

BRAVE NEW HOPE

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Romans 12:12

Good morning, Fil-Am! I'd like to greet you Happy Birthday! Good morning to our guests. I'd like to thank you for coming and being a part of this celebration.

Fil-Am has come of age. Because being 21 means you've just gotten started. You have the whole world to explore, an enormous range of opportunities to pursue and thousands of things you can become an expert at. Everything that you've done so far has given you a good base to build upon.

God has given us the past 20 years to learn, to grow, to mature, and everything. He stretched us a church, he challenged us, he allowed us to go through the ups and downs, the highs and lows, so that we may experience his grace and faithfulness and prepare us for better things to come.

And I believe God has great plans for us. Amen? That's why our anniversary theme is, say it with me “Brand New Home”. Did I say it right? Oops, “Brave New Hope”. But they sound alike, don't they? Brand New Home, Brave New Hope.

Brand New Home. You know what I'm talking about. We were there just last week and let me tell you now, we're going back there in December. We'll make that announcement next week. So, be here next week.

This morning, I'd like to tackle a topic about hope, about expecting God's best. As a church, we've been praying that God's will be done in this church. We've been praying that all our plans, our programs, our way of doing things be in accordance with what God thinks is best for this church. Because this is his church, not ours. We've just been given the unique privilege of letting her grow and mature just like God has given parents the opportunity to grow her children.

Please turn to the person next to you and say, “This is his church, not yours.”

Now, as individuals I'm sure we also want God's best for our lives. And it involves every aspect of our lives—family, career, love life, school, ministry, and the list goes on. We must not settle for less. Last week, I talked about conquering your fears. This message is sort of an extension. To conquer your fears, you must believe that God will defend you, he will deliver you, and he will never desert you. In short, to live a victorious means depending on God because you must expect that God wants his best for you.

Please turn to your neighbor and say, “God wants the best for you although you don't look like you deserve it.”

This morning I'd like to talk about expecting God's best. There are **three things you can do to expect God's best.** And these are contained in our theme verse. Let us read together, ***“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”***

Expecting God's best starts with hope. The verse says

1. **Be joyful in hope.** Say to your neighbor, “Be joyful”. Smile.

Other versions of the Bible say, “Rejoice in hope”. Now, what does hope mean to the Christian? How does the Bible define hope? Like Faith and love, God has given us hope and we must rejoice in that.

But first, let me tell you what hope is not. You see, the dictionary defines it as “a desire for something to happen”. A wish, an expectation, an aspiration. Like saying “I hope the Redskins win the Super Bowl” or “I hope I get a raise” or “I hope my husband gives me flowers”. For some women that's hopeless. But I hope not.

Notice the uncertainty in those statements. Biblical hope is not a hope-so but it is a know-so. It isn't wishing for the best. It isn't waiting to see what happens and hope that it turns out well. Hope, in other words, is not a feeling or an emotion. Hope is the knowledge of facts.

If someone says to you “I hope you have a good day,” there is no guarantee that the day will go well. But to have a biblical hope is to have a sure anchor of the soul, not hoping for rain because the forecast says that there is a 60% chance of rain and you hope that you get your garden watered. That is not hope...that is wishful thinking and it is utterly undependable and has no power to bring anything to pass. Human hope pales in comparison to biblical hope, as we shall see.

A Christian’s definition of hope is far superior to that of the world. Instead of wishing or hoping for something to happen, a believer knows that their hope is solid, concrete evidence because it is grounded in the Word of God and we know that God cannot lie. **Hebrews 6:18-19** says, *“God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”* This hope, which is our salvation and all things that accompany it as the verse before this says, *“...dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation.”* **(Heb. 6:9b)** is firm and secure. It cannot be moved. It is rock-solid. You can bank on it. The world doesn’t know or have any idea of the kind of hope that we have as children of God. It is an exclusive privilege we have. Because he loves us so much. He will not promise us something and then go back on his promise.

What are God’s promises? There are literally thousands. One of these is forgiveness of your sins.

You may be someone who is always hard on yourself. You cannot forgive yourself because of the mistakes you’ve made. Or the sins you’ve committed in the past. It haunts you. Your mind replays it like an old movie. And you feel like there is no hope out of this prison you’re in. But it is just a prison you created in your mind. God can set you free.

Paul says in **Romans 8:1**, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”* The good thing is, God’s forgiveness never runs dry. It is a deep well from which you can always draw from. If you fail him today, he will not fail to forgive you. In **1 John 1:9**, it says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* There’s no expiration to that. He will keep on forgiving. That’s how loving and gracious our God is.

God also promises an abundant life at present. He wants to bless you. And as I said earlier, he wants to give you the best. He wants you to experience his joy, and peace, and grace in this world. Jesus says, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* (**John 10:10**) Many of us are full of debt, full of problems, full of pain. Wouldn’t it be nice instead to have a life that is full of joy, full of peace, full of grace? That is what Jesus promises to those who will take him at his word.

And God’s promise also is that you will live forever in heaven. One of our greatest hopes is the resurrection. There is no other religion that offers this kind of hope. We have this hope because of what Jesus has done for us. He died for us. He was buried. And he was resurrected. Therefore, his followers will be resurrected as well. The apostle Paul recognized this hope when he said before the Jewish religious leaders during his trial, *“It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”* (**Acts 23:6**)

So, folks, we can be joyful in hope. There are so much we can hope for. Be joyful in hope. Don’t let circumstances bog you down. Which leads us to the next thing you can do to expect the best from God.

2. Be patient in affliction. Say to your neighbor “Be patient”. Hang in there.

Affliction is something that causes pain or suffering. No one in this world is immune from affliction. If you're not suffering from anything now, I assure you it will come. It's part of life. Even the Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, is known to have been afflicted with bouts of depression in his entire life.

Afflictions can come in the form of health issues, financial troubles, unfaithful spouses, wayward children and the list continues. But many also deal with persecution which the Apostle Paul likely had in mind when he wrote this verse.

The word "affliction" comes from the Greek word **thlipsis** and conveys the idea of being squeezed or placed under pressure or crushed beneath a weight. In ancient England, for example, those who willfully refused to plead guilty had heavy weights placed on their chest and were pressed and crushed to death. This was literally thlipsis. Thlipsis thus refers not to mild discomfort but to a great burden that weighs heavily on one's heart, mind, and soul.

Regardless of the manner or degree in which we are afflicted, Paul encourages us to just endure it by being patient. At times the source of affliction will lift speedily, at other times not so fast, and never fast enough for most of us, and some deal with affliction throughout their entire life. I like the KJV word for patience which is longsuffering, which of course means suffering long – indicating that the affliction is not a short-term ailment.

What are your afflictions at the moment? What is giving you pain and suffering for quite a while? Of course, afflictions are never pleasant. It has the effect of making us either better or bitter. But God has a purpose for everything that happens in our lives. I'm not saying that God causes your afflictions. They happen because we live in an imperfect world where in general we see tragic things happen all around us. And so, we ourselves on a personal level experience tragic things in our own lives.

But I want us to look at three reasons why God allows you to go through sufferings or difficulties.

A. GOD OFTEN USES PROBLEMS TO DIRECT US.

You see, sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways. Do you agree with that? That's the thought contained in Proverbs 20:30 (NIV). It says, "Blows and wounds scrub away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being." It's saying that sometimes we learn our lesson the hard way. Like a little child who is tempted to steal from his mother's purse but doesn't do it because he remembers the spanking he got when he was caught the first time.

You see, God uses problems to motivate us. Sometimes we're a little complacent, we don't want to change and He has to light a fire under us. It makes things uneasy. We get uncomfortable. C. S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." There's no doubt about it, when you're hurting God has your attention. God uses problems to direct us, to say, "I want your attention. You're going the wrong way."

B. GOD OFTEN USES PROBLEMS TO TEST US.

Deuteronomy 8:2 "The Lord God led you all the way in the desert these forty years to test you in order to know what was in your heart." The Bible says that God let the children of Israel wander around in the desert for forty years and He gave them several different tests and every single test they failed. So He'd say, "Ok, one more lap around the desert!" They spent forty years dying in the desert while God was testing them and they failed every test.

You see, problems reveal what's inside of us. It's like when you squeeze a toothpaste tube, toothpaste comes out. When you squeeze a lemon, lemon juice comes out. When you are in the squeeze, whatever is inside comes out. Somebody said, "Christians are like tea bags.

You don't know what's inside of them until you plop them in hot water." When you get under pressure it really reveals to you what you are. And I'd like to emphasize TO YOU. Because God already knows what you are, what you are made of, what's inside of you. He tests you for your own benefit. So that you may know who or what you really are.

C. MOST OF ALL GOD USES PROBLEMS TO PERFECT US.

Paul says in Romans 8:28-29 (NKJV) "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." v. 29 says how He uses things for good: to make us like Christ, to mold us into the image of Jesus, to build character in our lives.

You and I are like uncut diamonds. We have some rough edges on us. We have some dull spots that need to be polished. God uses problems and trials and difficulties in our lives to cut off the rough edges, to smooth us down, to polish us up so that we become a beautiful gem reflecting His glory, reflecting the light of the Lord, of much greater value than before.

What is God's number one purpose in your life? It's not to make you happy. Happiness is a by-product of His number one purpose. God's number one purpose in your life is to change your character, to make you like Himself. The Bible says in Genesis 1, God created man in His own image; only, man blew it and he went another way and the image was marred and broken and damaged so God, today, is restoring that image. He wants to make you like Christ. What was Jesus like? He was loving, patient, good, a person of integrity, faithful. He had self-control. All of those kinds of things, God wants to build in your life. So God's number one purpose is to make you like Christ and His character.

To expect God's best in your life, you need to be joyful in hope, be patient in affliction, and finally,

3. Be Faithful in prayer. Say to your neighbor, "Be faithful".

Being faithful in prayer is what ties up this verse. Our first two phrases say "Be joyful in hope and patient in affliction"- Hope and patience can get Christians through the trying times. However, these two are impossible without prayer. How can we be joyful in hope, if we know nothing about prayer to the God of all hope? As for patience, how can we be patient if we do not pray? Without prayer, our hope grows dim and we lose sight of our heavenly home. Without prayer, our patience grows thin and we want to give up during times of affliction. Through prayer, we can be joyful and patient in all tribulations, and endure even to the point of torture and death.

Most of us are familiar with Ted Turner, the cable television millionaire. Turner, at the American Humanist Association banquet, where he received an award for his work on the environment and world peace, openly criticized fundamental Christianity. He said, "Jesus would be sick at his stomach over the way his ideas have been twisted." He went on to say, "I've been saved seven or eight times. But, I gave up on it, when, despite my prayers, my sister died. The more I strayed from my faith, the better I felt!"

Ted Turner is dead wrong, but he is perfectly reflecting the attitude many hold concerning God and the matter of prayer. Many people will pray about something for a while and when the answer doesn't come when they think it should, they just throw up their hands in defeat and say, "What's the use?" Many of us wouldn't admit that this morning, but we have done the same thing! This passage is a challenge to that notion!

In Luke 18, we read the parable of the persistent widow. Jesus tells His disciples this parable in order to teach them the importance of remaining persistent in prayer. In this parable, apparently a widow had a quarrel with somebody then took her case before a judge. The judge ignored her. But she kept coming to the judge so that he may grant him justice against her adversary. We don't know how many times she did it, but eventually the judge, out of exasperation, relented and gave in to her demand.

This widow represents us. There are times when we too are burdened down with cares, worries, fears and troubles. During those times, it may seem that every circumstance of life is stacked against us. There may be the temptation to say, "What's the use?," especially after we have prayed and prayed and prayed about some matter. Yet, if we can learn anything from this poor woman, let us learn the lesson that persistence in prayer pays off in God's time!

John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher, encountered many times refusal, and denial, during his early years in the ministry. He logged a few of these instances in his diary:

Sunday A.M., May 5: Preached in St. Anne's. Asked not to come back.

Sunday P.M., May 5: Preached in St. John's. Deacons said, "Get out, and stay out!"

Sunday A.M., May 12: Preached in St. Jude's. Can't go back there either.

Sunday P.M., May 19: Preached in St. Somebody Else's. Deacons called special meeting, and said I couldn't return.

Sunday A.M., May 26: Preached on street. Kicked off street.

Sunday A.M., June 2: Preached at the edge of town. Kicked off highway.

Sunday P.M., June 2: Preached in a pasture. Ten thousand came.

God answers in his own time. As the song goes, he makes everything beautiful in his time. You just wait and be faithful in prayer.

You see, we need never fear that God doesn't hear us, because His ear is ever open to the cry of His children. Isaiah 65:24 says, "Even before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear." And Jer. 33:3 says, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know."

Sometimes prayer is answered immediately, at other times, the answer is delayed for some time. The key is not giving up! God isn't just making us wait, He is working out the answers we seek. Our persistence in prayer demonstrates the depth of our burden. If you can pray about an item once or twice and then give up, you weren't really burdened over it. A genuine burden will put you before God and keep you there until He answers!

Let me finish this message with one more story to illustrate the value of being faithful in prayer.

Roger Simms, hitchhiking his way home, would never forget the date--May 7. His heavy suitcase made Roger tired. He was anxious to take off his army uniform once and for all. Flashing the hitchhiking sign to the oncoming car, he lost hope when he saw it was a black, sleek, new Cadillac. To his surprise the car stopped. The passenger door opened. He ran toward the car, tossed his suitcase in the back, and thanked the handsome, well-dressed man as he slid into the front seat. "Going home for keeps?" "Sure am," Roger responded. "Well, you're in luck if you're going to Chicago." "Not quite that far. Do you live in Chicago?" "I have a business there. My name is Hanover." After talking about many things, Roger, a Christian, felt a compulsion to witness to this fifty-ish, apparently successful businessman about Christ. But he kept putting it off, till he realized he was just thirty minutes from his home. It was now or never. So, Roger cleared his throat, "Mr. Hanover, I would like to talk to you about something very important."

He then proceeded to explain the way of salvation, ultimately asking Mr. Hanover if he would like to receive Christ as his Savior. To Roger's astonishment the Cadillac pulled over to the side of the road. Roger thought he was going to be ejected from the car. But the businessman bowed his head and received Christ, then thanked Roger. "This is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me."

Five years went by, Roger married, had a two-year-old boy, and a business of his own. Packing his suitcase for a business trip to Chicago, he found the small, white business card Hanover had given him five years before. In Chicago he looked up Hanover Enterprises. A receptionist told him it was impossible to see Mr. Hanover, but he could see Mrs. Hanover. A little confused as to what was going on, he was ushered into a lovely office and found himself facing a keen-eyed woman in her fifties. She extended her hand. "You knew my husband?" Roger told how her husband had given him a ride when hitchhiking home after the war. "Can you tell me when that was?" "It was May 7, five years ago, the day I was discharged from the army." Then, Roger hesitated. Should he mention giving his witness? Since he had come so far, he might as well take the plunge. "Mrs. Hanover, I explained the gospel. He pulled over to the side of the road and wept against the steering wheel. He gave his life to Christ that day." Explosive sobs shook Mrs. Hanover's body. Getting a grip on herself, she said, "I had prayed for my husband's salvation for years. I believed God would save him." "And," said Roger, "Where is your husband, Mrs. Hanover?" "He's dead," she wept, struggling with words. "He was in a car crash after he let you out of the car. He never got home. You see--I thought God had not kept His promise." Sobbing uncontrollably, she added, "I stopped living for God five years ago because I thought He had not kept His word!"

This morning, I'd like to tell you. God is faithful. He never breaks his promise. He says "I'll never leave you nor forsake." Just put your hope in me.

This church has a bright future ahead of us. Twenty years has gone by and for the next 20 years I believe God want us to face a brave new hope. And for each of you, I don't know exactly what is going on in your lives. Are you troubled, are you in great difficulty, are you losing hope. The psalmist says in Psalm 42:11, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."