



ARTICLE

HOPE AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH PAINS
 (MODIFIED FROM FBC WATCH NIGHT 2024)

PRAYER SPOTLIGHT

PRAYER FOR FBC CHURCH CAMP
 (31ST MAY-3RD JUNE 2025)

FBCToday

UNLEASHING THE GOSPEL



HOPE AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH PAINS (MODIFIED FROM FBC WATCH NIGHT 2024)

There are so many verses on Thanksgiving in the bible. In the epistles/letters, psalms, and some Old Testament narratives... I often wonder why giving thanks is necessary. I came across quite a few Tedtalk-ish videos

that explain that "gratitude" is a key to happiness/contentment. They say that the human brain is built for survival, it's not built for happiness. Looking for things that threaten us feels natural, looking for things

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 Galatians 2:1-10
 Preacher
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to be thankful for feels unnatural. Every time I scroll through social media I learn of new things to be fearful of, new parasites, new viruses, and new chemicals found in our food, our water, and even our clothes. Another plane crash, another economic challenge, and political instabilities that threaten our livelihood or well-being. We even have a saying for this on social media **"New fear UNLOCKED"** (they just keep unlocking new ones and adding our fears but never reducing the list of fears). So then the (secular) scientists suggest the key to happiness is to focus on the good and intentionally practice the art of gratitude for the little good things in life even though it feels unnatural so that you can be happier and less negative.

That's the secular advice for giving thanks, what about the "Christian" advice? What does the Bible say?

I think our God deeply understands the tendencies of humans to look out for threats in fear, you can tell by the many passages assuring us not to fear. Here is one:

Philippians 4:6-7

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Unlike secular advice, Christians are to give thanks not just the good things but EVERYTHING:

Ephesians 5:19 asks us to -

"Always give thanks to God the Father for everything"

Everything? You mean not just the good things in my life but the bad things? The challenges? The series of unfortunate events? The failures? To those things I want to say "God, No, thanks."

But it's not just this verse, there is another verse that advocates for giving thanks despite the circumstances:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

This was practiced by the apostles in Acts 5:41 where they rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace and persecution in God's Name. It seems to be God's will that we give thanks, not just only for the good things that happen to us like non-believers do, but as believers, even for the seemingly "bad things", the sufferings that happen to us. We can see a window into "why" in Romans 5:3-5.

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

I used to wonder: “How does character build hope?” Hope for what? Hope in what? I can understand the first two connections. But I thought someone who has been hurt and suffered will be hardened, jaded, and more hopeless in humanity than hopeful.

It was not until I went through some challenges that God put me up to, sometimes... to the point where I wanted the cup to pass from me, that I could see why. After going through some trials and still going to God despite those trials, I felt my character develop.

When I first came to FBC and was attending Gamma Bible Study, during one of the discussion times I got frustrated by one person and spoke my mind without giving much thought to the words I used and the embarrassment he would have felt. My harsh words made a grown man cry. He never came back to the bible study after that. I too

have been on the receiving end of harsh words in church and have shed tears over them. And so the cycle is complete. I have hurt others and others hurt me. But now, I think some of you close to me can attest to the fact that I am no longer the same person as I was then.

I saw myself change to be more patient and loving, and when I saw that change in myself I became less pessimistic about people, less pessimistic about myself. I always saw people as hopeless sinners who **WILL** disappoint each other and hurt each other endlessly. But the trials helped me develop a little hope:

- **hope** in this newer version of self in how I treat others (the last version of me was hopeless but this newer version of me is a little more hopeful),
- a **hope** in a future self: which will be better than my current self and more Christ-like in handling situations,
- **hope** in **other people** being changed by God,
- and most importantly **hope** in **the Lord**, in his miraculous ability to change the hearts of people, from hearts of stones to a heart of flesh. (He’s REAL guys! And He is working in people’s hearts even now)

I am still scared of a lot of things that I have to face in this life, but I am a little less fearful and a little more hopeful, despite knowing that **there will be** challenges the Lord will put in my path until the day He calls me home.

I can understand that it's hard to see **"the good"** in the middle of trials, our God acknowledges our discomfort in trials:

Hebrews 12:11

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

There is peace and righteousness waiting for us at the end of the tunnel of trials.

Disclaimer: Now I am not asking everyone to force themselves to be happy in all trials, but to at least go to God directly, personally, and ask "how?" To wrestle with Him. I believe that: wrestling questions with God, asking for God's help, and seeing God's work done in us is how we get through the darkness in the the tunnel of the Christian journey. I am still wrestling with some questions, even now.

I have a quote by Jonathan Edwards that I hold on to for comfort. *"Our bad things will turn out for good. Our good things can never really be lost. And the best things are yet to come."*

There is also a verse in Lamentations where the prophet Jeremiah still puts his hope in God despite seeing a prophecy of his city Jerusalem being destroyed before his very eyes. I imagine him watching a vision of his city going up in flames as he said this:



Lamentations 3:19-26

*"I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.
Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:*

*Because of the Lord's great love we are not
consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."*

*The Lord is good to those whose hope is in
him,
to the one who seeks him;
it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord."*



So until D-day, we hope and wait on the Lord like how Hachiko waits for his master to come back. The good news is that although Hachiko's master was dead and could never come back, our Master is alive and will come back for us one day. Amen.

I found this helpful motto from the constitution of another church:

"We will pursue transparency with each other, resisting the temptation to hide our struggles and sins, that we might experience the grace of God in the care of his saints."

(Rom. 15:7; 1 John 1:6-10; James 5:16)

I hope that at the end of this year, you will resist the temptation to hide what God has done and is doing in your life in the past year. If you know someone in church with a beautiful story of God's work in their life, encourage them to share it to give hope to the rest of the church on Watch Night 2025. See you there.



By Toh Kai Xian

Kai Xian is an editor of the newsletter FBC Today



PRAYERSPOTLIGHT

PRAYER FOR CHURCH CAMP 31 MAY-3 JUNE

- Pray for God to move hearts of many to attend church camp especially those who are newer to FBC, younger members and families with young children.
- Pray that many will take the opportunity to build bonds and grow into a close knit church family that will be united and mighty for kingdom work.
- Pray for the speaker Ian Buntain, that he would have clarity, wisdom, strength, and the power of the Holy Spirit as he prepares to speak God's word.
- Pray for the camp committee as they work on the arrangements and logistics for the camp. Pray for wisdom, unity, and protection from accidents and sicknesses.