Save us from what?” By save us, I mean: Save us from bringing hell to earth. Save us from our own self-destruction. Save our lives and our world so future generations can thrive here. Save us from despair and apathy.

Listen for the places in this passage where Paul is speaking to the church in Corinth suggesting ways to be the hope for their new church community and world.

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1 Corinthians 3:1-9

¹And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? ⁴For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely human?

⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who

waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. ⁹For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



There are three points in this passage I want to emphasize today.

1st - To be the hope for the world, God's servant, God's field, God's building, we must not be people of the flesh. We must be above human inclinations. We must not be jealous of one another, quarrel or be divisive.

When Martin Luther and John Calvin led the Reformation movement, they had no plan for more than one Protestant church denomination. They underestimated the human inclination to be stubbornly divisive that formed many protestant ways of being a Christian. Today there are about twenty-thousand different protestant denominations around the world. I'm sure that is a huge disappointment to Jesus who preached oneness and unity often.

2nd - God is responsible for our growth and flourishing even though we like to think our successes are due to our own hard work. How do we acknowledge this with our lives? How do we give God the credit for our personal thriving?

3rd - The key to abundant life is to wholeheartedly embrace our role as God's servants, the field that God grows and the building that God supports with hope.

Let's look at the first point: We must be above human inclinations. We must not be jealous of one another, quarrel or be divisive. Well that's no fun, is it? Being critical and divisive is so stimulating and so much less boring than just being nice! But God calls us loudly to work against our natural selfish instinctual inclinations and be the opposite way because it makes us healthier and happier in the long run. Our country is being taught to fear and mistrust people. That will divide us and make us sick.

COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

Being compassionate and empathically understanding is scientifically proven to improve your mental and physical health and overall wellbeing.

Last week I took a survey that measured how empathic I am based on my answers to fifty questions about being empathic. While taking the test the test taker also learns what empathetic responses and behaviors we should be showing in our actions. There were questions like:

- How easily can you walk in another person's shoes and understand what problems they struggle with?
- Does it bother you when someone else is being teased, bullied or demeaned?
- Can you tell when a stranger approaches your group and wants to be included in the conversation?
- Do you feel upset when you see an animal in pain?

I was surprised but I did not get one-hundred per cent! So maybe I have more work to do in this area, too! (The Noetic Science Institute has this test on their website.)

The results did show I was above the autism range. But even some people with autism can be taught to be more aware of people's emotions and sensitive to social cues. When we were teaching social skills to autistic children on the child psych unit at the University of Iowa, we presented a staff and parent seminar. The speaker was an adult who had lived with autism challenges all his life. He told us what it was like to receive social skills and empathy training. He said it was helpful to learn how to be sensitive to crying and other signs of distress, but he said there were mistakes in his training. No one told him not to look people in the eye on elevators!

PROMOTING EMPATHY IN THE WORK PLACE

New research predicts that the more empathic people we have in the world the healthier our world will be. As a result of many studies showing the beneficial effect of training people in empathy, businesses are now providing seminars to their employees promoting empathy in the work

environment. If you want to know more about empathy training and the different styles of empathy you can go to www.empathystyles.com

So our scripture today could say, the seed was planted and watered, but God's empathy training promoted our growth because Jesus taught empathy well.

PRAYER

Secondly, acknowledging God's role in our thriving is a daily life skill. It starts with prayer. When you connect with God first thing in the morning and before bed at night, you remind yourself of your dependence on God and God's presence within and around you. That is why the Muslim prayer practice of stopping whatever they are doing and praying five times a day is actually a very healthy practice. In prayer you remember you are connected to the universal power of God and to all of creation.

Even this is true in the Muslim prayer practice called "salat" which means bowing, worshipping and praying. An estimated one and a half billion Muslims worldwide perform these prayers daily in the same way starting at dawn. When a young Muslim graduate from the Georgia Institute of Technology was asked about his faith and his prayer practice he said, "I can't imagine life without prayer. It reminds you about God throughout your day," he says. "At fixed intervals, no matter how busy you are, all of a sudden you have to take out a few minutes and you're remembering, OK, why am I really here on this earth? And while I was doing whatever I was doing, was I doing it in a manner pleasing to God?"

Praying five times a day is considered the second most important of Islam's five pillars, after professing that there is no other god worthy of worship but our one God."

[\(http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/03/21/why-do-muslims-pray-five-times-daily/\)](http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/03/21/why-do-muslims-pray-five-times-daily/)

ALL HUMANITY

Praying together helps Muslims to realize that all humanity is one, and all are equal in the sight of God who they call: Allah.

Remembering each day that all humanity is one saves your brain from being imprisoned by divisive thoughts. Albert Einstein believed that when we consider ourselves separate and alone from each other we are like in a prison that we must free ourselves from.

Einstein said, "A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

And Rob Bell takes it a step further and suggests embracing all living creatures with compassion through empowerment. He said, "When we empower others, when we extend grace to others in their oppression, whatever that may look like, we find out about the grace that God has extended to us. ... In helping save someone else from suffering, in the process we find ourselves being saved ... from indifference, from the inertia of inaction, from taking what we have for granted."

YOU ARE AN AMBASSADOR FOR GOD

And the last point: You truly are an ambassador for God in the world. When you identify yourself as a believer in God, your behavior, compassionate attitude, successes and failures all reflect upon God. You were made in the image of God and your image reflects out to the world who God is and what you believe in.

2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." To be reconciled to God you need to know God, know the sacred scriptures, pray, get to know the beauty all around you in nature and your neighbors who carry the divine within.

A WORD OF HOPE

Yet, most of us struggle sometimes with the idea of being God's servant, God's field, and God's building because many of us feel inadequate or unworthy or powerless. But that really is a lame

excuse and I would even go so far as to say it is sinful to not embrace the divine power you have within you to be God's field and God's building in the world. You must be holding onto hope for the future or you wouldn't be here today. You are here today looking for a word of hope that you already possess deep down inside.

When people say they don't believe in God, ask them if they have any hope at all for the future? If they say, "Yes!" they still have a shred of hope. They are professing faith in God because God is the creator of hope. Only authentic atheists have absolutely no hope in the future.

If you are a true disciple of Jesus, then you carry with you eternal hope that is worth celebrating daily! Sing praises to God trusting that no matter how bad our world may seem, God will find a way because God keeps promises and because God is love. There is hope in most everyone deep down. But when their hope seems to have leaked out, you can give it back to them by being their empathic brother or sister who is willing to walk alongside them until they can feel the hope that is within them again.

Remember Psalm 31:24 that says: "Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord."

The key to abundant life is to whole-heartedly embrace our role as God's servants, the field that God grows and the building that God supports by instilling within us resilient hope.

HOPE IS AN ACT OF FAITH

Hope is an act of faith. Those who cling to hope are far more resistant to the setbacks in life.

During World War II, twenty-five-thousand American soldiers were imprisoned. Many soldiers died. But, some of the soldiers noticed a difference between those most likely to die and those who survived. They realized that once a soldier lost all hope of being released, he would simply choose to die. The soldiers who survived had held onto hope they would be released someday.

Robin Reader, in his work, *Holding On To Hope* , said. "The prisoners of war who survived, talked about the kind of homes they would have, the jobs they would choose, and even described the kind of person they would marry. Some even found ways to study subjects related to the kind of career they wanted to pursue when they were set free someday."

Hope enhances your physical health, too. The American Heart Association cites the work of Susan Everson who studied people with a high level of despair in comparison with a group of "optimistic" people. The people with little hope and much despair were twenty per cent more likely to have hardening of the arteries than optimistic people. Everson noted that the physical health correlation was the same as comparing a pack-a-day smoker to a non-smoker.

(<https://kaarre.wordpress.com/tag/talk-of-hope-keeps-one-alive/>)

You can literally save a person's life with hope. If you teach yourself and others to have empathy, a sense of oneness with all of creation, and spread authentic hope in God, then you are the hope of the world! Amen

Benediction: So live as God's field, God's building, God's servant of love and faith for all the world to see. Embrace your purpose as God intended you to be, the hope for the world.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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