

If you Google the word “hope,” you’ll get about 622,000,000 responses. But if you ask people if they have today, you might not get very many positive responses. Hope seems to be a rare commodity today. Record breaking gas prices, the ongoing home mortgage crisis, and the continuing poor economic situation in Michigan don’t give us much hope. On top of that, the Tigers are off to a bad start, even though they were preseason favorites to win the World Series. How do you find hope in times like these?

A good place for us to look is in the small letter in the back of the New Testament we call 1st Peter. 1st Peter is the “How To” letter for the 1st Century Christian Churches scattered throughout Asia Minor, the area now occupied by modern day Turkey. The Christians there were facing a localized persecution. Some time later the persecution of the Christians would spread throughout the Roman Empire, but it had not reached that point yet when the letter was written.

1st Peter calls the Christians “aliens and strangers in the world.” (1 Peter 2:11) They didn’t quite fit in with the pagan culture of the day. Their lives had been changed by their faith in Christ. We are much like the 1st Century Christians that Peter wrote to. Even though we don’t face any type of formal persecution as Christians in the United States, Christians are often marginalized and the church is frequently criticized. We had a classic example of that last week when both Pope Benedict and the Dali Lama were in the United States. Bill Maher ripped into the Pope and the Catholic Church, not the Buddhist and Dali Lama. It has become OK for celebrities to launch verbal attacks on the church and for the entertainment industry to make fun of Christians.

So how do you find hope in the tough times of life? How did the 1st Century Christians find hope? Hope is one of the most important words in our Christian faith. The word “hope” is used 75 times in the New Testament alone and makes it very clear that our hope is in Jesus Christ. 1st Peter gives some good advice on finding hope and tells us that we need to always be ready to give an account of the hope that we have in Christ.

If we want to find hope, we need to begin with an attitude of love. 1 Peter 3:8 reads, “**Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.**” These words were addressed to the people in the church. Jesus said that people will know that we are His followers by our love for one another. Hope begins with love, God’s love for us that enables us to love one another. That love begins within the Christian family. When we love one another in the Lord, we can then learn to see other people through Jesus’ eyes. We can learn to love our enemies, to see that everyone is created and loved by God. Don’t you feel

better, more hopeful, when you know that someone loves you? To find hope and to give hope to others, we need to develop an attitude of love.

That attitude of love is a necessity for the next step, repaying evil with blessings. 1 Peter 3:9 reads, **“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing.”** We can’t control everything that happens to us or the way other people treat us, but we can control our responses. Most people expect us to get even, to seek revenge. But we don’t have to. As a matter of fact, Jesus tells us love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Christians make a mistake when they respond to attacks upon the church with counter attacks. Our goal shouldn’t be to be proven right or to just win the argument. We need to be faithful to God in the tough times of life, in a hostile culture. Then our response can become a positive witness to those around us.

1 Peter also tells us, **“Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.”** (1 Peter 3:10-11) When we control our reactions with the help of God’s Spirit, we are promised life and good days. And that gives us hope. It also gives hope to those who witness our reactions to the things that happen to us.

Another key step in finding hope is facing our fears. We can’t have hope if we are living in fear. Sometimes people suffer for doing what is right. You may even believe this is true, “No good deed goes unpunished.” But God doesn’t want us to live in fear or act out of fear. His perfect love for us drives out all fear. We can even find hope when we suffer for our faith. Romans 5:3-5 tells us, **“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, 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.”** The love of God will never fail us. We may face tough times, but nothing can separate us from God’s love. Our hope in Christ will not disappoint us because Jesus has won the ultimate victory over sin and death for us.

Finally, the fourth step in finding hope is to follow the example of Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life. He never did anything wrong. But he certainly suffered for doing good. He was condemned for doing good and for proclaiming the Good News. His death and resurrection are the ultimate triumph of hope over injustice, sin and death. Jesus went through all of that to bring us to God, to restore us to God’s family, to welcome us home. Because Jesus lives, we have a living hope in Him. As Jesus’ people we don’t have to respond to evil by retaliating, complaining or retreating. We can live in and tell the world about the hope that we have Jesus Christ, the hope of the world. Amen.