



hope deferred makes the heart sick. Proverbs 13:12

Hope deferred has been on my mind a lot lately. Like countless parents around the world, I am doing what I can to help our children navigate their feelings related to things that have been lost due to much of society being shut down. They are unable to attend school on campus, participate in sports, go out with their friends or any of the other normal social activities they have always enjoyed. They keep hoping for news that restrictions will be lifted. As you all know there is no certainty about if, or when, that might happen. They are experiencing hope deferred.

Those problems likely seem small to adults who are worrying about health, jobs, mortgages and putting food on the table. Hope deferred is being experienced by all of those who are hoping

for their businesses to reopen and for bosses to call saying it is time to come back to work. Many are hoping for good news about treatment that will provide some protection from the virus. Those who are retired, or are about to retire, are hoping for good financial news and for the stock market to fully recover.

Kids and adults alike are eagerly awaiting good news. They are longing for a return to normal. With each passing day, that the good news does not come, patience becomes more difficult to muster and some are struggling to hold onto hope.

I am not a prophet. I can't foretell the future. I don't know when, or if, life might return to something we consider normal. I can tell you that there is great danger for our hearts, if our hopes are too attached to the temporal comforts and pleasures of this world. That is true in normal times. It is true in unusual times.

What if our health fails? What if our job doesn't come back? What if we lose some, or all, of our possessions? What if we lose some, or all, of our freedoms? Will we all be heart sick? Those are difficult questions to really consider. Seriously though, "what if"?

Tonight's letter might be uncomfortable but I am writing it with members of our church family in mind. We are Christians. We belong to Jesus. Even if all of those "what ifs" come to pass, we have been called to run a race, looking to Jesus. For the Christian that is the defining purpose. That purpose should dictate our lives, our goals and our hopes.

Hebrews 12:1-2

1Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. 2We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith...

Right now it would be so easy for us to be completely focused on what things we have lost, or may lose in the near future. Focusing solely on those things could lead to despair as we are overtaken by sadness that life hasn't worked out like we had planned. Fearing loss of anything attached to those plans may cause us to cling too tightly to the wrong things.

Remember the challenging ways Jesus spoke during his earthly ministry?

Luke 17:33

Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.

Consider the statement of Paul, about the driving aim of his life.

Philippians 3:12-14

...I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and

straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus

What are we really waiting for? Ultimately, it is not for the economy to open back up. It is not being able to go to restaurants, our hair stylist, concerts, sporting events, back to school and back to work. I will certainly be thankful if all of that happens but as Christians that not really what we're waiting for. We are waiting for something much bigger than any of that.

Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Paul described our lives here as **waiting**. We go to church, we go to school, we go to work, we raise our families, we play and we enjoy countless blessings in this life but ultimately we are waiting for His appearing. That is our hope. Having that as our hope is good for our hearts as it prevents us from becoming heart sick when temporal things of this world are stripped away.

1 Corinthians 15:19

...if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

Again the question, what are you waiting for? We are waiting for the blessed hope, Jesus appearing. This hope shall not disappoint. This hope will not fail. This is the hope that conquers the grave. He is the resurrection and the life. In Him is our inheritance and it is completely secure.

Colossians 3:4

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

This is the day when sin and all of its pain are gone forever. We will all agree with the words of Isaiah 25:9

Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Sure, we're alive right now, but we will really start living on that day!

These truths strengthen us today and help us to be at peace with whatever comes our way in the meantime. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus went to the cross for the joy that was set before him. His awareness of final chapter of the story, and the joy that awaited, helped him to endure whatever came before that. That same chapter of the story helps us all today.

John Piper once said, "Occasionally, weep deeply over the life you hoped would be. Grieve the losses. Then wash your face. Trust God. And embrace the life you have"

His statement was based on the awareness that because of Christ, we will soon have a better life. We can look forward with joy to what is coming, His appearing, His glory and our inheritance. This keeps our hearts from despair, even in the most difficult days.

Growing up in church we often sang a song that was written by Kristin Chenoweth. It speaks of face uncertain days without fear, because He lives.

**God sent His son, they called Him Jesus
He came to love, heal and forgive
He lived and died to buy my pardon
An empty grave is there to prove my savior lives**

**Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives**

**How sweet to hold a newborn baby
And feel the pride and joy He gives
But greater still the calm assurance
This child can face uncertain day, because He lives**

**Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives**

**And then one day, I'll cross the river
I'll fight life's final war with pain
And then, as death gives way to victory
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He reigns**

**Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives**

**I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone**

**Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives**

My encouragement to you tonight is that your hope would be in something that cannot be shaken and that your heart is ultimately waiting for what is to come and cannot be stopped.

Perhaps your heart is weary as you've been waiting for better news to come about the virus, the economy and society. I'm not attempting to diminish the seriousness of the situation we're facing today. Instead I am trying to remind us all that no matter how this all plays out, it is not the final chapter to our story.

The day is coming when all bad news will cease, sin will be gone sickness and disease will be no more and will see Him face to face. He lives and that truth strengthens us, removes our fears and makes life worth living.

You are loved

Tony