

The God of Hope  
The Process of Hope  
Rom. 5:1-5

Have you ever had one of those "now what?" moments of life? When the phone rings or the door knocks or the boss comes by or the kids call, and all you can think is: Now what? I saw a kid this week who I could swear put his parents into the expert category of the "now what?" moments of life. We've all had those "Now what?" moments; sometimes those "now what" moments make us laugh. But sometimes they make us hang our heads. *Like a moment that happened to a young father I'll call Mike. Mike had been out of a job for months, then the car broke down.*

*And the same day the car broke down the toilet backed up, making the bathroom unusable. So when Mike came in from busting his knuckles trying to fix the car in order to answer the phone he couldn't even use the bathroom to wash his hands.*

*So he just grabbed the phone - trying hard not to cuss, he told me, and the guy on the other end of the phone said, "I'm sorry but I've got some bad news."*

*Mike said, "Now what?" And the guy said, "We're cutting off your phone at the end of this conversation."*

Sometimes those now what moments make us want to scream, and sometimes, they make us weep. There are families in our church that are facing a whole lot of heartache. What do you do when you face a "now what?" situation? Well, having faced several of those situations lately as the pastor of this church, I have asked the Lord that very question. And the answer that he keeps bringing me back to is this: Turn to the God of Hope! The God of the Bible, the God of Christianity, is the God of hope. And in these "now what?" days of our lives lately, I have found the Lord leading me through a study of what scripture says about that God of hope. We first looked at **the promise of hope**. The promise of hope is that no matter what the circumstances of my life, with God things are going to work out. Well, after several "now what?" moments with people in our church this week, I think we need to talk about **The Process of Hope**. How do we develop this hope in our lives? Do we put our penny in the slot of prayer, turn the handle and out pops hope? What do we do? How do we develop this hope in our lives? Let's look at the Book of **Romans 5:1-5...Prayer**

There is so much great info in this passage I don't know where to start. So I had to ask the LORD to show me what to bring out of this passage about hope. I want us to look at these verses this morning and the steps they show us on how to develop hope in our lives, the process that it takes:

1) The 1<sup>st</sup> step is to open your **eyes**.

The first step in the process of developing hope as a believer is to open your eyes during those "now what?" moments and get the right perspective on the problems and troubles you're facing. The Bible says, *"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings."* (Ro 5:2-3) I don't know about you, but I have no problem rejoicing in the glory of God. It's that rejoicing in suffering that gives me the fits! To rejoice when you are facing problems and trials and troubles is a difficult decision, because it is a decision that requires us to see those problems as opportunities and not obstacles. The first step in developing hope in our lives is to learn how to **see our problems as opportunities and not as obstacles**. Now, let's back up and take a look at this whole picture. If you were with us last week as we started this journey of hope, you know that our travel guide has been a man named Abraham. He had a problem. He was supposed to become the father of a whole nation of faith. God had told him that he and Sarah would have a child and through that child a whole new nation would develop, but Abraham had a problem. He was a hundred years old, and Sarah wasn't far behind. Yet Abraham refused to see his situation as only a problem; only some obstacle to joy. Instead, he rejoiced in those problems by seeing them as opportunities for God to do something special in his life. Now, how do you and I develop that kind of perspective? Well, I want to suggest to you that it begins by looking at life through the lenses of what I call the four myth-busters concerning the problems of my life. Four perspectives that help destroy the myth that my problems are insurmountable.

a) Here's the first: It's never as **bad** as you think. Even when things seem darkest, your circumstances usually are not as hopeless or as awful as they first appear. Our natural human tendency is to think the worst, imagine the worst, expect the worst, but seldom do things turn out that way. So the first myth-buster to remember when looking at your problems is it's never as bad as you think. *His name was Braeden. When he stuck his head into the principal's office, the school secretary took one look at him and said, "Now what is it, Braeden!"*

*You can guess how many times this first grader had visited the office. Well, Brandon was really upset and crying and asked to use the school phone to call home.*

*The secretary got concerned with his crying and wrapped him up in her arms and said, "What's wrong?" Braeden explained, "Yesterday I forgot my sweater at school. This morning my mom told me not to come home without it. I can't find it anywhere so I need to call her and find out where she wants me to go [since I can't go home]."*

b) Here's the second: It's never as **good** as you think. Now, that may sound like a contradiction, but what I mean is that there are times in life when everything seems to be going marvelously. But that's when you need to be very careful. *I remember one pastor who said, "In ministry, I've seldom had 2 good days back to back." Ouch!* The point is that all too often we get blindsided and blown away by the problems of life because we aren't spiritually prepared for them. We're living by what I call, "*Cruise control Christianity.*" We're just floating along as believers, and consequently, our faith is unprepared for the problems of life. So, the second myth-buster to remember is that it's never as good as you think. So be careful.

c) Here's the third: It's never completely **fixed**. Life is just that - life. It's constantly changing, and it's constantly moving. And just the time you think: "There! I've taken care of that problem. That's not going to happen again." Bam, it does! So remember, it's never completely fixed.

d) But also remember: It's never completely **broken**. No matter what it looks like - God's work has not stopped. One of the things I love most about the Easter season is that we take the time to talk about the tomb of Jesus. I find that a lot of life is lived out in tombs. Whether it is the death of a loved one, or the death of a marriage, or the death of a job, or the death of a checkbook - a lot of life is lived out in tombs. But Easter is the reminder that God does some of his best work in tombs! It's never completely broken with God. No matter what it looks like, God has not stopped working, and God does some of his best work in tombs. *A patient in a doctor's waiting room heard a scream from within the doctor's examining room, and saw an elderly woman come out and quickly depart in a state of agitation.*

*"What happened?" asked the waiting patient. "I told her she was pregnant," replied the doctor. "You couldn't be serious," remarked the patient. "Of course not," he answered. "But it cured her hiccups."*

The first step in the process of developing hope is to focus our eyes, to look at our problems and troubles in the right perspective. Not as obstacles; but rather as opportunities for God to do something special for us.

2) Focus your eyes, but then strengthen your **hands**.

Our passage says, "*We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance.*" (Ro 5:3) See that word, perseverance. That word means patient endurance. It means you hold on; calmly. You don't get all upset; you don't whine and complain and tell your friends how bad you've got it. Instead, you patiently and calmly hold on. Now, let's go back and look at Abraham. He didn't learn this right off. The bible tells us that honestly. So let's be honest about it. Abraham and Sarah got impatient when they were younger. They didn't think God was working things out soon enough; so they took matters into their own hands and adopted an approach that was rather common in the pagan culture in which they lived. They used one of Sarah's servant girls as a surrogate mother. Abraham slept with her and she had a kid; and that caused more problems and more heart aches than they ever imagined, which is what typically happens when you and I take matters into our own hands. Instead of patiently holding on and waiting on God; we push ahead. We try whatever options we can come up with; even adopting the tactics of our sinful culture at times. But just like Abraham and Sarah, all that does is cause more problems. **The answer is to learn how to hold on and stick with God.** But "Hold on to what, Stacy?" That question hit me as I was preparing this lesson. You tell people to hold on. It would help if we knew what to hold on to. I realized that the Bible tells us pretty clearly here just what to hold on to. Notice Rom. 4:20-21, "*Abraham did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*" (Ro 4:20-21)

What Abraham held on to was the promises of God. The promises God has given us in his word are the strong ropes we can hold on to in the face of life's problems. When faced with a "now what?" moment in life; hold on! Don't give up. And don't give in. Don't give into this world's tactics. Don't give in to your own ideas and attempts. Instead, hold on to the promises of God's word; and you will get through it.

3) Focus your eyes, strengthen your hands, and then develop your **heart**.

Look at Rom.; 5 again and let me explain that. "*We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to persevere. And perseverance develops strength of character in us.*" (Ro 5:3-4) It says there that perseverance develops strength of character in us. Can you see how these steps build on each other? Our trail guide for this journey, Abraham had the right perspective on his problems, and because of that perspective he was able to hold on, and because he held on, God developed his faith. God developed his spiritual character to the point that he is called "the father of faith." The word for character here means something of proven worth. Something that has been quality tested. It's not just holding on that produces hope in our lives. It's holding on - in faith. It's holding on while trusting God to work things out. You've heard the story before, I'm sure. *The man was out hiking in the Rockies. At one point, he was walking along a narrow path and slipped over the edge. As he fell, he grabbed a branch growing from the side of the cliff. Dangling there, he realized he couldn't hold on for long. So he called out for help. "Is anybody up there?"*

*Suddenly a deep voice resonated from above: "Yes, I'm here!" Man: Who's that? Voice: The Lord. Man: Lord, help me!  
Voice: Do you trust me? Man: I trust you completely, Lord. Voice: Good. Let go of the branch. Man: What???  
Voice: I said, "Let go of the branch."  
Man: After a long pause, "Is anybody else up there?"*

That sounds more like us than we want to believe, but developing this quality of hope means that we hold on in faith. It means that we allow God to develop our spiritual character and deepen our faith precisely through the troubles and trials we face.

God specializes in using those moments to develop our faith and character, and that's exactly what he will do, as long as we hold on in obedience. Let me ask you a question about that "now what?" moment you are facing; let me ask you a question about the problems you are up against right now:

Are you going to let them draw you closer to God or drive you farther from him?

Are you going to let this develop your character or are you going to force it to work out the way you want it to.

Are you going to let this deepen your integrity or are you are going to take the short cut to your desired solution.

Are you going to keep growing up as a believer, or are you just going to keep growing old.

It's got to be one of the hardest steps in this process because so many of us stumble right here at this point, but the key to discovering hope in the face of your problems is to let God develop your character; precisely in the midst of and through the elements of your troubles and problems.

4) Focus your eyes, strengthen your hands, and then develop your heart and when you've done that, all that remains is to use your **feet**.

That's what our trail guide, Abraham did, he moved out in hope. He walked forward into the future with hope. It says there that: *"We can rejoice when we run into troubles because we know that these troubles produce perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.* (Ro 5:3-5) Abraham looked at his problem as an opportunity for God to do something special in his life, and he persevered by holding to the promises of God. He let God put him through the fires of faith as it were so that it would purify his character. All the while, he kept moving with God; He kept moving forward under the power of the hope that God was going to work it out; which is exactly what God can do in your life. When you focus your eyes; and strengthen your hands and develop your heart; all that remains is to use your feet. **Keep moving, keep growing, and keep walking forward in hope.** I can guarantee that if you keep moving forward with God, you will not be disappointed. Because you will experience the love of God poured out into your heart, and you will discover how God always works things out. *"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* (Je 29:11) *There's a story I love about a Little League baseball game. A visitor happened to walk up and lean against the fence as the kids were playing. He called out to the right fielder: "What's the score?"*

*And the kid said, "It's 18 to nothing. They're ahead."*

*The man was a bit surprised and said, "You don't sound very discouraged about that." The right fielder said back, "Why should I be? We haven't even been up to bat yet!"*

It's the process of developing hope. Once you focus your eyes and get the right perspective; and then strengthen your hands to hold on in obedience to the promises of God. And then develop your heart by letting God purify your character through the problems; all you have to do then is to use your feet. Move on in hope - and discover how God is going to work things out for you. So tell me, are you ready to going through that process and develop hope in your life today? Even in your "now what?" moment? Are you ready to take the first step this morning?