

Who is your hope?

By [L. Gail Irwin](#)

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Hope is the name of one of the waitresses at my favorite café. She waits tables with eager determination and a bird-like alertness as she darts around the place making sure everyone is happy and well-fed. She always seems cheerful, with her sing-songy voice and a tendency to call everyone “Honey”.

But one day recently, she confided in me that one of her regulars had gotten the bad news: he has terminal cancer. Every day, he comes in for breakfast, and now he needs more than just eggs and hash browns. He needs a hand to hold, a shoulder to lean on.

“I don’t know why they always find me,” Hope said that day. “It must be my name. I always attract people in desperate situations.”

I told her, “It’s not your name. It’s that you *live up to* your name.”

She went on to tell me that, when she’s not waiting tables at the café, she works in an oncology ward at the hospital. I’m not sure what she does there, but she comes in contact with people who need more of what she represents: hope. And she finds herself listening to their sad stories a lot.

“I’m going to have to lean on you a little,” she said to me that day. And I was honored to think she trusted me as a pastor, instead of as just another plate of poached eggs. She was telling me, in not so many words, that bearing another’s sorrow is a load, even when it’s not your load. And that she was going to need a little help holding up for her loyal customer.

A few days later, I had a bad day at work. And the next morning, I headed to the café, found my corner table and sat brooding for a long time. Hope wasn’t there that day. But there was another customer watching me nearby, a retired cop who is a regular like me. Finally, he came over and sat down.

“You’re deep in thought today,” he said. So I told him my story, and he listened. And afterward, I felt lighter.

We are all of us here to hold each other up. Sometimes that is all hope is: the kindness of a neighbor to get us through the rough parts of our lives. But sometimes there is a bigger hope: a hope in something or Someone beyond us that is urging us to move toward the better country.

If you are a leader in a struggling church, chances are you are one who has listened to some sad stories. Where do you go when you need to tell your own stories? Who do you lean on? Who is your Hope?

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