Day 16 Joyful Anticipation

**Discussion Points**

1. **Have you ever caught yourself saying, “Well, I hope so,” when in actuality you meant you sincerely doubted it?** Discuss why it is important to understand the true meaning of the word “hope”. Why does the definition of hope include joy? What is the correlation between hope and waiting? What factor does time have to do with hope? What does God’s love have to do with hope?
2. **One of the strongest Bible illustrations of faith and hope is in the life of Abraham.** Using Romans 4:16-22, discuss how faith and hope were at work in his life. How might these principles positively affect the way we/you approach the promises of God? How can understanding these help us when we face situations that are far beyond our ability to fix them?
3. **Is there something that stands out to you in this quote? How might it be applicable to your current overwhelming circumstance?**

*Allow your heart to once again believe that God loves you and that His intentions toward you are good. Allow yourself to hope in Him and His promises again—to joyfully anticipate and wait for His promises to be realized. I’m not suggesting you just jump out of your chair and shout yourself into believing. I’m not saying, “Get over it!” or “Chin up!” in the face of grief. On the contrary, simply open your heart to God who loves you, who only desires good for you, and who will do all that He has promised. Just allow your heart to hope in Him.*

1. **Isaiah 40:29-31 is a well-known passage.** How can knowing that “waiting” means to “expect” (to hope—to joyfully anticipate) positively influence our concept of what these verses mean? Why might this type of waiting renew our strength, cause us to soar like an eagle, run and not be weary, and walk and not faint?

Day 17 Pleasing God

1. **Perhaps you also experienced starting your Christian life with a desire to please God—being motivated in every area by your love for Him.** Then over time, those actions motivated by grace through faith became ***obligations***. Did/does your Christian experience include a long list of things that you believe you must do in order to be a “good” or “spiritual” or “sincere” Christian? In other words, are there religious practices you feel you must DO to be “right with God” or “to please Him”?
2. **In what ways does the false idea that God has our every word, thought, and deed under a magnifying glass negatively affect our relationship with Him?** Why is the concept of “enough” never realized with this way of “living”? If this is difficult for you to ponder, consider a human relationship in which one person is constantly scrutinizing the other, criticizing, demanding more and more, and never satisfied. Why is it difficult for love to flourish in this setting?
3. **All Christians supernaturally want to please God.** Discuss the grand implications of thinking that pleasing God amounts to not “sinning” and doing “good” INSTEAD of simply believing in Jesus (see John 6:26-29). Why does or in what ways does this truth disturb some and set free others? Why might pastors find this disturbing, and why should they instead find it wonderful? (In what ways might having a congregation of people motivated by pleasing God by faith and love be different from a congregation of people fulfilling duties in order to please God?)
4. **In Hebrews 11, we read of the many mighty deeds that people of God have done throughout history.** Often we focus on the deeds accomplished, and miss the point of Hebrews 11 that their faith is what pleased God and caused them to take action. How might this subtly sneak into our relationship and service for God?
5. **In the book of Hebrews, the author is encouraging them to believe in Jesus and not return to the law.** Paul, in Galatians, encouraged the Gentiles not to turn to the law for righteousness, but to continue in faith. Each of us has a slightly different Christian experience, so how do these exhortations to continue living under grace through faith encourage you personally not to base your righteousness (right and favorable relationship with God) on what you do and don’t do?
6. **Hebrews 11:6 teaches us that without faith we cannot please God (at all-Wuest).** This means the faith is what pleases God. Focusing on the word “pleases”, how do you think God responds when He see us believing in Him for answers during difficult times?
7. **Explain the difference between “living by grace through faith”, and “living by law through works”.**
8. **Paul explained that he had formerly seen himself as righteous based on his diligent adherence to the law, his birthright as a Hebrew, his religious participation as a Pharisee, and his religious zeal demonstrated by persecution the church.** Have you observed a similar “righteousness” in the church or perhaps have you also seen yourself as righteous by similar points of boasting?
9. **Many have taught that the “loss” Paul suffered IN ORDER TO GAIN CHRIST was giving up sin and worldly possessions.** What did he ***actually*** give up and count as rubbish? How did he obtain the righteousness which is from God?
10. **Some significantly mean, nasty, and violent things have been done by religious people against believers in Christ.** We can see it taking place around the world even today. We also see persecution within the Christian church. Paul felt completely righteous about persecuting the church. Have you observed or perhaps participated in persecuting those who teach ***righteousness by faith*** in Jesus?
11. **In Hebrews 11:6, we see that faith involves two main features.** One, we believe that God exists. We can amplify this to include that we believe that God is who He claims Himself to be (good, love, faithful, etc.). The other aspect of faith is routinely neglected or greatly diminished, and that we must believe that God rewards those who seek Him. (Save discussing the word “diligently for the next chapter.) How can understanding that faith is not only believing that God exists but also believing that He will actually ANSWER our prayers (reward us with a result) completely changes our concept of why we pray?
12. **In what ways can you relate to the song shared in this chapter?**
13. **Discuss some of the statements made in the last two paragraphs in this chapter.**
* A reward is a *good* thing.
* Believing this pleases Him.
* God isn’t concerned about how long we pray.
* God doesn’t answer our prayers based on how well we’ve been practicing our list of spiritual disciplines.
* His grace is not accumulated.
* God doesn’t refuse to answer our prayers because we aren’t perfect in every way.
* “He who approaches God has, through faith, the assurance that his seeking God will result in good to himself.”-Vincent
* We pray because He answers.
* When we face impossible situations, how much more we need to believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him with good.
1. **In what ways does Romans 4:1-5 express these same concepts?**