

Ways to Find Serious Hope

By Viki Rife

We live in dangerous times, and I'm not referring to the risk of contracting COVID-19. Yes, there is cause for concern there. But our greatest danger as Christians is that we will buy into the world's perspective and act accordingly, missing an amazing chance to reflect Christ to the world around us.



I've been personally challenged to consider the amount of time I spend following the news, compared to the time I spend checking to see what God's Word has to say to me. Although mankind had been prone throughout history to mass hysteria, the kind of global fear we are seeing is intensely compounded by social media as well as news sources. Everyone is anxious to get a story out, even if it means they don't take time to responsibly check the facts. Of course, all kinds of people are willing to be interviewed as "experts," even those who only know about a tiny percentage of the big picture! How is a person supposed to know what to believe?

There is a lot of reason for hope, but first we need to make sure we're on stable ground. For starters, we need to keep in mind that no human being can predict what God is up to outside of what His Word teaches. We absolutely cannot base our decisions and responses on what anyone is saying will happen. We can't afford to be shaken by what people think. Now, more than ever, is our chance to personally immerse ourselves deeply in what God himself states are his intentions for the human race.

Interestingly, many of the principles presented by the American Psychological Association for developing an ability to "bounce back" from hard times were actually given to God's people long ago. Here are some steps we can take, based on their recommendations, but from our perspective as believers. Some action steps are suggested for each one:

- 1. Make connections.** Do not isolate yourself emotionally, even if you have to physically. Stay in touch with other human beings in some way. Accept help from others. Remember, too, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Helping others will help you a lot! *Set a goal to reach out to a certain number of people a day to find out how they're doing. Offer to pray with them before you end the conversation.*
- 2. Embrace change.** As believers, we know, in our heads at least, that God uses everything for our good. Pay attention to how the changes in your routine are growing and maturing you. Make a point of finding the positive possibilities the change could bring. They're there if we're willing to see them. *Write down possibilities you uncover.*
- 3. Keep perspective.** Look for the big picture. How important will this seem in 5-10 years? Again, dig into God's Word for his perspective. The worst thing you can do is watch the

news constantly—it will draw you into the dire predictions and that “sky is falling” mentality of those who do not know Christ. *Ask God to help you see the situation from His perspective. Write down and celebrate what He is doing right now.*

4. **Remember.** Review other times of struggle and how God got you through it. Remember how God worked when his people praised him in advance for the victory he would give. Seek out strong believers who have been through hard times and listen to their stories of God’s faithfulness. *Make a list of evidences of God’s faithfulness and give yourself time to rejoice over each one!*
5. **Develop a structure.** Decide what you want to include in your day and set up times to do it. Plan set times for meals, bedtime, and time with God. If you want to keep abreast of the news, set certain times to check what’s going on and then turn it off. Personally, I find that five to ten minutes three times a day for news and/or social media are plenty. I’m trying to keep my focus off my phone and computer except for work (and recipes). *Setting up a schedule that provides a sense of rhythm and routine will help stabilize and ground you.*
6. **Let go of what you can’t change.** Don’t let your mind waste tomorrow’s energy today. Ask God to show you what you should be acting on, and trust that he will do that. Faith in his ability to guide his children through this is a privilege we should appropriate for ourselves. *Write down the things you can’t change, allow yourself to grieve their heaviness if necessary, then tear them up and throw them away. You’re reminding yourself they are not yours to carry.*
7. **Take care of yourself.** Exercise your body and your mind. Get the rest you need. Find something else to do other than binge eating. Today’s crisis will not last forever; prepare yourself to move forward in the future. *Plan steps you can take so you will actually be healthier by the time things return to normal.*
8. **Focus on hope.** We must remember that hope is a choice. We must teach ourselves to recognize the hope that is within and beyond hard times. Let God’s word transform your soul with his hope. *Start by using a Bible app or website to look up and read every verse in the Bible that mentions “hope.”*
9. **Be grateful.** Nothing overcomes anxiety like a thankful heart. It might be over little things you never normally think about. For example, the other day I passed the plungers in the story and found myself thanking God we’re not having to deal with plumbing problems right now. Once you start looking for ways to be thankful, you will have a fresh perspective on God’s goodness. Have you heard of the 1000 gifts challenge? *Record what you are thankful for, numbering each one. Set a certain number you want to record each day. See how long it takes you to list 1000 blessings from God.*
10. **Pray.** I know that should have been first, but I find that I am usually more likely to remember most whatever I read last. Set yourself on a journey of intercession for others (see #1 above). *Spend time asking God to help you see His heart in this matter. Intervene before God for those who are suffering more than you are.* It will increase your ability to be grateful, too.

(Some ideas adapted from "The Road to Resilience" from the American Psychology Association toolkit)