

“Hope, Week 5” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
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Sermon Series on Hope

Let us pray: **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.**

Today, we continue our sermon series on hope. Hope is important, so how can we increase our helpfulness and become less fearful, more motivated, more able to dream and capable of making a difference in this world? This sermon series covers seven factors that each of us can use in our lives to increase our helpfulness. Paying attention to each of these factors in our lives will enable us to be more hope-filled.

So far, we’ve covered four of the seven factors that raise our hope. Factor #1: **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. We looked at 5 things you can do to keep your batteries charged: invest in your own growth, understand the power of worship, unleash the power of the Bible into your life, build great relationships and pay attention to whose voice you are listening to – listen to Jesus’ voice.

Factor #2: **Raise your expectations.** If you have small plans you’ll get small results, so believe that impossible things are possible. There are better days ahead. You can see those better days when you adjust your perspective on life. You can’t be fearful and be hopeful at the same time. Instead of boxing yourself in, replace ‘what if’ with ‘why not.’

Factors 3: **Refocus on the future.** The key Bible verse, Philippians 3:13: **But I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.** The question to ask as you refocus is: ‘what can this become?’ Answering that question allows you to look at your life with a fresh vision so you can experience great comebacks and be fueled to reach for something better. Answering that question frees you to dream and gives you energy and stability.

Factor #4: **Play to your strengths.** The key Bible verse, First Timothy 4: 14 - **Do not neglect the gift that is in you.** Playing to your strengths means discovering and using your God-given talents and abilities. When you use your God-given talents, you are maximizing your potential and you discover your purpose in life. When you use your God-given talents, you can be freed from insecurity and inferiority and become motivated and encouraged free from fear of failure. When you use your God-given talents, you have at your disposal the best way to change the world and your stress level is lower and your joy increases.

Today, we’re going to look at hope factors 5 & 6. The fifth hope factor: **Refuse to go it alone.** Our key Bible verse – Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: **Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.**

This scripture is so true. So much of today’s social research points to the benefits of having friends. In his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, by Robert Putnam, the author points out that the best predictor of happiness is the breadth and depth of one’s social connections. The research shows this to be true in the USA and

throughout the whole world. Friendships are important to living a long and happy life. The author goes on to say that if you belong to no groups and decide to join one, you cut in half your risk of dying in the next year.

Sounds like joining groups, belonging to groups like this church, are quite important! Without friends to support you, your ability to live a hope filled life is challenged. So, make more friends and become more hopeful!

The author of *The Hope Quotient*, the book I'm using for this sermon series, tells a story about a fortune 500 exec who stopped at a gas station while his wife went inside. From his car, he watched his wife's animated, pleasant conversation with the man working inside. When his wife returned to the car, he asked her who she had been talking to.

His wife replied that it was an old boyfriend. To which the husband replied, "I'll bet you're glad you married me – a Fortune 500 CEO instead of a service station attendant." The wife calmly replied, "No, that's not what I was thinking at all. I was thinking how fortunate you were that I married you or he'd be the Fortune 500 CEO and you'd be the gas station attendant."

Yes, we need supportive relationships to do our best and thrive!

There are five types of friends' relationships we all need. As I go over these five types of friends we all need, consider if you have a friend or friends in each type. If you see one is missing, you may want to consider finding a friend to fill that slot.

First, we need people who will help us cast our vision, to help us make our dreams bigger. We need people who can help us make sure our dreams align with God's purpose and honor God.

Second, we need soul sharpeners. You may know the verse from Proverbs 27:17: **As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.** You need friends who support you spiritually. These friends help you dare to be all you can become in the spiritual arena.

Third, we need models and mentors. Paul wrote in First Corinthians 11:1 - **Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.** He also wrote in Philippians 4:9 - **Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.** Paul knew the value of being a mentor to folks growing in their faith. Find yourself a mentor to help you. Pick out someone or somebodies that can help you grow in faith.

Fourth, have friends who listen to you, who can help you when you're down. Too often we don't have friends who actually listen to us, who really understand us. We all have times when we're down and need to talk to someone who understands and can help us through the valley we're in. Find friends who can do that.

Fifth, we need tail kicker friends. Yes, that's a polite phrase. You need friends who will tell you the truth about yourself. Proverbs 27: 6 says, **wounds from a friend are better than kisses from an enemy!** Yes, sometimes what a friend says can hurt, but if the person is a true friend, then listen to what that friends is saying. The task of a tail kicker is to afflict the comfortable and God uses this type of friend to move you and me forward, to keep us faithful. Tail kickers challenge us to stop settling for the status quo.

Just remember that friendships are not found but built. You may say you can't find friends. There's no 'tree of friends' that you just pick a friend off of. You need to cultivate friends. Of the

five types of friends I mentioned, you need to identify the types of friends that may be missing from your circle and find new friends to fill that slot.

Let's move on to hope factor #6: **replace burnout with balance**. What is the most common comment you hear from your working friends and your retired friends. Yes, 'I'm busy.' As a society we are overloaded and overcommitted. When you are overloaded and overcommitted you lose joy and hope and friendships. Often families suffer and productivity declines. And perhaps worst of all, we lose touch with God.

What about your life? Are you stressed. Are you rushed, late and regularly exhausted.

Each of us is different in how we react to stress and what is stressing us. Let's look at a few questions that may give you insight in how to deal with your particular situation. Ask yourself:

1. Am I trying to do too much in my life? Do you fill every waking moment with something to do? Do you multitask to the point you miss details? Do you forget what you ate the day before? Do you become impatient with clerks and service people? You need to slow down.
2. Am I running on empty? God wants us to be spiritually and emotionally healthy and balanced. Lacking joy? That's a pretty good indicator that you're running on empty. What are some of other indicators that you're running on empty, that you're out of balance?
  - Are you present or preoccupied? Ask your family or friends if you're fully present and attentive when you're with them.
  - Do you set aside time for fun and enjoyment? When was the last time you really had fun?
  - Do you resent phone calls or visits as interruptions of your time or do you see them as opportunities for ministry? If you're running for cover, trying to dodge people, you're overextended.
  - How long has it been since you heard the still, small voice of God?

None of us can afford to ignore these signs of running on empty. Schedule time to recharge and refuel and get your life back in balance. And if you say you don't have time for that, you are way too busy and overextended. That's a sure sign you need to slow down.

3. The next question to ask yourself about stress and balance in your life - Am I dropping the right balls? Some balls don't bounce back when dropped. Brian Dyson, from Coca-Cola Enterprises shared these words at a commencement address:

Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling five balls in the air. You name them – work, family, health, friends, and spirit – and you're keeping all of these in the air. Work is a rubber ball that will bounce back if you drop it. But the other four balls – family, health, friends and spirit – are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged, or even shattered. They will never be the same.

Keep your priorities straight. Take care of your spiritual life, your health, and your relationships. That's not being selfish. Doing so sustains your spiritual life, your health, and your relationships. Pay attention to the most important stuff to keep the balance you need in your life.

4. Are you out of balance because you believe you're invincible? What are your limits? God may be infinite, but we're not! We tend to overestimate our abilities and

underestimate how long it will take to solve our problems. We live in a world where we're told we can do it all. I'll let you in on a secret. You can't do it all. We talked last week about spiritual gifts. The list of things we can't do well is much longer than the list of things we can do well. So, remember that you and I have physical, emotional, mental, and time limits in our lives.

5. This next question really speaks to a life that's out of balance. Ask yourself, when I relax do I feel guilty? If you feel guilty when you relax, then it's time to check on your priorities and readjust and get your life back in balance.
6. What does God have to say about keeping your life in balance? Do you understand that God makes a big deal out of keeping your life in balance? The fourth commandment? Exodus 20:8-11 - **Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.** God thought enough of each of us to make a commandment telling us to rest and recover one day a week. Are you doing that?
7. Finally, ask yourself, am I putting first things first? Are you going to your grandchildren's soccer games? Are you making time to attend that play your friend is in? Are you doing things with your friends that are important to them? Are you putting first things first?

There's a story about a guy who was always bringing office work home with him. One day, his daughter asked him why he was always bringing home office work to do in the evening. The father replied, "Because I just don't get it finished at work." To that the little girl said with a sweet smile on her face, "Daddy, maybe they should put you in a slower group."

Put first things first in your life. Maybe you do need to be in a slower group, so you can see the important things in your life.

Why is keeping balance in your life so important? Why do you and I need to make sure we're taking care of the important things in our lives? Why do we need to take a day of rest, a day of Sabbath?

Living a balanced life allows you to look back at your life without any regrets. It allows you to be grateful for the life you live and the friends you have. It allows you to keep in contact with God. I can't think of any thing more important than to look back at your life with satisfaction. Sure, life isn't perfect. We make mistakes, but if we strive for balance then we'll have more joy and less regret. We'll have more hope.

Today, we looked at two more hope factors: refuse to go it alone and replace burnout with balance. Think about those two factors this week and how you're doing with each of them. Make adjustments if you need to. You'll be a lot more joyful and hopeful when you have friends and balance in your life.

Next week, we'll look at the last hope factor and wrap up this series.