

Living with Hope by Henri Nouwen

Optimism and hope are radically different attitudes.

Optimism is the expectation that things:  
the weather, human relationships,  
the economy, the political situation,  
and so on—will get better.

Hope is the trust that God will fulfill God's promises to us  
in a way that leads us to true freedom.

The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future.

The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust  
that all of life is in good hands.

All the great spiritual leaders in history were people of hope.

Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Mary, Jesus, Rumi, Gandhi and Dorothy Day  
all lived with a promise in their hearts that guided them toward the future  
without the need to know *exactly* what it would look like.

Let's live with hope.

Meditation

As a child I remember hoping for certain things to happen:

I'd get what I want from Santa...

I'd get the cool teacher I wanted in 5<sup>th</sup> grade...

I'd get a puppy for my birthday....

As I grew older my hopes grew mature, or so I thought:

**I hoped that HE would ask me to prom...  
I hoped that I would be accepted into THAT college...  
I hoped that my sister would leave her abusive husband...**

**But now that I am well into latter mid life...  
I have begun to understand hope in a very different way.  
Not to judge myself too harshly,  
but I now understand that most if not all of my past hopes  
were actually desires or wishes or wants...  
at best I was being optimistic that I would eventually  
be getting what I wanted...  
they weren't bad wishes or misdirected wants...  
it just wasn't hope, as I understand it now...**

**Now...I am beginning to get a glimpse into the beautiful and boundless and very real world  
of hope that holds our very limited, fragile and beautiful world...**

**According to Nouwen:**

**Optimism is an expectation of future events going your way.  
Hope is trusting that this very moment...no matter what it is like....  
is held within a larger context of Good and of Love.**

**That is very hard to do.**

**When my sister was being beaten...  
I used to say that I hoped and prayed that she would leave her abusive husband. Nothing  
wrong with that don't get me wrong...  
but it wasn't hope...that was my desire that she do so...  
You might think that I am splitting hairs, being too picky on the words that I use...but I  
would suggest words are important..**

If my sister didn't leave him and if things turned out for the worse,  
(which was a real possibility)  
then my hope would be destroyed and I would have sunk into despair  
and I very well could have lost a lot more than my sister....

Please allow me explain to explain.

We all know that uncertainty and suffering is a part of all of our lives....  
and there is a lot of it in the world, which of course is an understatement,

Children, everywhere are suffering ...

Earth is suffering...

Everywhere we look we see signs of pain and loss and grief...

One of...if not THE hardest things to accept about Life,  
is its apparent paradoxical nature:

That there is joy and sorrow,

good and bad,

easy and difficult

birth and death

in every single life.

We human persons don't like that.

We don't want the sorrow, the bad, the difficult, the death part of life.

We only want success and happiness and ease and life and more life and even more life...

And so on some deep level many of us believe that if we worship the right God, obey the  
right rules and belong to the right religion

our hopes will be fulfilled and we won't endure suffering or loss....

**Others believe that by studying hard enough, working hard enough,  
eating healthy enough, exercising enough...  
that will be the way we will avoid suffering from life's uncertainties of illness and loss ....**

**But we all know that doesn't work either.**

**Life is limited.**

**Life is hard.**

**Life is fragile.**

**Nothing that WE can do can change that reality.**

**Now to be sure: some of our suffering in life is self induced....**

**but there is absolutely no way we can avoid it all.**

**So how can I ...how can we possibly see that ALL of life:**

**the beautiful and the tragic is held,**

**to use Nouwen's language, is in God's good hands?**

**We can do so with Hope.**

**Hope is not wishing.**

**Hope is not wanting...**

**Hope is a choice.**

**It is CHOOSING TO Trust in the Mysterious Presence**

**we know by oh so many different names.**

**Hope is Trusting that the Divine, Mysterious Presence is Good and it is Love  
and that it imbues all of creation all of the time.**

**and Hope is Trusting that Divine Presence is there in the good times**

**and in the times that we are suffering....**

**Hope is trusting in the Ultimate Goodness of the Divine and that is what we call Faith.**

**Hope invites us to recognize the reality the suffering and struggle in this life but at the very same time to know, deeply know that our suffering and our struggles do not have the last word. I believe that is the message of the Resurrection!**

**Hope invites us to TRUST that we are being held in Love and Grace even when we feel lost and in pain**

**Hope whispers to us that we will find a way through it all... and the darkness will not last...**

**and when we keep our minds, our eyes and our hearts open....**

**we see snippets of undeniable beauty and strength that sustain us and we would never have imagined that it could be so in a million years!**

**Etty Hillesum was a young Jewish woman who found beauty and compassion in the Nazi concentration camp...**

**Immaculee Ilibagiza found forgiveness and hope in her Pastor's bathroom with seven other woman during the Rwandan genocide.**

**Are they any different than we?**

**Perhaps...If they are it is only because they understood the true nature of hope even as their desires and wishes were not being realized.**

**When we look for only what we want, then we can not see what is there....**

**So when the cancer diagnosis is made: we only see death.**

**We do not see the love that oozes out of the cracks and crevices all around us.**

**When we lose that job we only see suffering and loss.**

**We do not see the new opportunities that are inviting us to evolve and grow...**

**When we don't get the relationship we desire, we only see loneliness...**

**We do not see how much we are already in relationship with all of creation:  
human and otherwise...**

**Hope allows us to experience the full spectrum  
of human existence without despair....**

**Yes...this or that part of life is ugly but it does not have the final say...**

**Yes...this or that part of life is beating us down...but it will not destroy us....**

**Yes...this or that part of life is cruel and uncertain,  
but we and everyone else always end up in Love.**

**That is our Faith. That is our choice and that is where we find our Hope.**

**Ultimately....**

**Hope is that quality that begins with "Yes" and always ends with "Thank You" Amen!**