

"Hope, Week 2" A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
December 10, 2017 Second Sunday in Advent
Sermon Series on Hope

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

Last week, we began a sermon series on hope. Today, will be the second in that series. Today is also the second Sunday in Advent, a time of preparation to welcome the baby Jesus, a time of hope as we consider all that Jesus' birth means to the world and you and me. However, we're not just celebrating the birth of Jesus, but we're also celebrating our hope of Jesus' return to the earth: the second coming. We wait in hope and with eager anticipation for Christ's return to bring peace on earth. We wait for Christ's return when he will establish his kingdom on earth, when Christ will eliminate war, hunger, and wipe every tear away.

As Christ-followers, we live in that hope of Christ's return and we need to share that hope more than ever with the world we live in.

Last week we looked at what hope is and does. You may remember that hope releases you from your fears. Hope motivates and helps you to bounce back. Hope sets you free to dream. You can't dream without hope. Hope is the fuel that makes the world a better place. Hope helps people believe that they can make a difference, regardless of their circumstances.

My favorite quote from the book, *The Hope Quotient* by Ray Johnston: it's been said that you can live 40 days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but not a single second without hope.

Hope is important, so how can we increase our hopefulness and become less fearful, more motivated, more able to dream and capable of making a difference in this world? There are seven aspects of hope that each of us can examine in our lives to see how we're doing in each area. Paying attention to each of these aspects in our lives will enable us to be more hope-filled. This Sunday we'll be looking at the first thing we can do to be more hopeful, how we can increase the amount of hope each of us has.

One: Recharge your batteries. You can't be hope-filled if you are out of fuel in your life. Keep your life fueled and full of hopeful energy.

Many of you will remember the name Francis Gary Powers. He was a U-2 spy plane pilot who was shot down over Russia on May 1, 1960 when he was flying seventy thousand feet above the Soviet Union. Powers safely ejected from the plane, was captured, put on trial, convicted and sentenced to prison. He was released a couple of years later in a prisoner swap for a KGB master spy. Some of you may remember the 2015 film, *Bridge of Spies*, starring Tom Hanks. This film told the story of Powers and the prisoner swap.

After Powers was released he worked testing experimental aircraft and eventually became a helicopter traffic reporter pilot in Los Angeles. In 1977, seventeen years after he was shot down over Russia and lived, he died piloting a standard traffic helicopter. He died when his traffic helicopter crashed. Why did it crash? His helicopter ran out of gas!

Running out of fuel in your life is a bad life strategy. If fuel is so important in your life for leading a life full of hope, what is it that fuels you? You can be the most talented, educated, successful person – having everything going for you – but if you run out of fuel, you'll crash.

So how do we keep ourselves fueled? How do we keep our batteries charged so we're full of hope? You need to ask yourself: what drains me? And what fuels me?

What drains you? What discourages you? You need to get rid of those things that are draining you of hope and vitality. As you consider that question, let's look at the five passion killers the author lists in his book, *The Hope Quotient*.

Passion Killer #1: Unhealthy people. I mentioned last week a scenario of two people walking towards you. One was the most encouraging person, the other the most negative person you know. I asked which you'd rather speak with.

We all would rather avoid those negative, emotionally draining people who tear us down. Avoid them if you can. I know that as Christians we cannot avoid people who are negative. Someone may just need encouraging. But don't make those people who bring you down the people you spend most of your time with. Obviously, not everyone is perfect, but make your primary relationships those with people who build you up.

Passion Killer #2: Unkind critics. We do need to listen to criticism, but avoid those people who are unkind to you, who are not trying to help you, but defeat you.

Passion Killer #3: Unbalanced schedule. If you're burning the candle at both ends, you're not as bright as you think you are. Keep all your life in perspective. Don't be so busy that you're too exhausted to be hope filled. Take time to recharge your batteries.

Passion Killer #4: Unnecessary guilt. Paul says in Philippians 3:13, he lives - **Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.** We cannot feel enthusiasm and guilt at the same time. Christ died for your sins. God has forgiven you. Believe it and be free of your past. There's no need to look backwards with regret. As one of my friends says, forgiveness means giving up all hope of a better past. Move hopefully forward, free of your past.

Passion Killer #5: Underestimating the impact of exposure. Exposure - what you think about, the friends you have, the things you do. Your mind will think most about whatever you most expose it to. No one puts low-octane gas in a high-performance race car. Olympic athletes don't eat a diet of Twinkies and chocolate if they are to succeed. Be careful about the materials you read, the images you watch, the events you attend. These will shape your actions, character and destiny.

Paul shares another thought along this line - again from his letter to the Philippians chapter 4:8 - **Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.**

Avoid these five passion killers. They will leave you drained and empty. Avoiding them is the first step to becoming more hopeful. You want a supply line of energy, not negativity, so avoid the five passion killers.

I met a man who had served in the first Gulf war. He had been in the Navy and was involved with fuel supply. His group was responsible to get fuel to the field to run the trucks and tanks. They did this by setting up a chain of fuel bladders, big bags that got filled with fuel. The chain of bladders was connected by hoses. So, fuel was pumped from the ship at the shore to the battle field through a series of bladders. I was fascinated at the logistics needed to support the soldiers on the battle field and how important a job he and his fellow soldiers were doing.

You may remember in WWII that German Field Marshal Rommel earned the title of 'Desert Fox' for driving the British out of Northern Africa. But he ultimately was defeated. One of the factors that led to his defeat – he ran ahead of his supply lines. Rommel's army basically ran out of fuel.

What does that story have to do with you and me? We can avoid the five passion killers, but that's not all we need. We need a supply line that keeps us spiritually and emotionally fueled. So, let's look next at five supply lines that we can use to keep us spiritually and emotionally fueled.

Supply line #1: Invest in your own growth. What are you doing to invest in your own growth? My spiritual director reminds me every month to take time for myself. Magazine and newspaper articles remind us that to avoid burnout, we need to take time for ourselves. I go to retreats and continuing educational activities to invest in my growth. You may read a book or take a class or learn a new skill or craft.

But some of you may be saying that you don't have time to invest in your own growth. To say you don't have time is another way to say that you prefer to be drained and hopeless. Even Jesus took time for himself. The Bible stories of Jesus' life say time and again that Jesus withdrew, or Jesus went off by himself to pray.

Only you know the best way to invest in your own growth. However that is, do it.

Supply line #2: Understand the power of worship. Worship is so important and powerful that God told you and me to take a day off to do it. Worship refocuses us on God. Worship takes the focus off our lives and puts in on God – where it belongs.

Isaiah 40:31 reminds us of the value of worship: **but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.**

The author of the *Hope Quotient* points out seven things that worship does for you and me:

- Authentic worship renews your strength
- Authentic worship reconnects you with God.
- Authentic worship restores your perspective.
- Authentic worship rekindles your hope.
- Authentic worship rebuilds your confidence.
- Authentic worship restores your joy.
- Authentic worship releases your anxieties.

Quite a list! No wonder you feel better after having been to church on Sunday! Yes, worship supplies us with the fuel we need to be more hopeful. Understand the power of worship.

Supply line #3: Unleash the power of the Bible into your life. Studies have revealed that the Bible is the most powerful force for spiritual growth. You and I know that the Bible's power to development spiritual growth is unsurpassed by anything else.

How does spiritual growth happen? John Maxwell says that life transformations take five steps (*Thinking for a change*, 2003):

1. When you change your thinking, you change your beliefs.
2. When you change your beliefs, you change your expectations.
3. When you change your expectations, you change your attitude.
4. When you change your attitude, you change your behavior.
5. When you change your behavior, you change your life!

You can change your behavior by studying the Bible and following what it says. You can gather inner strength by studying the Bible. You can transform your life by unleashing the power of the Bible in your life.

Staying encouraged and hopeful involves keeping your supply line full. So far, we've looked at three ways to fuel your life: Invest in your own growth, understand the power of worship, and unleash the Bible into your life. Let's look at two more. The fourth supply line that we can use to keep us spiritually and emotionally fueled is build great relationships.

Supply line #4: Build great relationships. A recent edition of an AARP publication noted that having friends helps you avoid Alzheimer's. Other research showed that a lack of friendship is a health risk as high as obesity, smoking and high blood pressure.

In our culture, loneliness is epidemic. Many people have no friends and little contact with people other than store clerks and bus drivers. We need friends. Good friends can give us hope and keep us going when we're down. We need people to cheer us on.

Eric Moussambani gave an unforgettable performance at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. The 22-year-old from Equatorial Guinea qualified to swim in the Games under a special

program that encourages developing countries to participate. Eric had only learned to swim a few months before the Olympics. He entered the one-hundred-meter men's freestyle even though he'd only practiced in a twenty-meter pool. In Eric's qualifying swim, the other two swimmers were disqualified, so Eric swam alone. As an inexperienced swimmer, he didn't do well and just stopped before the finish, unable to continue. There was a capacity crowd at the swimming preliminaries that day. You can imagine what happened next. The crowd jumped to their feet and cheered Eric on. He finally reached the finish – having won the qualifying swim since he was the only one in the pool. Eric told a reporter that, "It was their cheering (the crowd's cheering) that kept me going."

What kind of support do you have? Ecclesiastes 4:10 says: **If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.**

To be more hope-filled, strengthen the relationships you have and find new, positive friends to help you remain hopeful. Build great friendships.

Supply line #5: Pay attention to whose voice you are listening to. The voice to listen to is Jesus'.

Matthew 7:24 - **"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock."**

John 6:63 - **"It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."**

Matthew 28:20 – **"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

We have so many voices on our daily lives that distract us from following Jesus. Don't listen to them. Listen to the voice of Jesus. Jesus' voice gives us hope. Pay attention to whose voice you are listening to.

The five things that fuel your supply line:

1. Invest in your own growth.
2. Understand the power of worship.
3. Unleash the Bible into your life.
4. Build great relationships.
5. Pay attention to whose voice you are listening to.

Next week we'll look at the second aspect of hope for us to examine.