

FOCUS

MAGAZINE



REFLECTING

hope
edition



CONTENTS

- 03 The 'permacrisis' and hope** **David Neal** finds a reason to get up in the morning.
- 04 The power of hope** **Yanet Guarachi** shows why we must keep hope alive.
- 06 Something more** **Jody Bloom** discovers something to fill the void.
- 08 Hope for physical health** **Dr Chidi Ngwaba** gives a doctor's advice.
- 11 Twelve years of hope** A modern take on a familiar story from **Catherine Anthony Boldeau**.
- 13 Reflections of hope** **Eileen Phillip** imagines the shades of hope.
- 14 Hope after death** **Dr Kirk Thomas** gives a Christian response to grief.
- 16 The unplugged diaries** There's something better to plug into for **Divinia Reynolds**.
- 20 Making hope visible** 'What does hope look like?' asks **Sharon Platt-McDonald**.
- 23 It is well with my soul** **Omari Norman** points to hope when all hope seems lost.
- 24 The colour of hope** **Brenda Nelson** pictures hope in a coffee shop, and in Heaven.
- 25 Hope in an unexpected place** **Precious Chitwa** discovers hope via WhatsApp.
- 26 Thinking of making a NEWSTART?** **Darell Philip** gives pointers for a healthier future.
- 28 Reflecting on hope** **Christian Salcianu** finds a song to inspire.

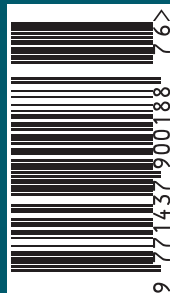


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The 'permacrisis' and hope



by David Neal

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I rarely feel encouraged after watching the news. We live in the age of the 'permacrisis', a term the dictionary describes as '*an extended period of instability and insecurity, especially one resulting from a series of catastrophic events*'.¹

Do I really need to provide the roll call? Let's start with Brexit, COVID-19, Ukraine, climate change, ecological and man-made disasters, the cost-of living crisis, political instability, global insecurity, earthquakes, and now, as I write, a return to 'cold war' politics between the US and Russia. The 'doomsday clock' of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists 'now stands at 90 seconds to midnight – the closest to global catastrophe it has ever been'.² Seeing all this trouble – on top of your own personal trouble – why would you ever bother getting up in the morning?

I'll tell you why. Look at the news and all your personal issues through the lens of Christianity and its central character, Jesus. I home in on the Person of Jesus because I believe He is the key to universal, global and personal hope.

What I like about His teaching, as recorded in the Bible, is that He is remarkably honest and kind. He's honest in His assessment of how things are (there will be trouble ahead), and kind in the way He wants to help – in fact, to a large extent, He's already done so. For example, consider the event we all try to avoid – death. He overcame it! Because of His death

and resurrection (the reality of which was confirmed by eyewitness testimony and historical record) there is the gift of a future life that lasts forever. Christians call it 'eternal life'.

But that's not all! There is also the added value of the personal presence of Christ in our lives today. I cannot begin to tell what a difference it makes to my personal well-being during the 'permacrisis'. When I see global challenges and my own personal challenges through 'His eyes', I begin to see things in a different context.

This is perhaps a conversation for another time, but when Jesus said there would be trouble ahead, He knew what He was talking about! Jesus is God who became human and visited this planet to resolve our troubles, to resolve a conflict as cosmic as it is personal: the conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. It was Satan who was defeated when Christ overcame death. And guess what – a day is coming when the problem of death will be no more. That is what the resurrection is all about. It is worth taking a deeper look at some time, but Christians have real, tangible hope because of this: Jesus came, He lived, He died, He rose, He ascended, and He will return!

Unpack every one of those ancient statements, and you will find Someone who is utterly and totally kind, gracious and trustworthy; a Teacher and Healer; Someone who knows the past, present and future, and who is more powerful than Biden, Putin and Xi Jinping and all the world leaders put together. Most of all, He not only shares good news: He *is* the good news. Truly, I submit that He is the answer to every crisis, whether global, local or personal. Why do I believe that? Because His actions speak louder than words. That's why I'm still filled with hope, even in this time of permacrisis.

¹*Collins Dictionary*, 'permacrisis': <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/permacrisis>

²See *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 'A time of unprecedented danger: it is 90 seconds to midnight' (24 January 2023): <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/>



The power of hope

by Yanet Guarachi

What is hope?

Hope is an important attitude concerning the future. Hope gives us resistance to life's blows. When a natural disaster or personal misfortune occurs, such as the loss of a loved one, those who believe there is a solution can experience an extra measure of strength to recover from losses. Hope promotes overall mental health and may help heal specific conditions, including severe mental illness, suicidal thoughts, depression, anxiety, and trauma-related disorders.¹ Research also demonstrates that hope promotes well-being more than optimism or self-efficacy.² In addition, hope has strong associations with several psychosocial processes and outcomes, including positive affect, emotional adjustment and illness-related coping, greater life satisfaction, enhanced perception that life is meaningful, a high sense of purpose in life, quality of life, and social support.³

The psychologist Viktor Frankl was cast into the Nazi network of concentration and extermination camps, but he survived miraculously. Frankl stayed alive and kept hope alive; he thought about his wife and the expectation of seeing her again, and dreamt of lecturing after the war about the psychological lessons to be learnt from the Auschwitz experience. He affirmed that most of the survivors of the Nazi concentration camps were saved because they kept alive the hope of being liberated until the end. Since they did not accept

the idea that it was the end of their days, they focused on the hope of one day being released from that hell.

Promoting hope

So, if hope is an important condition that affects many areas of our present and future, we need to know how to promote it. Here is a list of advice on some helpful habits:

- **First, change your routine.** When hopelessness overwhelms you, you could experiment with uncommon activities: go somewhere in nature; enjoy the beautiful things that God has created; listen to songs of peace and hope. If you do not rest on Saturday, why not start doing that? Most of the time we are busy in our routine, but we need a break at least one day a week. These variations will renew your spirit to the point of looking to the future with hope.
- **Second, reject negative thoughts.** If you have failed a test, do not think to yourself, *Next time it will happen again.* We need to challenge our thoughts about past failures so we can have hope.
- **Third, foster hopeful thoughts.** As you look to the future, strive to see good results and fulfilling experiences. What is expected at the beginning often influences the final state of things.
- **Fourth, cultivate optimism.** Hope and optimism are related. There are two ways to interpret the same fact of a stomach pain:

‘This stomach ache is probably related to a serious illness,’ or, ‘This stomach ache is probably nothing.’ Everything has a positive and a negative side. Consider both; evaluate the situation; and gather all the information. Then be satisfied with the positive side and enjoy the results.

- **Fifth, read and meditate.** Have good books – the ones which have deep wisdom. Meditate on them, and you will find the calmness and strength to revitalise your hope. One of the best books is the Bible, which contains inspired texts that have supported, guided and strengthened the hope of many people.
- **Sixth, convey encouragement and hope to others.** Part of your personal growth is reflecting your positive influence on others. When talking to someone who is going through a difficult situation, encourage them and help them to escape despair.
- **Seventh, take care of your physical and mental well-being.** Consciously take care of your health as well as your mind, so that your thoughts are always full of hope.

Hope camp

In addition, hope is closely related to religious faith. Most religions are based on hope or feature hope as a central component. For the Christian, hope is a gift from God that unites the past with the present and the future to provide a happy and definitive ending.

The San Jose mine in the north of Chile collapsed on 5 August 2010; 33 miners were trapped almost 700 metres deep in that mine for 69 days. For the first 17 days, there was no communication with the outside. The miners survived with a little milk and some cookies every 48 hours. It was not until 22 August that rescuers managed to drill a small hole that reached the place where the workers were sheltering, and the message from Jose Ojeda appeared: ‘We 33 are fine in the shelter.’ Then the hope that they might be saved began to seem more realistic. The confirmation that the miners were alive, and the confidence that the government and all those involved in the rescue would try their hardest and use the best

technology to attempt their rescue, brought a new spirit of optimism to Camp Hope, where many of the trapped miners’ relatives had gathered. Their rescue took more than 69 days of intense and careful work.

Faith and hope

When the Phoenix 2 capsule brought the 33 miners to the surface, many, having received Bibles sent by the Adventist Church, also experienced spiritual renewal and wore T-shirts that had the phrase, ‘Thank You, Lord’ printed on them, along with Psalm 95:4, which says, ‘In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also’ (KJV). Almost all of those who were rescued participated in a tour of Israel, which even included baptism in the waters of the Jordan River.

We all go through crises in our lives. The good news is that, with God as our Guide, there is light in the darkness, because He is the Source of hope. The light of God can illuminate your way too. Why not try some of the suggestions above? For example, why not study the Bible and meditate on its promises and the hope of salvation? Perhaps you too will be able to find complete hope and light in your darkness.

¹See Corn et al., 2020; Long et al., 2020. ²Note Kraff et al., 2021. ³See Corn et al., 2020; Long et al., 2020.

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'Something more'

by Jody Bloom

She thought she was happy,
Had the thrill of the club,
Loved the blare of the music,
Late nights in the pub.
Surrounded by friends,
And laughter and fun,
Every pleasure was hers,
But when she was done
There still was a longing
She tried to ignore.
Deep down, a voice whispered,
'There is something more.'

So she turned to her job,
Threw herself into her career,
Cut out the partying,
The champagne and the beer.
She aimed for success,
She achieved all her goals;
She got the pay rise –
But still there was a hole,
That hole in her heart
That she tried to ignore,
And deep down a voice whispered,
'There is something more.'

So to fill the deep void
She turned to a guy
Who made her laugh,
Dried the tears that she'd cry.
They'd talk on the phone
All through the night,
And when he came over
He'd cuddle her tight.
She felt she was happy,

That he was her all.
He was her Prince Charming,
So handsome and tall!

But that hole didn't vanish.
In fact, she was sure
That the voice just grew louder:
'There is something more.'

'There is something more?'
She said to herself.
'But I've tried all the parties;
I've tried gaining wealth.
Even relationships
Don't satisfy.
The hole just gets bigger:
What else can I try?'

In her frustration
She fell to her knees
And cried out to God,
'If You're there, help me please!'
Tears flowed down her cheeks,
But she didn't care.
She poured out her heart
To her Father in prayer.
And as she was praying
Her heart filled with peace;
The emptiness left her:
The burden decreased.

She knelt there for ages,
Till her knees had grown sore.
But when she stood up,
She had found something more.





Hope for physical health

by Dr Chidi Ngwaba



'Health is a crown that the healthy wear, but only the sick can see.'

These are wise words indeed! How often do we take our health for granted. It's usually not until we have a problem that

we realise just how valuable it is. I have a regular exercise routine that involves a 5km run five times per week. As I often tell people, I don't particularly enjoy the run, but thankfully I've got into the habit of doing it. On every occasion, however, as I'm pounding those streets, I almost always have episodes of wishing that I were somewhere else, doing something else, anything else! Those thoughts came to an abrupt end when I got injured. I had a slight Achilles strain and was unable to run properly for several months. Even though I could walk, I could tell that my body was missing the runs. I started to yearn for a run. I even had at least one dream about running free again. Suffice it to say that when my injury was over, I appreciated the run much more than before . . . even if I didn't fully enjoy it.

Being physically healthy is freedom. It allows us to do what we want, to go where we please, and to have a high level of independence. It also frees us to help others. It's much more difficult to help others if we need a lot of help ourselves. Given what we've been through over the last three years, with the COVID-19 pandemic, health has become a much more significant treasure in the eyes of many. In fact, COVID-19 illustrated just how important it is to maintain physical health. The early reports showed that over 99% of people who tragically died from COVID-19 had at least one underlying disease.

These were diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, obesity, and many more. These 'lifestyle diseases', so-called

because they occur due to our lifestyles, were some of the major causes for mortality during the pandemic. But, before the pandemic, people had been living reasonably comfortably even though they had these illnesses. I like to describe lifestyle diseases as a bear stalking us from a distance. You don't want him there, but, as he's far away, he's not an imminent threat. The same thing is true of these diseases. We don't want them, and we would rather they were not there. But we can live with them. We reason that we can attend the hospital appointments, we can take the medication, because these illnesses will not kill me imminently.

But then along came COVID-19 – and that was like giving the bear such a boost that he was suddenly on your shoulder: a deadly threat. COVID-19 weaponised our underlying diseases, converting them from chronic to fatal! With all the attention given to lockdowns, masks, and vaccines, very little was focused on some of the most powerful tools to combat the disease and prevent fatalities by preventing and curing the underlying diseases. As this is my speciality – reversing and preventing disease – I realised just how important it is to invest in your health when you are free to do so, rather than trying to restore your health once it's been taken away. As the saying goes, 'A stitch in time saves nine.'

The amazing thing is that many of the solutions to some of the most difficult and debilitating diseases are so simple. I consider myself to be a pretty good doctor, but I cannot compete with the ones mentioned in this poem: ***'The six best doctors anywhere, and no one can deny it, are sunshine, water, rest, air, exercise, and diet.'***

Having a healthy, colourful, plant-based diet; getting out and exercising in the fresh air and sunshine daily; drinking enough water; and sleeping well can do more for you than any doctor on the planet. Turning these activities into habits can change your life for good. With your health restored, the future looks brighter and more hopeful. In fact, health and hope go

hand in hand. *Health gives hope, and hope gives health.*

It is absolutely true that the healthier you are, the better your outlook on life will be. The more hopeful you will be, the more at peace you will be. But there is something even more powerful, and more accurate. The more hopeful you are, the more at peace you become, and the healthier your body will be. Health, strength, and vitality begin with our thoughts. More often, the body follows the mind, and not the other way around. 'A man is not disagreeable because he is dyspeptic, but is dyspeptic because he is disagreeable' (James Allen, *As a man thinketh*). This means that the goal is to change the way we think so that we may enjoy a peaceful, hopeful, and happy life.

In my life, knowing that there is an all-loving, all-seeing, and all-knowing God, who works out even my greatest trials for my favour, gives me a sense of peace that is more powerful than any obstacle in my life. I can wholeheartedly recommend getting to know Him. It is my number-one prescription for a peaceful, joyful, hopeful and healthy life.



'Dear God, if today I lose my hope,
please remind me that Your plans
are better than my dreams.'

Unknown



Twelve years of hope

by Catherine Anthony Boldeau

It was polycystic ovary syndrome – mild; nothing to worry about.

‘It’s common in women your age.’

I sigh.

There is nothing common about feeling unwell all day, every day. There’s nothing common about continual exhaustion and overwhelming fatigue. And there’s certainly nothing common about bleeding all day – every day.

I’m too tired to argue, and I’m not even sure that I’d have the right words to say if I could.

Menopause came early, like a demented cockerel, singing at midnight, thinking it was morning: three weeks after my 28th birthday, two weeks after I had just said, ‘Yes to the dress,’ and a week after my promotion.

The bleeding started: slowly at first. Drip, drip, drip. And then it kept coming, continuing through the birthday, weddings, Christmas.

The business suits were replaced with comfortable ‘dark’ trousers and loose tops. Heels were exchanged for flats, and the neat leather laptop case, my promotion gift, lay untouched on the wardrobe floor – a large, loose rucksack became my daily companion.

I glance in the mirror as I leave my sterile

surroundings, and am shocked by the person who stares back at me. Her eyes are sunken, with dark shadows holding them up. Her skin is dry and pallid, the melanin turned from copper to ash. There are frown lines tapdancing in the middle of her forehead and waltzing around the corners of her mouth. She spies stray hairs on her chin. Her hair is dull, lifeless, and dry.

‘Dear God,’ I whisper audibly, ‘what has happened to me?’

I step out into the cool of the February afternoon. The south-westerly breeze is momentarily refreshing before the onslaught of the Sahara’s hot flushes envelop my being. I feel the clamminess of my raging hormones first on the back of my neck, then my chest. The beads of sweat that now race down my face skate through the long-lasting makeup and setting spray like a hot knife through ice.

But my appearance is the least of my worries. It’s that time again: that time when the body expels its life force and paralyses me with fear of discovery. I need a bathroom. There are many in the gentrified coffee shops that I pass, but most won’t be big enough for my needs.

I panic. I need to go home: *now*.

The cab drops me home 15 minutes later.

‘Are you OK, love?’ I hear a voice in the distance. ‘You don’t look well.’ I stuff a twenty in his hand and rush to my door. My gait is awkward, as my need for the bathroom is pressing.

Thirty minutes and a long shower later, my breathing returns to normal and the panic starts to subside. I breathe in the scent of lavender, jasmine and cedarwood as I pop pill after pill into my mouth with small gulps of water and sigh for the second time that day.

Health insurance doesn't cover existing conditions. Conventional medication is costly, and not only financially – there are unpleasant side effects, and there is no evidence of success for the array of alternatives that I have tried.

Nothing works.

Twelve years: from beauty to ashes; from health to sickness; from energy to helplessness.

The tears run freely. They stain my cleansed skin, but wash my soiled soul. They reveal the hope trapped inside my humanity, waiting to escape. They unmask my future dreams that are dwarfed by the raging of my hormones.

The tears flow, as does the blood, and my physical and mental well-being collide in a rainbow of grief and sadness and hope for healing. The world spins, and I find myself on the floor, wet all over.

In this moment, I hear the words, 'There's healing for your sorrow, healing for your pain, healing for your sickness . . .' and I curl up in the foetal position for comfort.

I take another shower.

The water is now cold and uninviting, but needed. The icy droplets return a sense of calm to the hysteria. I rush out and wrap a large, dark towel around me, drying myself quickly.

'There's Jesus – healing for your sickness.'

I look around. There is no one here. But the voice was clear.

'There's Jesus – healing for your pain.'

I shiver.

'There's Jesus – healing for your sorrow.'

The name is familiar – vaguely. Jesus . . .

I scramble through the brain fog to recall where I'd heard that name.

The rumours were that He was a teacher and a preacher, and some even said that He was God.

But I remember that Anna's brother's

second cousin's daughter's nephew had prostate cancer, and he swore blindly that on meeting this Jesus the cancer disappeared.

The wind is restless outside, although the sun shines. I hear this Jesus in the local park. I've been out once today. And, in my world, that's once too many. But I'm sick of being sick. I'm tired of being tired. And who wants to bleed and stain sheets daily? Who wants to suffer the embarrassment of soiling clothes and chairs on a regular basis? Will I ever have a social life again? Will there be intimate moments with the man I used to call 'hubby' – the man who no longer comes home early or shares a room with me?

'It's for the best.'

I need to go and find Jesus.

The park is packed – there's a festival of some kind. I can feel the blood flowing, despite all the packing and padding. My body screams, 'Go home.' My mind answers, 'To what?'

I see Him now. He's within stretching distance, but the crowds are thick. He looks in my direction, but seems to see past me. The crowds push Him along. He'll be gone soon. I need healing . . . *now*.

'Down,' says the voice. I look around. It's too noisy. It could be anyone.

I go down on my hands and knees. Maybe I could crawl through the crowds to Him. A booted foot lands on my right hand. A sandled foot accidentally kicks me in the face. I feel feeble and foolish, but I'm here now, and need to keep going.

I hear a voice and look up. I'm at His feet but I can't stand – there are too many people around me. Maybe I could raise myself upright in a kneeling position, and He'd notice me. But the crowd thickens. I'm so close, and yet so far.

If only I could just touch Him. He is so very close.

In that moment, I lose all my fear. The hopes of twelve years culminate into action and I try to touch His feet, but He moves on and my fingers touch the fringes on His leather coat.

Something changes. Something's different. Something happens.

I'm healed.

Reflections of hope

by Eileen Phillip

The colour of hope – what would this be?
Colours of the rainbow or still water's
tranquillity?

Is it that of the sunshine, or the sky's shades
of blue? Or perhaps something even more
tangible to you?

Is it hot baked potatoes, or loved ones at the
door? Or what about a breakthrough, long
waited for?

Would these be met with an elevation that
soars, taking you higher and higher than
each time before?

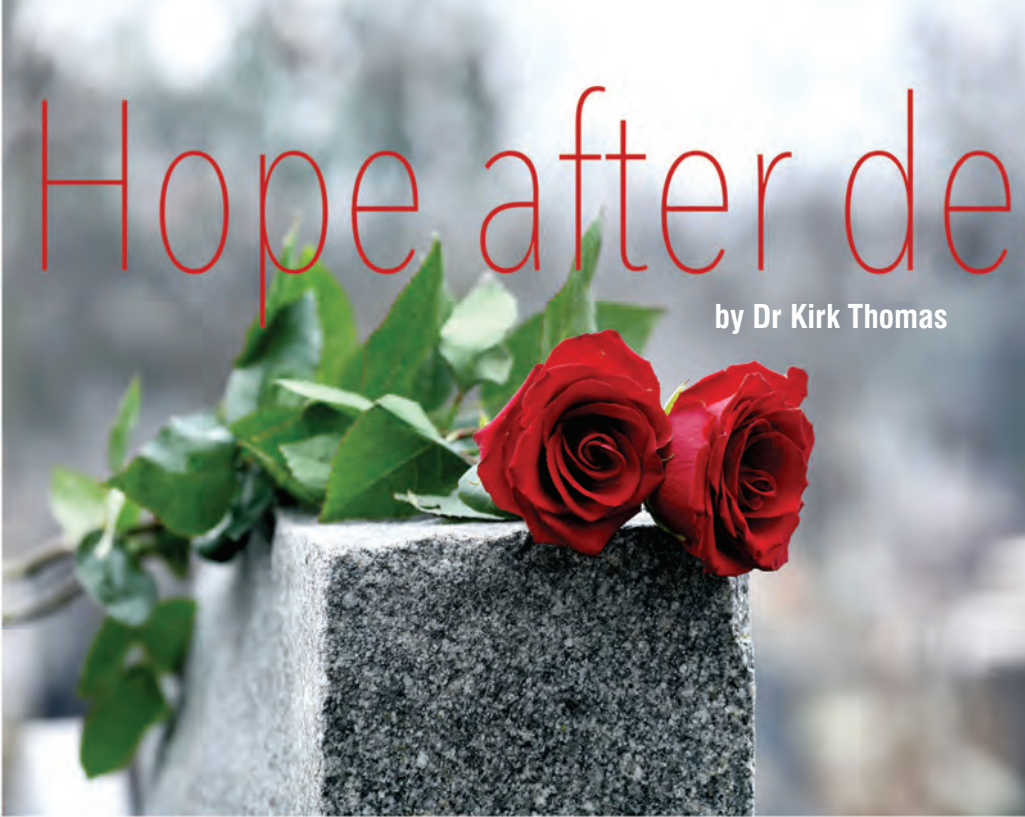
As high as an eagle
ascending the sky,
beyond heaven's
glory, mysterious
to the eye –
where

colours exist that have never been seen – the
colour of hope originates where the Alpha and
Omega has always been.

Before hope ever existed, colours known and
unknown too, there has always been a Creator
who made everything beautiful –
including you.

Hope after de

by Dr Kirk Thomas



©liudmilachernetska/123RF.com

When death takes what matters most to us, we experience a storm of emotions. Pain, anger, regret, anxiety, and an ache for genuine comfort are but a few of the things we go through. When someone we love dies, we might even question the wisdom or the goodness of God. When death comes after long-term suffering, we struggle to understand why God waited so long to bring relief. We sometimes begin to think of God as distant, untouched by our sorrow; we ask, 'Why?' Yet, even as we stumble through this maze, there is hope.

Luke Veldt, in his book, *Written in Tears: A Grieving Father's Journey Through Psalm 103*, shares the story of the death of his daughter Allison. According to him, she was a normal, healthy thirteen-year-old, active and happy – until the day she was found slumped over the table at home. Her speech was slurred, her legs were numb, and she could not lift her head up. She was rushed to hospital within fifteen

minutes, and her family endured an anxious wait amid a flurry of activity by the medical staff. As Christians, they believed that God could heal her. Other friends and family believed the same, and prayed as well. However, in a short few hours, Allison was dead. Luke writes that her mother, with tears in her eyes, asked: 'Is it all true? Is any of it true? Is there a God, and is Alli with Him?' Luke recalls that in that moment he had no answer; and that, even though they had both been Christians for over forty years, that moment distilled within them a single paralysing collection of thoughts: *Is any of it true? Is there really a God?*

One Christmas, I received a call from my mother informing me that my uncle had died following two massive strokes. I had to find a flight and return to Guyana in South America to shoulder the burden of arranging the funeral. Since I was the eldest male and the perceived leader of the family, pure adrenaline kicked

ath

Even in our grief, God is with us. You don't have to walk alone.

in and I busied myself ensuring that everything was done to a high standard. I had no time to mourn. On the day of the funeral, I visited the mortuary with the clothes my uncle was to be buried in. Only then, when I was invited in to view his body, did the reality of his death hit me – and when it did, it was like a cannonball to the stomach. He was really gone!

A week later, my immune system was compromised due to fatigue and grief. I became sick. Sleeping at night was a nightmare. I had no energy or motivation, and small, everyday

tasks appeared enormous. Getting out of bed was like trying to climb a very high and steep mountain. Living after the death of a loved one is deeply painful. It knocks you off balance; takes away your desire to move on; and in many instances can even cloud the will to live.

Yet, as I stumbled through this maze of grief, there was hope. For me, hope is a process. I found myself asking the question, *What would my uncle want me to do?* Knowing him, he would want me to live, laugh, smile, do good, and be happy!

Furthermore, as a Christian, I know that death is not the end: it is a sleep, and one day, when Jesus returns, we will see our loved ones again.

At the time, I found much comfort in the words of Psalm 103:11-14, a passage in the Bible. It says (NET):

'For as the skies are high above the earth, so his loyal love towers over his faithful followers.

As far as the eastern horizon is from the west, so he removes the guilt of our rebellious actions from us.

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on his faithful followers.

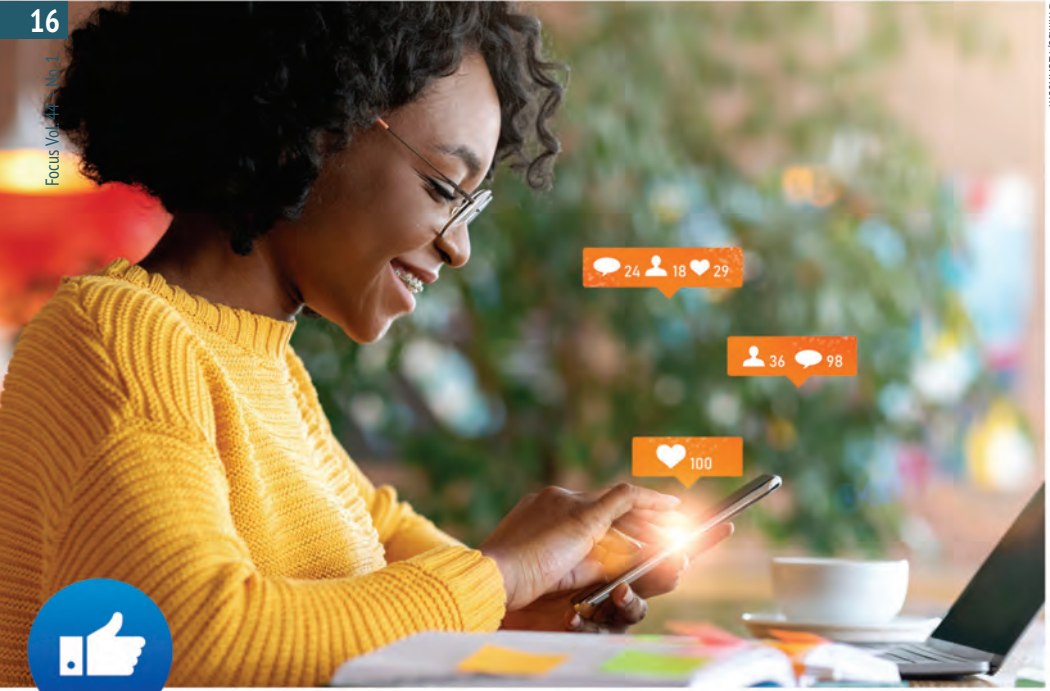
For he knows what we are made of; he realizes we are made of clay.'

This passage contains two beautiful illustrations of God's love. Firstly, it speaks of the immeasurable distance between earth and heaven as a graphic description of the love He has for us, and of the vast distance from one side of the world to the other. Secondly, this potent and endearing masterpiece brings the reality of God's love closer to home in the words, 'As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on his faithful followers' – on us, mere humanity! My friend, God shares our grief; He knows our pain, heartaches, disappointments, and sufferings. As A. W. Tozer said, 'The Bible was written in tears, and to tears it will reveal its best treasures.'

Even in our grief, God is with us. You don't have to walk alone. In addition to the hope and support that we can receive from our communities, loved ones, family and true friends, God is there for us too. Contrary to popular opinion, He is not aloof, detached, controlling everything from afar. He is not untouched by His own decisions; He is deeply involved and personally affected. He knows how you feel right now. He knows what it is like to see a child die. Another passage from the Bible, John 3:16, echoes this sentiment down through the annals of time (NKJV):

'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . . .' My friend, God 'gave His only begotten Son' for *us!*

For me, this is where the ultimate source of hope in grief lies. If we look carefully into His eyes, we will see a practical hope that says, *I am here for you, and we will get through this together.*



The unplugged diaries

by Divinia Reynolds



Part 1: Morning post

When the day arrives, it isn't sunlight that hits my eyes too early, but the glare of my device. It hasn't been a great night's sleep. Slowly I stir myself into action. My feet don't touch the ground before I'm floating in a social media soup of suspended reality, posting something motivational to get me (and maybe someone else) going. Have you ever felt that dicing with social media is like having a love affair that always delivers less than it promises? You invest too much, giving it little pieces of yourself and spending far too much time thinking about it, only to end up very

disappointed and still wondering where you stand.

Social media whispers, *'Use me! Learn! Relate! Reach out! Show up professionally!'*¹ Journeying to work, the sound of whirring vehicle engines tempts me to slide that black block out my pocket and play on – it's a numbing form of escape, like pulling a 'security blanket'² over me, while other 'users' are seated, huddled around me, doing the same.

My workplace is on the horizon, so empowerment resonates with me. Did anyone 'like' my quote? I try to log on, but get that little blue circle – whirling, a gateway to connection, spinning in space – that leaves me entering a

tunnel . . . it's as if my social connections are 'me', so the fear is that neglecting them will make me disappear into a social abyss. Nothing's 'real' until it's on there, preferably with a picture.

Sometimes it's more like a relationship with a covert narcissist trying to steal your identity. It doesn't have a soul: it tries to take *yours*. So you present your best. You see results, not the hard work that goes into things: the 49 job applications; sleepless nights spent on assignments or with sick children. Why air dirty linen? We always publish a post about the romantic meal at the swanky restaurant, but *not* the argument moments *before*.

That's why, scrolling through, we see quotes oh-so-striking, marriages oh-so-happy. We see outfits oh-so-glitzy-glamorous, children oh-so-cute-and-clever. We scroll and see social lives oh-so-sizzling as people huddle with friends, laughing at a lens. That can spark gladness for them, but also shame and anxiety³ in ourselves. *Am I not good enough? Am I on the right track? And just what is the perfect collage of images and words?*

It's funny how I try to escape, only to end up facing myself and the realities of the city building that waits to swallow me.

When I go in, I must find a socket . . .

Part 2: Searching for connection

On mid-morning break, I'm sipping a beverage, all plugged in, checking emails to see if that job offer has come through. The algorithm says, 'You're always right,' so, like a stubborn umbilical cord, even when we are unaware, newsfeeds form us and feed us more of what we want to see.⁴ Our buttons are pushed as we push those buttons. People are inflamed, and I'm concerned about the toxic polarisation and fake positivity; so I avoid the breaktime talking points by . . . checking my social media!

There've been no responses to my post except criticism in the comments. It's media, but sometimes I wonder: *Is it really social?* In this love affair with narcissistic undertones, sharing your heart can meet with a lack of empathy in return, and even abusive exchanges with those you thought were friends but who

start to look more like trolls,⁵ aggressively trying to change you. *How annoying. Why am I doing this?*

I'm electric, but I want to go acoustic. I want to unplug, but I've got to take a look. I know I won't disappear, but 'fear of missing out'⁶ drives me to the 'socials'. Has Sam WhatsApped me back . . . ? No. Nothing's new since I checked 10 minutes ago. Friends try to sell me things again; ads seem to know my mind. *Why do I get the feeling the product on sale is really me?*

Part 3: The source

Outdoors, there's a refreshing crispness. I pick up a bagel salad box, and then my restless feet beat a path through the cityscape to make the most of lunchtime by the local stretch of 346 kilometres of clay-tinted, gently glittering river. I breathe, seeing it still there, rolling reassuringly. *Enjoy the moment . . . or post the moment?*

Though I really need to switch off, maybe I can do both. Anyway, trying to get the best shot is already distracting me as workmates join me in this instagrammable⁷ instant, leaning into the scene. With an accidental nudge, I find my quivering, sleep-deprived hands grabbing at my phone as its dense form nearly plummets into the Thames. . . . *Time to put the phone away.*

Back at home, I'm unplugged: no more giving in to narcissistic demands. We're more than a little icon on a computer screen. We don't need to build an image: we've been formed in God's image. The Source of life lights us up and empowers us when we get connected to Him.⁸ This brings me promise and hope for my day. It's not that we aren't useful, loveable, valuable or worthy, but social media can't be a mirror that reveals all of ourselves. It doesn't define our personhood: this lesser technology isn't worthy of us, because my device holds the world's biggest platforms, but can't contain all of you and me, the most brilliant invention of all.

Social media is an experiment we still don't understand, and likewise the results; but this is what I'll do: I'll be selective about what I give



my attention to. There's no unfinished business: the 'love affair' was never real. I'll place boundaries on this 'partner' so I can switch off, unplug, and appreciate the miracle of the world around me, savouring silence and the sounds of life other than humming machinery. I'll also treat others with the dignity due to image bearers of God, moving from competition and comparison to community and compassion. I'll make time to reflect naturally, unaided by anything digital, and will rehumanise and stay authentic. Instead of 'blue light',⁹ I'll focus on the true Light;¹⁰ and where I can offer goodness, I'll do it from a place of genuinely giving without expecting to receive.

I'm connected to the ultimate Source. No more will I post about my life more than actually living it.

¹Pathak, A. (20 September 2020), 'Top 5 Benefits of Using Social Media', LinkedIn – available online at: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/top-5-benefits-using-social-media-aditi-pathak?trk=pulse-article_more-articles_related-content-card (accessed 22 January 2020)

²Sri., M. S. (2020), 'The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health', *Stumagz.com* – available at: <https://www.stumagz.com/the-impact-of-social-media-on-mental-health> (accessed 22 January 2020)

³Chloe Carr (27 May 2022), 'Why Social Media Is Just a Highlight Reel: Mental Health Matters', *Prestige Student Living* – available online at: <https://prestigestudentliving.com/blog/why-social-media-is-just-a-highlight-reel-mental-health-matters> (accessed 23 January 2020)

⁴Orlowski, J. (9 September 2020), *The Social Dilemma* (Netflix Originals)

⁵Various sources of research are beginning to highlight the challenges of trolling online. See, for example, Amnesty International, 'Women Abused on Twitter Every 30 Seconds', Amnesty International Press Releases – available online at: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/women-abused-twitter-every-30-seconds-new-study> (accessed 22 January 2023), and Suci, P. (4 June 2020), 'Trolls Continue to Be a Problem on Social Media', *Forbes* – available online at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuci/2020/06/04/trolls-continue-to-be-a-problem-on-social-media> (accessed 22 January 2023). In his article, Suci references the same research by Amnesty International and Element AI: 'Women of colour were 34% more likely to be included in abusive or problematic tweets than white women, with black women in particular 84% more likely to be targeted than white women.'


⁶Sri: *Ibid.*

⁷Many people now take to search engines looking for 'instagrammable' locations. The term became 'part of the dictionary' in 2018, according to Amelia Heathman's *Evening Standard* article (2018), 'Gram it: Instagram and Instagrammable Are Officially Part of the Dictionary' – available online at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/tech/instagram-dictionary-entrance-a3928356.html> (accessed 19 February 2023).

⁸'His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence' (2 Peter 1:3, ESV).

⁹Light from electronic devices such as computers and smartphones and from energy-efficient lightbulbs has been linked to health problems and sleep disruption,' according to *Macmillan Online Dictionary* (2014) – available online from: <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/blue-light#:~:text=%E2%80%8Bnoun,health%20problems%20and%20sleep%20disruption> (accessed 22 January 2023).

¹⁰John is speaking of Jesus when he says: 'The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world' (John 1:9, NIV).



**'Hope is being able to see
that there is light despite
all of the darkness.'**

Desmond Tutu

Making hope visible

by Sharon Platt-McDonald



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What does hope look like? However we may choose to describe it, the impact of hope is life-changing.

It has been said that man can live for about forty days without food, three days without water, and eight minutes without air – but for only one second without hope, because to live without hope is to cease to live.

It is hope that enables one to keep going in the face of difficult circumstances; it is the expectation of a better tomorrow, regardless of the current outlook. Martin Luther King, Jr said: 'We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.'

When you are hopeful, it can bring healing even in the most difficult circumstances.

During the dark chapter of the global COVID-19 pandemic, our family sadly lost two relatives to the virus. Our faith in God and scriptures of comfort brought us solace and strength during our time of grief. We looked forward to the hope of Heaven, a place void of sickness and death.

Subsequent lockdowns gave us much time for reflection, and I found myself with more time for reading. It was during this time that I

read a book that impacted me significantly. It was titled *The CHOICE: Even in hell hope can flower*. It is one of the most compelling books on hope that I have ever read. Its author, Edith Eger, whose experience in the concentration camps shaped the trajectory of her life, chronicles the captivating story of her struggle for survival.

Born to Hungarian Jewish parents, Dr Edith Eva Eger (aged 95 at the time of writing) is a Holocaust survivor and a specialist in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Edith was 16 years old when she was deported to Auschwitz in 1944. Tragically, her parents (along with thousands of Jews) were murdered shortly after their arrival. When the liberation occurred, Edith was clinging to life. Her positive life attitude, bravery, and ability to focus not on the pain and suffering, but on her future after the camp, enabled her survival. Subsequently, working as a psychological therapist to help clients free themselves from the thoughts that bind them to their traumas, choosing hope over despair, she has brought hope to countless lives.

While I found the title of her book intriguing,

it was the picture on the book's cover that captivated me and gave clarity to the subtitle: 'Even in hell hope *can* flower'. It features the image of a concentration camp in the distance on a grey wintry day with heavy snow on the ground. In the foreground are some yellow flowers growing out of the snow, nestled between the rails of a train track. My eyes were immediately drawn to the flowers' vibrant colour, a stark contrast to the sombre background. I was immediately struck with the message of hope that this picture conveyed. The flowers are precariously positioned on a train track, thriving in the most unlikely place. It is as though they are defying death in a concentration camp: suggesting that, even in a place where so much death has occurred, life can still bloom!

This is what hope looks like!

We too can bloom with hope in this dark world. Even when life strips us of all that is familiar, the Christian finds hope in the living God to be life-affirming.

When we have nothing left but God, we realise that He is enough, because He has everything we need to sustain us.

With Christ we can face life and all its challenges with purpose. He enables us to conquer the past, with all its disappointments; to live in the present with joy, in spite of hardships; and to embrace the future with hope, regardless of the current outlook.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthian church, had good advice about keeping a realistic outlook on life: suggesting that, rather than making happiness in this world our number-one priority, we ought to look for a heavenly hope . . . the hope that we will enjoy a world void of suffering. In 1 Corinthians 15:19 he states: *'And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world'* (NLT).

How did he come to such a conclusion? Well, Paul had encountered a catalogue of adverse life experiences and emerged not only to share what he survived, but also to paint a picture of living hopefully, whatever our current circumstances might be.

The record of his intense suffering is

highlighted in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. We read of multiple shipwrecks, vicious beatings, being robbed, being almost stoned to death; episodes of fierce persecution; frequent lack of food, water and sleep; and so much more.

Incidentally, some of these intense ordeals were not one-off tragic events, but repeated suffering in the same area of trauma: five episodes of being lashed thirty-nine times; three episodes of being beaten with rods; three shipwrecks . . . and the list goes on. That's enough trauma to cause anyone to lose hope.

How was it possible for Paul to heal from all that suffering? I believe he realised that it was futile to put his hope of happiness in this world alone. He realised that it's God's love alone that can keep us hopeful despite life's anguish.

Paul states: 'We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love' (Romans 5:3-5, NLT).

We must manage our expectations and keep our lives in perspective.

So, what are you hoping for? How can hope permeate your current circumstances and enable you to see a better future? Well, I believe that hope is transformative when Jesus is at the centre of our hope. He offers to bring hope into our lives; and, if you accept His offer, He will turn your battles into breakthroughs; your test into a testimony; your mess into a message; your obstacles into opportunities; your problems into possibilities; your hurt into healing; your wounds into wellness; your pain into praise; and your trials into triumphs . . . and will transform you from a victim into a victor!

This makes hope visible.

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope' (Romans 15:13, ESV).

**‘YOU WILL BE SECURE,
because there is hope;
you will look about you
and take your
rest in safety.’**

Job 11:18 (NIV)



The Bible tells the story of a prominent woman in Shunem, an Israelite village, who had lost her miracle child (see 2 Kings 4:8-37). She was devastated, and resolved to return to the man through whom the original miracle of God had been wrought . . . but without informing her husband that their son was dead. Her husband was very confused.

‘Why are you going to him today? It is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath,’ he said.

‘It is well,’ she replied.

Elisha – who had initially promised her the child – seeing her approach, sent his servant with great haste to greet her.

‘Please run now to meet her, and say to her, “Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?” ’ he urged.

‘It is well,’ she replied.

‘It is well.’ Her soul was vexed within her, and yet ‘It is well’ was her response. She was not simply saying, ‘I’m OK’ to avoid divulging her pain: she was telling the truth. This begs the question, **how was she able to respond in this manner when circumstances were dire and suggested no evidence that things would improve?** How can we sing ‘It Is Well With My Soul’ when our world is falling apart? We might ask the writer of the hymn to get an answer to both questions.

‘It Is Well With My Soul’ was written in 1873 by Horatio Gates Spafford after traumatic events in his life. Horatio was blessed with a wife, a son, four daughters, and a happy home. He was also blessed with a prosperous career as a lawyer, a good reputation in his church and community, and substantial wealth, including an extensive real estate portfolio in his home city of Chicago. In 1870, however, his four-year-old son died suddenly of scarlet fever. In October 1871, the great Chicago fire



Horatio Gates Spafford

IT IS Well WITH MY soul

by Omari Norman

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wiped out much of his real estate. On 22 November 1873, his wife and four daughters were

on a steamship headed for England when it collided with another ship, killing 260 people, including all four of his daughters. His wife survived, and upon reaching safety in Wales she sent him a telegram with the words, ‘Saved alone.’ While the pain of this loss was still fresh in his mind, he penned the following words:

‘When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,

“It is well, it is well, with my soul.” ’

In this song we gain a sense of how the Shunammite woman was able to say, ‘It is well’ in the midst of her grief, and how we might even sing it in the midst of ours. The Shunammite woman sought Elisha in faith. Her belief in God’s faithfulness produced a hope that sustained her and a peace that surpassed understanding, protecting her mental health. Have you considered that belief in God can do the same for you too?

(Bible texts in this article are drawn from the New King James Version.)

The colour of hope

by Brenda Nelson



The colour of hope is like the colours of a rainbow: red, blue, yellow, purple, orange and green, with hues of pink. The colour of hope is like the rays of the sun illuminating a dimmed and darkened room. The colour of hope is where you can dream and imagine a beautiful world without spot, blemish or wrinkle, for you and for me. The colour of hope can be found in the face of Jesus – His love, His peace, His gentleness, His compassion and kindness, which runs ever so deeply.

The colour of hope makes one dare to dream and contemplate the promises given to us by our Lord, Saviour and King. The colour of hope will bring a smile to your face and cause you to dare to dream for a better world void of tears, death, sadness, heartache and pain.

Imagine living with everyone free, happy, content and at peace. . . .

Imagine a loving couple sitting in a coffee shop, drinking peppermint tea and hot chocolate and eating salmon salad sandwiches without a care in the world, locked into each

other's eyes with intimacy and love . . . she with windswept hair and a fluffy scarf around her neck, a black warm, padded coat, and winter boots on her feet; he with his thick, dark goatee beard, wrapped up warm in a soft brown winter coat and fashionable boots on his feet.

Will you dare to dream of what will eventually be when the clouds burst open, the trumpet sounds, and Christ appears to take His people to a place prepared for us since before the foundation of the world, which we will all call home?

Dare to dream of the colour of hope, of a better future filled with beauty, promise, joy, love, and the beautiful fresh fruit that we can pick and eat from the tree of life, along with apples, apricots, mangoes, strawberries, peaches, plums, grapes, pineapples, guava, pears, cherries, and all sorts of berries that you can imagine.

A better day is coming . . . sooner than we think. I pray we will all be ready to meet our Lord, Saviour and majestic King.

Hope in an unexpected place

by Precious Chitwa

Some time back, as I was scrolling through the status messages of my WhatsApp contacts, I came across a quote saying, 'You were not born just to go to work, pay your bills and die.'

Though this quote only contained a few words, it caused me to pause and think deeply.

With the high cost of living today, compared to a couple of years ago, we have to work very, very hard; and, even with a full-time job, many are having to have a number of 'side hustles' in order to make ends meet. Life has become a circle of working, eating, sleeping and paying bills, leaving little or no room for one to invest in other things or a relationship with God.

In the Bible, God told a man by the name of Jeremiah that, even before He gave him life, God had selected him to be a prophet to

the nations (see Jeremiah 1:4, 5). God had such big plans for Jeremiah, and God has big plans for us, too; and He created us to lead a purposeful life. His plans for our future are not to harm us, but to prosper us (Jeremiah 29:11). This should give us hope.

'How can I trust His intentions?' you may ask. Well . . . God loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in order that we should not die, but have eternal life (see John 3:16).

Why not try God? Why not try prioritising a relationship with Him? Allow Him to relieve you of your stress and to guide you into a fulfilling, hope-filled life. Indeed, life is not just about working, eating, sleeping and paying bills: there is more to it; and we can be comforted by the fact that God cares about our well-being and happiness . . . and even our bills, too (see Matthew 6:31-33).



Thinking of making a **NEWSTART?**

by Darell J. Philip



For millennials and indeed others who may find themselves at a crossroad, looking for a sense of direction, purpose and optimism for their lives amid all the challenges life can bring, perhaps a **NEWSTART™** would be in order. Below are some practical tips you can use to make a healthy and hope-filled **NEWSTART**.¹

N is for Nutrition: A balanced diet of vegetables, fruits, nuts and wholegrains is essential for a healthier lifestyle, as these food items contain the vitamins and minerals necessary to build resistance to disease and improve general health.

E is for Exercise: Cultivate good practice for the body through regular exercise. A 10-minute walk, jog or run is good for maintaining strength in the legs and thighs, as well as increasing the flow of blood to the heart. Swimming and athletics as well as other sports are good for strengthening the cardiovascular system while also keeping your body lean and fit.

W is for Water: While water may not be to everyone's taste, there are many important functions it has in your body. Firstly, it is a cleansing agent that cleans the body from impurities from the inside out. Not only is sufficient water essential for a healthy immune system and good cognition, but it also cleans out the kidneys, helping to prevent the formation of kidney stones. Also, unlike many fizzy drinks and fruit juices (which often have a very high sugar content), pure water cuts down on your thirst, leaving you feeling refreshed from the inside out.

S is for Sunshine: Many of us are deficient in vitamin D, which is needed to strengthen our bones as well as boost our immune system more generally. Therefore, it is important to take in a regular supply of sunshine whenever and wherever possible (while also taking care not to stay too long in the sun to minimise the risk of sun cancer, particularly for those with lighter skin tones), as it brings positive energy to the body, serenity to the mind and peace to the soul.

T is for Temperance: It is always important to use good things moderately while avoiding completely those things that are bad for your holistic health. Though often hard to practise, the application of temperance in your life is wise, since it leads you down a path that

enables you to flourish and grow, as opposed to one where you wither and ultimately perish.

A is for Air: As well as taking in as much outdoor sunshine as you can, you should also take in a regular supply of fresh air, especially during seasons when there are elevated levels of flu and COVID-19. Perhaps a walk in the countryside would be ideal, as you take in a fresh supply of air that clears the lungs, allowing you to breathe efficiently while also calming your spirit.

R is for Rest: Many of us work long hours, leaving very little time for rest or relaxation. No sooner have we returned from a hard day's work than we often find ourselves back out again, either to shop or all too soon to return to work again. Often the end result is burnout, which can then lead on to stress. Therefore, it is important to take as much rest as you can so that your body can recuperate from the day's activities, bringing your mind and body in sync with each other.

T is for Trust in Divine Power: Often the path we take in life seems like a very hard and lonely one, yet we are told in the biblical book of wisdom – *Proverbs* – that there is a God, and that if *we put our trust in Him with all our heart and look to Him for understanding, acknowledging Him in all our ways, then He (in turn) will direct our paths* (see Proverbs 3:5, 6).

So, as you journey on in this life, why not consider making a **NEWSTART** through the adoption of these nuggets of hope, ensuring a happier and healthier life for both you and your loved ones?

***NEWSTART**™ is a registered trademark of the Weimar Institute.

Further reading

Mark A. Finley and Peter Landless (Editors), *Health and Wellness* (Grantham, UK: The Stanborough Press Limited, 2015)

Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Grantham, UK: The Stanborough Press Limited, 2012)

Julian Melgosa and Michelson Borges, *The Power of Hope* (Grantham, UK: The Stanborough Press Limited, 2017)



Reflecting on

Here's a task for you: try to think of a famous song that has the word 'hope' in its title or in the chorus – one that was played on the radio recently; one that runs in a commercial ad; one that just about everybody knows. Take your time – I'll wait. . . .

Most people struggle to think of such a song immediately. And if you think of hope being '*in the air, everywhere I look around . . .*' (John Paul Young), well, it makes sense, but the word 'hope' is not there – it's 'love'. Try harder, as I'm pretty sure you're already finding it a bit challenging.

Of course, there are songs that *inspire* hope, whether as a desire or as an expectation;

whether the singer is waiting in confidence or aspiring with trust. You may have been touched by a sad story or a catastrophic event shared in the news; you may think of the expectation that our team will win the World Cup, or may be expecting a cruel diagnosis from your GP – all of these and more call us to think positive, to move on, to conquer, to believe in something beyond, to overcome the crisis, and even to imagine a better world.

To be sure, there are many famous quotes on 'hope' in literature, and key verses are being shared by the religions of the world. But how come there isn't an easy-to-remember song on 'hope'? (I could



in hope

by **Christian Salcianu**, ADC Director

easily find some entitled ‘hopeless’ . . .)

Now, I do have a famous song on hope – and it’s in the title, in the chorus, in every stanza. Some of the readers of this magazine may know it. It’s entitled ‘We Have This Hope’, and the music and words were composed by Wayne Hooper, way back in 1962. He used to be a singer in the King’s Heralds quartet, and later became a music director for the ‘Voice of Prophecy’ radio station.

What if I told you that this song, ‘We Have

This Hope’, is a key one for millions of people – that it’s like the battle hymn of an army? No exaggeration: some 22 million people around the world know the tune and can whistle or sing it right away. Have I got your attention now?

It’s powerful because it’s not just a song that fades away, and it’s surely not an empty slogan. It’s an affirmation of faith and a promotion of life, sung by people of hope. A handful of them have written the articles in this special edition of *Focus* magazine. Within the UK and Ireland there are tens of thousands of these hope-filled people. Some of them may be your neighbours, colleagues, people in the community.

These are people who not only *sing* about hope for a better life, but also *live* on average ten years longer than the general population, and they’re ready to reveal their secrets: with the Jews or the Muslims, *sharing* faith in one God and *trusting* the ancient Scriptures; with those of no faith, yet in search of a better world, *spearheading* the fight for the common good, *engaging* in the frontlines of community care, the medical field, education and advocacy; *mingling* with the hopeless, the marginalised, the immigrants, the lonely.

Do they also share hope with you? In the global village of the UK

and Ireland, people of hope speak your language, eat your kind of food, dress like you, and treat all people as equals. There’s something about them, and it’s not just a song on hope, not just an aspiration. They are real . . . and I know it, as I am one of them. You can be one as well – living a meaningful life, reflecting on hope.

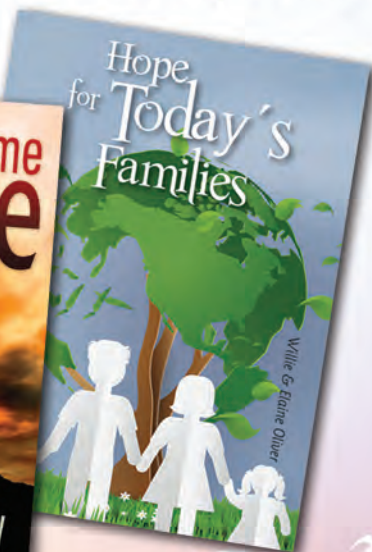
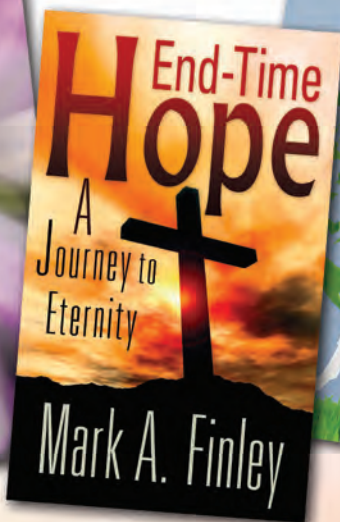
Reflecting Hope!

Looking for a free Bible?

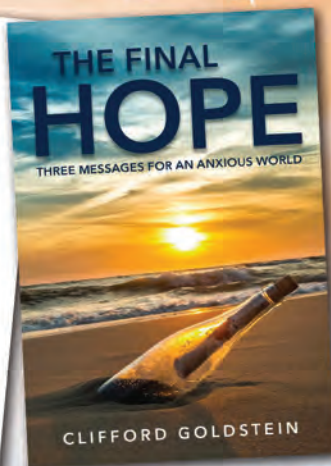
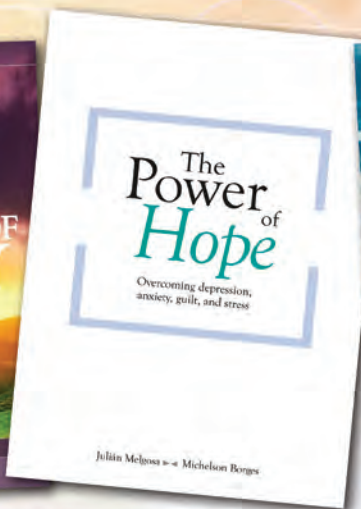
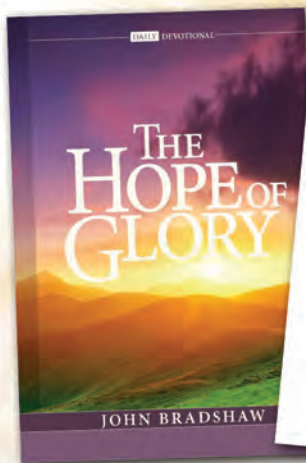
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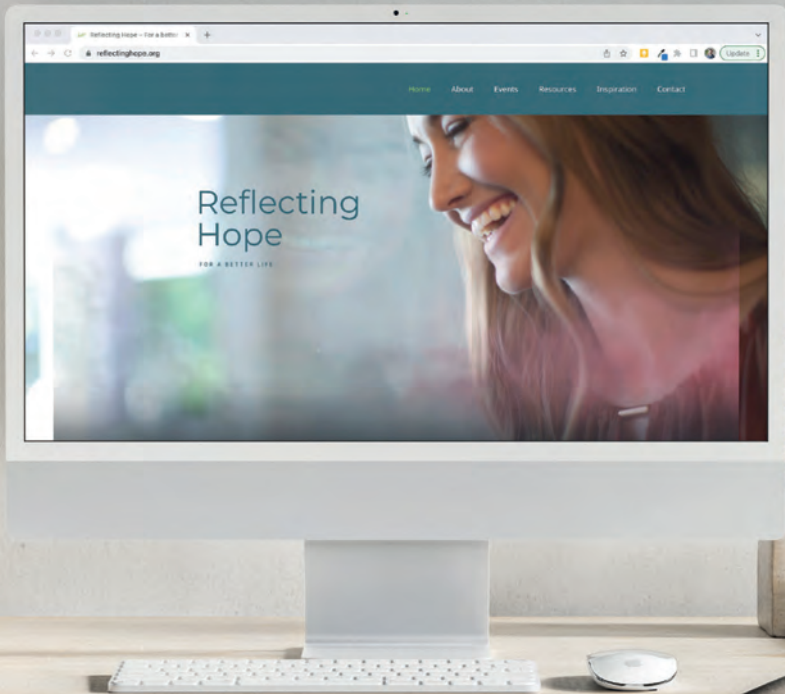


We hope you enjoyed this issue of *Focus*!
Hope is certainly needed in a world that sometimes can feel quite hopeless.
Why not strengthen your hope by reading more about it?



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