

MAGNOLIA MINDS: Hołd on!

*By Tony Martin
Associate Editor*



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Whether it's dealing with sickness, financial problems, broken relationships, or any other kind of setback, it's easy to lose faith and feel like there's no way out. However, as Christians we have a unique perspective on earthly struggles that allows us to find hope even in the darkest of times.

Maybe I'm obsessive about this "hope" thing. Just this morning I was reading a Facebook post from a friend of mine who is in

a horrific downward spiral. She's "had enough," she says.

Most of her issues grew out of a realization that some earnest, heartfelt beliefs she had were shown to be categorically untrue. It rocked her world to realize she was wrong. Well, if I were to put my hope in some sort of man-made construct like politics, I'd despair too.

Scripture gives reason for hope in the midst of struggles. The Bible is full of stories of people who faced incredible struggles and yet found hope and redemption through their faith in God.

The story of Joseph begins in Genesis chapter 37. Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers, falsely accused of a crime he didn't commit, and spent years in prison – but through it all he remained faithful to God and eventually became second in command of all of Egypt, saved his family from famine (including the brothers who sold him), and became a hero to his people.

Similarly, the Apostle Paul faced numerous struggles in his life including rejection, imprisonment, persecution, and physical ailments, but he never lost faith and continued to preach the Gospel even in the face of adversity.

In fact, it was during his imprisonments that he wrote some of his most inspiring letters to the early Christian churches, encouraging them to persevere in the faith. We know those writings today as the epistles of the New Testament.

I know what you're thinking, because I'm psychic like that: "I ain't Joseph, and I ain't Paul." True that. You are uniquely you. As a believer, however, you have the same resources they had to find hope in the midst of struggles. How does that work? Here are four principles.

– **Trust God's Plan.** One of the most powerful ways we can find hope in the midst of struggles is by trusting in God's plan

for our lives. The Bible teaches us that God is in control of everything, and that includes the challenges we face.

In Romans 8:28, we read: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Of course, trusting in God's plan isn't always easy, especially when we're in the middle of a crisis, but we can take comfort in the fact that God is always with us, even in our darkest moments. As Psalm 34:18 says, *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

As a Christian, trusting in God's plan means having faith that God is in control of our lives and that He has a purpose for everything that happens. It means surrendering our own desires and plans to God and trusting that His plan for us is good, even if it may be different from what we had envisioned for ourselves.

– **Find Community.** As a Christian, finding community means being a part of a group of people who share our faith and who can support us in our spiritual journey. It means being surrounded by people who encourage us, challenge us, and help us grow in our relationship with God.

Finding community is an essential part of the Christian life. The early church, for example, was characterized by a deep sense of fellowship and mutual support. Acts 2:42-47 describes how the believers *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... All the believers were together and had everything in common... they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God.*

We find encouragement and accountability when we share our struggles and triumphs with others. We can learn from the wisdom and experience of those who walked the path of faith before us.

We can also be a source of encouragement and support for others who are going through their own struggles and challenges. That's a big deal.

– **Cultivate Gratitude.** Are you thankful? When we're in the middle of a crisis, it can be easy to focus on all the things that are going wrong. However, as Christians we're called to give thanks in all circumstances.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, we're told to *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

This doesn't mean we should ignore our pain or pretend that everything is okay when it's not. Rather, it means that we can find hope by looking for the good in every situation.

Cultivating gratitude as a Christian involves recognizing that everything we have is a gift from God, intentionally focusing on the positive aspects of our lives, and giving thanks to God for His provision and faithfulness.

By practicing gratitude, we experience greater joy and contentment in our lives and deepen our relationship with God.

– **Hold on to God's Promises.** To hold on to God's promises means to trust in and rely on the truths and assurances found in the Bible that are attributed to God. Holding on to God's promises involves several steps.

First, we need to identify the promises that speak to our specific situation. For example, if we're facing financial difficulties, we might look to the promise in Philippians 4:19: *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

If we're struggling with fear or anxiety, we might turn to Isaiah 41:10: *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Once we've identified the promises that apply to our situation, we need to meditate on them and internalize them. This means taking the time to read and study the relevant Bible verses and reflect on what they mean for us personally. There are no shortcuts.

Finally, holding onto God's promises requires faith and patience. We may not see immediate results or experience an instant resolution to our struggles, but we can trust that God is working behind the scenes and that His promises will come to pass.

As Hebrews 11:1 tells us, *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

Holding on to God's promises involves a combination of faith, study, prayer, and patience. By relying on the truths and assurances found in the Bible, we can find hope and encouragement even in the midst of our struggles.

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