

Fanning the Flames of Faith



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I saw a homeless man pushing his junk cart today. It contained everything he owned. His scraggly beard was as dirty as his matted, stringy hair. It was obvious he had not bathed in a while. The rags he wore hung loosely from his bony frame. What I remembered the most about him was his eyes. They were severe, dark, empty eyes that had lost all hope. Adversity overcame his ability to believe in his dreams.

Hope often hides in adversity's shadow. Adversity tries to convince us it will destroy us, as it taunts us and tells us there's no reason to keep going. It wants us to give up and accept our condition.

A young couple has grandiose plans and dreams for marriage, anticipating the glorious future they will build together. They soon discover that adversity walks alongside their hope. He loses his job; she miscarries their first child, and they're forced to move in with his parents in a house shrouded in conflict. The question, "Why?" hangs in the air. And eventually, hope turns into anger, then bitterness, and ultimate defeat.

In the beginning, there is always an abundance of hope. Christopher Columbus left Spain because he had hope. The Pilgrims experienced untold suffering just for the hope of freedom to worship their God. They spent two months on the Mayflower, enduring taunting by the crew, sickness, storms, and death before finally landing at Plymouth Rock. They continued, however, and produced the greatest nation on earth.

The early American settlers traveled thousands of miles in wagons across the dangerous, unfamiliar terrain, just in the hope of a better life. Women buried their husbands along the wagon trail, yet they persevered and continued their long journey west. Hope was their only consolation. Adversity was the constant companion of those heroes who struggled for a better way of life. Hope was always nearby, eager to nurture and strengthen their battered faith.

I once heard a misguided pastor preach a message titled There is No Such Thing as Hope. His theory was that we must have faith. "Faith is to be sought after with everything in us. Hope is futile. It is faith that moves mountains," he blustered, "not hope." While it is true that faith is the drive that ultimately fuels our endeavors; hope is the spark that ignites faith's flames. How can we remain assured that we will receive our desires without the seed of hope from which to build?

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Before every great work of art can begin, before laying the foundation of a nation, before building a magnificent cathedral, before bringing a new life into the world, there is hope. Hope is the underpinning of every grand enterprise. Our dreams cannot exist without hope. Adversity challenges every endeavor, every dream, and every plan. We invest our finances, our time, strength, commitment, and honor while adversity laughs at us, mocks us, and calls us fools. Sadness grows into a lump in our throat, choking the life out of us while we look to heaven and ask, "Why?"

We wipe our tears and peer across the horizon. Is that a cloud moving toward us? What can it be? How can we endure another disappointment? The cloud moves closer, and we can see the towering red "H" on its chest against the blue backdrop of his suit. The crimson cape of promise ripples in the wind. Hope has arrived. Adversity must step aside as hope wraps its powerful arms around us, soothing us with words of promise. Hope fuels our faith, and we can move forward once again.

Our dreams, desires, and promises are there for the taking. We can change things. We can make a better world. Although adversity stands by, longing to destroy us, hope steps up, ready to carry us back once again to our faith. For those who will allow it, hope fans the flames of faith with the promise of a better tomorrow.