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But and Yet! Words of Hope!

Strange words that God uses to give us hope. 2 Corinthians 4:8 "We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

2 Corinthians 6:9-10 "Dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing everything."

It seems now that we are all faced with difficult times – finances and enrollments are of particular concern. Needed personnel and enhancing our programs always remain at the forefront of our concerns and challenges. And often the prayer that escapes our lips is "God can't you make it any easier?" We know what we need as we look around our schools – more students, materials, help. And if we listen carefully when we pray God sends us words of Hope.

On the surface that doesn't seem like much of an answer to prayer. And yet it may be worth more to us in the long run than our pleas for relief. Most of our everyday dealings with the word hope are amorphous wishes. "I hope it rains." "I hope you have a good day." There, our hope is nothing more than a passive thought. Yet, that is not how God looks at hope. In 1 Corinthians 13:13 Paul writes, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." While we hold love to be the greatest – yet none of us would dismiss faith but we don't seem to know what to do with hope.

Faith, hope and love. Faith is the beginning of our journey (He who comes to God must first believe that He exists) and love (God is love) is the destination of our journey. That leaves Hope to be the bridge between faith and love. What exactly constitutes Hope? Hope is an active persevering and following after God. While faith is a gift from God, hope is the engine of our transformation.

Hope is an active holding on, an active following hard after God. Hope is built on faith. If you lose hope – you give up. As long as you

hold onto hope – you hold onto faith and you continue to put one foot in front of another.

Many of us are facing extremely challenging situations this year. And now of all times we need those words of hope. Paul writes, "We are hard pressed on every side". And that certainly reflects the daily happenings of our lives but he goes on to write "we are not crushed." Yet we feel like we are being crushed. We feel we can't take anymore. He writes "We are perplexed." And that certainly enters into our thoughts and lives. "God, why don't you make it easier for us to minister to your children?" And then he adds, "We are not in despair." That is our challenge – to not let the circumstances put us into despair. By and large we have been spared persecution but his word of hope that we have not been abandoned is one we need to hold onto. We feel abandoned at times (and yet He never leaves us). And occasionally we get struck down – loss, illness, people leaving us etc – and Paul writes that, "We are not destroyed." We sometimes feel mighty close to being destroyed. And yet it remains the Hope God gives us that allows us to continue. There are no easy answers to our present circumstances but if our hope is in Him then we continue. Sometimes it is through lions den's, or fiery furnaces but He always goes with us. Hold on to Hope!