

Hope unlimited by our limits

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Hope is sinewy, tenacious, and determined. It gives us strength when ours is gone, carries us into the future when we've been knocked-off our feet by the disappointments of the present, and makes it possible for us to trust that God is with us even when we feel alone.

We can't produce hope for ourselves. We can, of course, train ourselves to think more positively, tend to our anxiety more mindfully, and view our circumstances more optimistically. It's possible, with practice, for Eeyore to learn from Tigger, for people who see the glass half-empty to recognize that it really is also half-full, and for "woe" to give-way to "wow."

Hope, though, is what we need when even the best leverage we have against hard and heavy reality won't budge it, and our attempts to move it have left us exhausted. Hope is a gift from God; it's an infusion of divine energy from beyond us and an uprising of the creating and sustaining Spirit from within us.

Over the last couple of years, I have had both the opportunity and responsibility of coming to terms with limits which slowly but perceptibly continue to close-in and narrow the range and scope of my life. Cancer, treatment, and the questions and anxieties of incurable illness affect the whole person—body, mind, soul, and spirit.

I do what I can: I watch my diet, exercise, and attempt to focus on what is possible rather than on what isn't, and to attend to what I have more than on what I've lost. I'm convinced that those things help; but they, like I, have their limits.

What I always need, but especially on those days when the numbers aren't good, or my energy drops out before the work wraps up, or my fears overtake my trust is the remembrance which prayer, meditation, the scriptures, and the Eucharist make possible: I live—all of us do—in the force-field of a God of boundless love, endless grace, and all-encompassing mercy.

God is the source of a kind of hope which our limits cannot limit.

In Romans 5, Paul says that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” I don’t think these words provide a step-by-step formula for moving from suffering to hope.

Instead, I think they are the description of a sufferer’s astonished realization that, though God does not will our suffering, it can teach us, transform us, open us to love, and become for us a channel of powerful and sustaining hope.

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