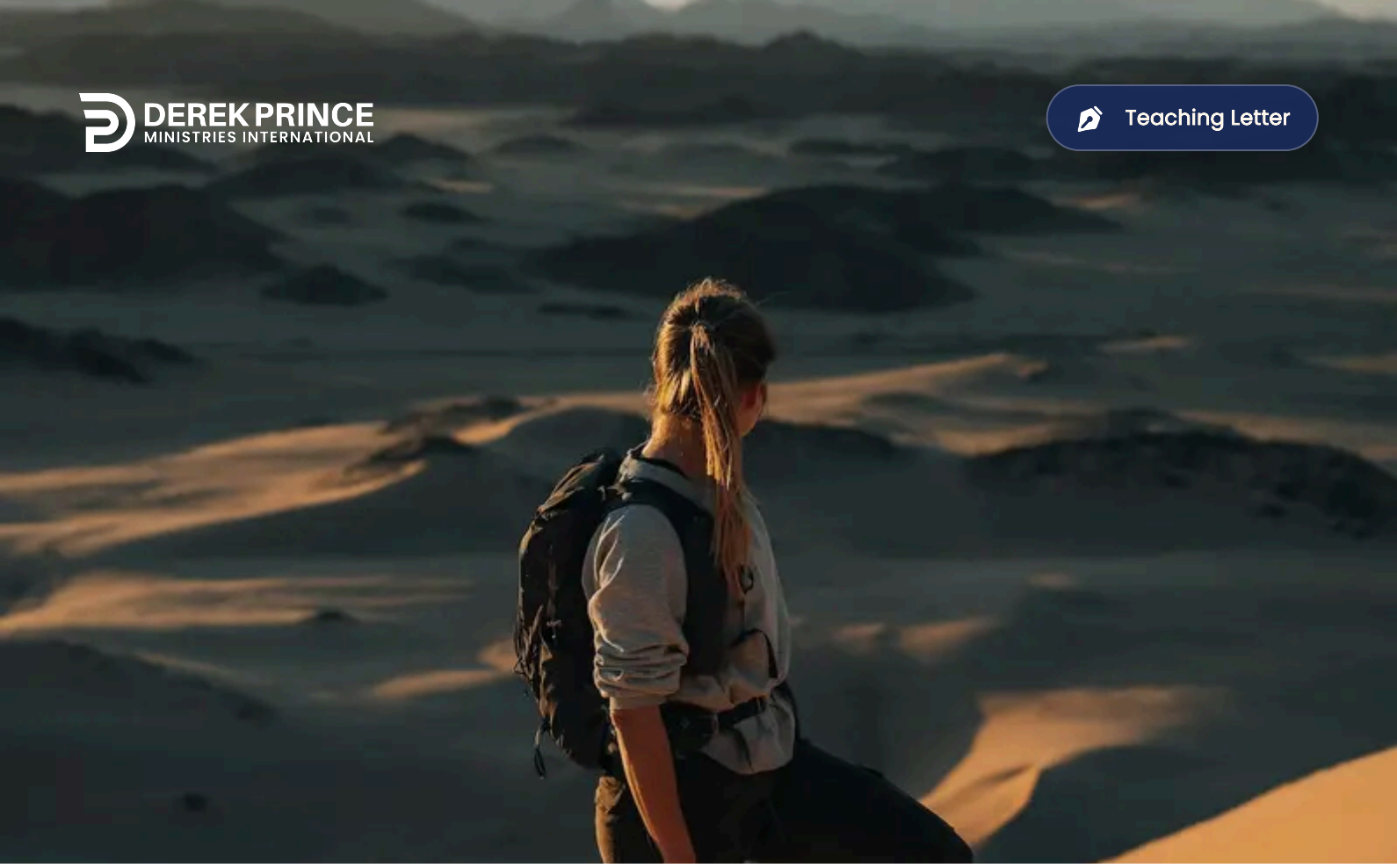


Hope Grows Through Testing



Part 5/5
Hope
By Derek Prince

Throughout my lifetime, I have been privileged to pray for thousands of Christians facing many different challenges in their lives. Although the issues have varied from person to person, there is one problem that I believe is universal. At some point in our lives, most of us—if not all of us—experience hopelessness.

As Christians, we may have to contend with hopelessness, but we don't ever have to succumb to it! Genuine hope, as it is presented in the Scriptures, has the power to transform our outlook on life. But what do we do when we think we are losing this age-old battle? That will be the topic of discussion as we close this series on *Hope*. I trust that this final teaching of our five-part series, along with the previous installments, will help you grasp what hope is, how important it is, and most of all, how you may have it.

Hope of Glory

So far in our series we have discovered eight essential truths about hope. A brief summary of those truths will give us a good basis for what we will discuss in this lesson.

1. There are three abiding realities in the Christian life: faith, hope and love.
2. Hope is produced by the new birth, when we are born again into a living hope.
3. Hope is based on Christ's resurrection from the dead.
4. Hope looks forward to Christ's return, what Scripture refers to as the blessed hope.
5. The source of hope is God's love.
6. Biblical hope motivates us to holy living.
7. This kind of hope produces confident Christians.
8. Our hope is an essential part of our salvation, based on three short words; Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Two Important Alternatives

In my previous letter, we discussed an important contrast I would like to mention again here; that is, the contrast between those who have hope, and those who do not have hope. In Colossians 1:27, Paul speaks about the mystery that was hidden from previous ages and generations, and is now revealed to God's people. He sums it up with these brief words: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." So when

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Christ is in you, you have the hope of glory. This simple truth is vital to our understanding of hope.

What about those who are without Christ? In Ephesians 2:12 (niv), Paul says, "... at that time you were separate from Christ ... without hope and without God in the world." So you see, there are only two alternatives for all of us: if we have Christ in us, we have the hope of glory, of eternal life with Christ. If, however, we are without Christ, we are without hope, and without God.

While you ponder that point, let me suggest that you make sure you are in the first category. Do you have Christ in you? Do you know what it is to have the hope of glory?

Exulting in Tribulations

In my introduction to this series, I shared a personal experience from a time in my own life when I was in desperate need of hope. Eventually, the Holy Spirit took me directly to the Scriptures, and there He met my need. Because of that experience, I have a deep concern for Christians to gain a scriptural understanding of hope—especially when they are struggling.

What happens when our hope is tested? To answer that question, let's first look at Romans 5:1–5 (nasb1995):

> Therefore having been justified by faith [justified means acquitted, made righteous by faith], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (vv. 1–2)

Paul says that we exult in hope of the glory of God. The word exult means to rejoice, to be very confident. Notice that it is hope that produces that joy and confidence, even to the point of boasting. But that is not all Paul has to say. He continues in verse 3:

> And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations ...

In this verse, Paul says something quite different from the previous verse. We can understand exulting in hope, but how do we understand exulting in tribulations, trials, and testing? Maybe you have never thought about that. How do you react to tribulation? Do you exult in it?

Why should we exult in our tribulations? Paul goes on to explain:

> ... knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (vv. 3–5)

In these verses, Paul is pointing us to a progression that leads to hope. When we come into tribulation, if we hold onto our faith, then we can hold on to our hope. What does tribulation do for us? It initiates a progression which is essential for the building of Christian character—to give us a strong, stable, confident hope.

You see, hope must be tested by tribulation in order to be proved genuine and to become strong. Notice the progression: tribulation produces perseverance; perseverance produces proven character; proven character produces a hope that is not disappointed.

What Tribulation Produces

Let me tell you something about perseverance. Do you know the key to perseverance? It is to persevere! There is just no other way to learn perseverance but to persevere. It is like swimming. You can have all the theory of swimming, you can learn all the strokes and motions, and you can know all the facts about breathing. But ultimately, the only way to learn to swim is to swim. And the only way to learn to persevere is to persevere.

So when we come into tribulation, we need to hold on to these important truths: the trial we are facing is for our good. It helps us. God is permitting us to go through this because it is the only means to produce what is needed in us for that final strong, confident, radiant, unshakeable hope. Tribulation produces perseverance.

What does perseverance produce? It produces proven character. A person who has been through tribulation and comes out victorious has proven character. Paul says that "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37, niv). What does it mean to be "more than conquerors?" I understand it this way: you come out of tribulation with more than you had when you went into it. As a conqueror, you don't just hold your own, but you have

gained a victory. That is how it is when we persevere in tribulation—we come out with proven character.

Proven character is essential because it establishes our hope. We had hope of the glory of God before this started. But when we come out of it, we have an altogether different degree of hope. This tried and tested hope does not disappoint us, but opens us up to the fullness of God's love.

You see, to receive the fullness of God's love, you have to have proven character. You have to have stability. You have to have a vessel strong enough and large enough to contain all the love God wants to pour into you.

Door of Hope

I would like to illustrate this process from a passage in the prophets in the Old Testament. In Hosea, chapter 2, God is telling Israel how He is going to deal with them; He speaks about bringing them into a time of tribulation. But then He says this:

> There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. (Hosea 2:15, niv)

It is important to know that the word *achor* means "trouble." So the Lord is saying, "I'll let Israel come into trouble, but I'll work through that trouble so that it will become the door of hope." This is a wonderful biblical principle. Whenever God brings us into trouble, remember there is always a way out—there is an exit, and it is the door of hope.

Two Requirements

I want to explain briefly two further requirements for cultivating this kind of strong, confident hope that we are discussing. The first requirement is that we need to give heed to the Scriptures, to what the Bible says. Paul states this in Romans 15:4, (nasb):

> For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction [Paul is talking about the Scriptures; all Scripture is written for our instruction. What was the purpose?] ... so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

We have already pointed out that perseverance is essential to cultivating this kind of hope. But Paul is saying that we also need the encouragement of the Scriptures. When you are in tribulation and when you are having a hard time, turn to the Scriptures. Read them! Believe them! They will encourage you; they will strengthen your hope. Do not deny yourself this wonderful, God-given source of hope, which is the Scriptures.

Sometimes you might not feel like reading the Bible, but just make up your mind. Tell yourself, "I'm going to read the Bible until I hear from God, until I get something out of it that strengthens my hope and gives me the grace to go on persevering." Remember, that is what the Bible was written for—to instruct us—that through it we might have hope.

By the Power of the Holy Spirit

This is the second requirement: Hope can only come to us in its fullness through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. A little further on in the fifteenth chapter of Romans, Paul gives us these beautiful words:

> Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing [Think of what that means, to be filled with all joy and peace in believing. What is the result? He continues ...], so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13, nasb)

God wants to fill us with all joy and peace, so that we may "abound in hope." That means having more than just enough hope for ourselves, so that we may have hope to minister to others. When others are downcast, we have a word of hope, a word of encouragement for them. But notice, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot do this on our own. The Holy Spirit is the only agent who can minister this kind of victorious hope in our lives.

The God of Hope

I would like to close our series on hope with this beautiful phrase which begins Romans 15:13: "Now may the God of hope fill you ..." Notice, He is the God of hope. You cannot know God without having hope. He is the only ultimate source of all true hope. May the God of hope fill you. That is my sincere prayer for you.

Let's proclaim this scripture over our lives today.

> May the God of hope fill me, with all joy and peace in believing, that I may abound in

hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Consider these words. Meditate on them. When you find yourself in a troubling situation or facing affliction, turn back to them. Declare them again, over and over, until they become completely real in your life and your experience.

Teaching Letter
Transcript: TL-L118-100-ENG
Last Updated: 04 Nov 2026
Website: Derekprince.com/en/resources



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