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# HOPE FOR THE FAMILY



Everyone is talking about family. At parties, across the back fence, in the workplace, and in the secret places people are pouring forth about their families. Tragically, many of these countless conversations are filled with words of hopelessness.

As a pastor, I hear more than my share: “I just don’t believe that my marriage can ever be different!” Or: “My son is so far gone—I can’t see him ever coming back from where he is!” Or: “If you knew my sister, then you would understand why the kind of relationship I dream of having with her is an impossibility.” Or: “I’ve tried to be close to my Mom, but it just hurts too much! I can’t try anymore.”

We all speak words we regret in moments of desperation and are tempted to say, “I don’t mean that; I’m not sure where that came from,” but in reality we know that the words came from within us. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus taught that **“the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”** If the heart is where true feelings reside, then the hearts of many are filled with despair about their families—feelings of fear that things will never change and thoughts of futility that another attempted turnaround will only lead to failure.

This is a sad situation for anyone, but especially for those of us who are followers of Christ. After all, we worship the almighty God who says, “Mark

it down. I'm for the impossible stuff!" He's the One who said, "**Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know**" (Jeremiah 33:3). God has gone on record again and again saying, "Do you know what? When it seems desperate, when it seems out of reach, when it seems like it could never be turned around—call on Me; I will answer you!"

In the chapters ahead, we're going to spend a lot of time learning what we can do to experience God's transforming power in our family, but there's little point in going any further if we don't believe that our family can actually change. Without hope we're wasting our time, and neither of us wants that, do we? The goal, then, for this chapter is that God would produce hope in our hearts—hope that our best days are not behind us, but that our happiest family times are still ahead. Hope is the heartfelt confidence that the most joyful moments in our marriage and with our children and grandchildren are not in the rearview mirror, but are just around the next corner. When I truly believe that the greatest days for my family are still in the future, I have hope.

## HOPE IS PROMISED IN GOD'S WORD.

Scripture has so much to say on this matter of hope. Here are just a few of the passages the Lord has used to "stoke" hope in the furnace of my own heart:

"Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence." (Psalm 42:5)

"My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him." (Psalm 62:5)

"For You are my hope; O Lord God, You are my confidence from my youth." (Psalm 71:5)

"I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope." (Psalm 130:5)

"There is hope for your future,' declares the Lord, 'And your children will return to their own territory.'" (Jeremiah 31:17)

"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that . . . we might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

## HOPE CAN BE STOLEN.

To truly build your hope for all the transformation up ahead, I can't just give you a pep talk. To have hope that our families can change, we must look at what steals our hope. Trust me, the message of hope is coming, but first we need a clear understanding of why our family stuff so often punches a hole in our reservoir of hope.

It's not the problems at work, or even at church, that drain our hope; it's the pain in our families. There is no pain like family pain. Family pain is the injury that hits the hardest, hurts the most, and lingers the longest. It can come from the sin of a prodigal son or the loss of a dear loved one.

I write this from recent personal experience. Last summer my grandmother passed away suddenly in a car accident. She was eighty-six years of age and the spiritual cornerstone of our family. She and my grandfather were born again in their early thirties and subsequently led my great-grandfather to Christ. For more than fifty years, my grandma followed Christ and studied His Word, but most of all, she prayed. She was a woman of prayer like I have *never* met elsewhere.

How many times I remember going to her big farmhouse and sitting down in this special room. Two chairs faced each other right in front of a big picture window. She would reach with both arms to grasp my hands, then close her eyes and begin to call out to the Lord for me, and then for my wife and children by name, always with specific prayer requests. Inevitably, as she would pray for five, ten, even fifteen minutes without stopping, I would open my eyes and see the tears running down one cheek. (My grandmother had only one eye as a result of a childhood illness.) I have countless memories of those prayer times.

After her wake, our entire extended family went back to her house and into that prayer room. The room contains several antique chests and tables, each with one or many drawers. We began to look through the drawers and discovered they were jammed to the top with scraps of paper. On each piece was a date and detailed prayers my grandmother had prayed in that room over the years for our family. Of course, it's only human nature to look for your own name and wonder what Grandma had been praying for in 1974 or whenever. I soon found several pieces of paper with my name on them and specific burdens I had carried through the years. Most of them were long ago forgotten

by me but remembered before the Lord by Grandma—specific, articulate prayers for every child and spouse and fervent, visionary prayers for every grandchild and great-grandchild.

What a lasting legacy of prayer! I am sure eternity is going to show much more than I ever realized that the fruitfulness of my life—if there is anything praiseworthy in it at all—may be related far less to my efforts and far more to the faithfulness of my grandmother.

And so it has been a great loss. There is no pain in the world like that kind of pain. It attacks us at the very core of who we are and tempts us to doubt the goodness of God. Family pain assails our hope and tries like nothing else to conquer our hearts with despair.

## THINGS HAVEN'T CHANGED MUCH.

You have your own story. You know firsthand that nobody can hurt us like the ones under our own roof. This is true in our time, and it was definitely true in Bible times. Consider the example of King David. By the end of his life, he had been through his share of highs and lows. He triumphed over Goliath, the Philistine warrior, but he experienced great persecution by King Saul. He became king after Saul's death and won mighty victories with the Israelite army, but later David fell into an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and was confronted by almighty God through the prophet Nathan. David had experienced a lot, but his greatest pain was still ahead.

If family is the biggest pain target in our hearts, then our children are the bull's-eye. Nobody—and I mean nobody—can devastate you like your own kids. David learned this truth firsthand when his son, Absalom, turned on him and became rebellious. The episode itself is so sordid and sick that it sounds like the story line of a soap opera. It all started when Absalom murdered his half-brother as payback for raping his sister Tamar. Later Absalom became jealous of his father's popularity, turned his most trusted advisors against him, and chased David not only off the throne but also right out of the city of Jerusalem.

So there was David alone in exile, while the shattered remains of his army were out trying to defeat his own son. Ouch!

In 2 Samuel 18, two runners are seen approaching the exiled king to update him on the battle. The first one, afraid of the king's wrath, gives a lame,

vague report. So David asks the second messenger, the Cushite, **“Is it well with the young man Absalom?”** (verse 32). He didn’t care about the battle, he didn’t care about the victory, and he didn’t care about the throne. What he desperately wanted to know was, “Is my son OK?” Reading the story you want to say, “You mean the son that has been fighting against you? You mean the one who would kill you in a second if he had half a chance?”

The Cushite answered, **“Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil, be as that young man!”** Gently stated but clearly communicated, David’s treacherous son, Absalom, was dead.

No doubt everyone present held their breath as they waited for David’s response. Verse 33 says, **“The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked”**—can’t you see him pacing back and forth, wringing his hands?—**‘O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!’**” How can you explain that—David, the ruthless warrior, crying like a baby when his archenemy is finally defeated? It’s very simple: The enemy was his own flesh and blood, and there is no pain like family pain. Those we love most are also those to whom we are most vulnerable.

#### MORE BIBLE FAMILY PAIN

The Bible makes no effort to candy-coat the pain families experience. Remember Noah, the man of faith? After the Flood, he planted a vineyard and became drunk. Genesis 9:21 tells us that he was naked in his tent. Why? We are not told; we can only imagine. His son Ham came along and saw the shame of his nakedness. But instead of covering him to preserve whatever dignity he had left, Ham went and told his two brothers (verse 22). When Noah learned what Ham had done, he flew into a rage and cursed Ham’s son Canaan (verses 24–25).

Eli was a priest in the temple of the Lord. The Bible tells us that he was such a failure as a father that his own sons were stealing out of the offering and sleeping with women at what amounted to the front door of the church. First Samuel 2:12 describes them as **“worthless men; they did not know the Lord.”** How Eli must have anguished over the fact that he spent his whole life serving God, yet he lost his own children! Family pain.

The prophet Hosea, who was called to speak for God, married a woman who became a prostitute. A picture of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God, Gomer

went out and slept with every willing man she could find. On two separate occasions, she came home pregnant. The first illegitimate child was called Lo-ruhamah, which means “not loved” and the second was called Lo-ammi, which means “not Mine.” Just imagine the faithful prophet of God walking through the streets introducing his children. “I want you to meet my two kids, Not Loved and Not Mine.”

It’s absolutely heartbreaking! The Bible is not a retouched photo, and some of its saddest verses are family verses. The stories parallel our own lives and proclaim the truth: There is no pain like family pain.

### THE STATS DON’T LIE

Family pain is so common in our day that it hardly needs description, but here are a few thoughts from current research:

- Thirty-four percent of married couples today in the United States have been divorced at least once.<sup>1</sup>
- Of Christians who have been divorced, 90 percent report that their divorce occurred after their conversion.<sup>2</sup>
- One popular magazine asked its readers, “Which would you rather have: five extra hours a week at home, or ten thousand dollars a year?” Eighty-three percent took the money.<sup>3</sup>
- For women between the ages of fifteen and forty-four, domestic violence is the most common cause of injury. Sadly, the church is not immune. Summarizing the studies, ten of every sixty women in a church are being abused verbally at home, and three of those ten are being abused physically.<sup>4</sup>
- More than a quarter of American children—nearly seventeen million—do not live with their fathers.<sup>5</sup>
- Almost one out of every three children born in the United States in our day is the child of an unwed mother.<sup>6</sup>
- The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse surveyed hundreds of kids between the ages of twelve and seventeen and found that only 25 percent reported living in a home where parents established and enforced rules. Three out of four live in homes with no rules, no guidelines, no deadlines, and no curfews. And out of that comes every statistic

related to dysfunction, from prolonged therapy to substance abuse to adult criminal activity.<sup>7</sup>

## WHO'S TO BLAME FOR ALL THIS PAIN?

Now we know what drains the hope from our hearts, but what causes all this family pain? Clearly, family pain is all around us. You don't have to look far to find it. But why? If family pain is what drains the hope from our hearts, where does it come from? Well, at the risk of stating the obvious, all family pain is either directly or indirectly the result of *sin*.

### IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning, there was no family pain. God had created the entire universe—speaking into existence everything from the planets and stars to the earth itself, and every plant and animal that calls our world home—and it was good (Genesis 1: 31). Then He came to the crowning moment of creation and said:

**“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it.”** (Genesis 1:26–28)

Adam and Eve had it made! There was no pain of any kind in the Garden of Eden, least of all family pain. They had a perfect relationship with God and each other because they were without sin. They had five-star accommodations, food on the table every day, and just a little work to do.

Every day Adam and Eve got out of bed and said to one another, “So what do you want to do today?” Adam would chorus in, “Let's be fruitful and multiply! I love that job!” And Eve was like, “Shouldn't you start naming the animals?” (Things haven't changed much, have they?) But the important point here is that there was no pain. That first family was living in perfect harmony.

## STEPPING DOWN INTO SIN

In Genesis 3, however, everything changed, and as their spiritual descendants, we are still experiencing the fallout. Genesis 3:1 says, **“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?”’**” Notice that *God’s Word is questioned*. That is the first step down in every family. We say, “I know what God said, but does He really mean it?” We question the clear statements of God.

And then in verses 2–3, **“The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.”’**” The second step occurs when *God’s Word is distorted*. God never said they couldn’t touch the fruit; He just said they couldn’t eat it. They could coddle it all they wanted; they just couldn’t consume it. How important it is to get God’s Word right! We’re in for deep trouble when we distort it and make God say things He never said.

From there things start going downhill quickly. **“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’**” (verses 4–5). Perhaps Eve doubted in her own mind: “But wait, I thought God said we *would* die.” Satan declared, “No, you won’t die!” Right out in the open, *God’s Word is denied*—the third step.

We’re headed for big-time family pain when we allow God’s Word to be questioned, distorted, and denied.

The final step down occurs when *God’s Word is disobeyed*. Notice verse 6: **“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her.”** Do you see in that verse the all-important words, “with her”? Where did we get this notion that Adam was at the office when all this happened? He was right there with her, and they sinned together. **“She gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings”** (verses 6–7).

BIG-TIME FAMILY PAIN

Sin entered the world and with it came family pain. Adam and Eve disobeyed the direct commands of God, and the family fallout was immediate: *broken fellowship with God* (they went and hid); *shame* regarding themselves and their bodies (they covered themselves up); and *relational strife* (they blamed one another). God's judgment brought pain to the family: pain in their roles, pain in the man's work, and pain to the woman in childbearing. And all family pain—from that day to this one—results from the choice to sin.

I know that there are men and women reading this who feel so alone in their marriage. They're thinking, *This is it? This is what I got married for? This is what I have to look forward to for the rest of my life?* Distracted husbands. Detached wives. Distant relationships. Feeling so alone and, for the most part, suffering in silence.

Maybe you are strong as a couple but devastated by the weight of children who are making choices that break your heart. For others, it's financial burdens—"You have run up *how much* on your credit cards? You've got to be kidding me!" As I meet with families and try to help them, I have often thought, *How can a person do that?* The answer is plain and simple: It's sin. It's thinking that stuff will make us happier than God.

Maybe infidelity has scarred your home. Perhaps it's substance abuse, sexual addiction, or worse. Maybe it's just a thousand little things that could and should be so much better. And if the truth were told, you're asking yourself, "Can any of this ever change?"

HOPE STARTS RIGHT HERE.

Hope starts by calling my family problems *sin*. Until we are willing to call the issues in our home what they really are—*my sin*; *my neglect*; *my avoidance* of the issues; *my refusal* to live according to God's Word—we are not going to experience the grace of God for transformation. As long as we call it *weakness* when God calls it *willfulness*, we won't experience His grace. As long as we call it an *accident* when God calls it an *abomination*, we forfeit God's benevolence toward us. As long as we call it *indiscretion* when God calls it *iniquity*, we lose God's blessing.

We must be willing to pull the ugly thing—whatever it is—up on the table

and face it honestly and openly and say, “You’re right, God. It *is* what You said; it’s sin! This pain in my family is because we’ve broken Your laws and forfeited Your favor.” Only then will we experience God’s life-changing power.

## NOW FOR THE GOOD NEWS.

All in favor of good news? Here it is: God can cleanse your family sin. The family pain you may be feeling can be healed if you are willing to acknowledge its source and deal with it God’s way.

You think your family has some issues? You think you all need some counseling, some help? Well, the family of God in Isaiah 1 was about as far out as you can get—so far out that God Himself was feeling disillusioned with them. The prophet Isaiah records the very thoughts of God in regard to His family. Let me just hit a few of the lowlights from chapter one. **“Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me. . . . My people do not understand”** (verses 2–3). God describes His offspring as **“evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord . . . [and] despised the Holy One of Israel”** (verse 4).

Then in verses 5 and 6, God asks, **“Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion?”** In other words, “I have had to spank you so many times to get you in line! There’s not even a place anymore.” **“The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds.”**

God is fed up! He says in verse 13, **“Bring your worthless offerings no longer.”** In verse 15 He adds: **“So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen.”**

Do you think that situation looks dark? Does it seem beyond hope? Then listen to what God says in Isaiah 1:18 as He reaches in love toward His wayward children. **“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.”** Wow! It’s the very same heart that’s revealed in Exodus 34:6–7, **“The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.”** It’s the very same heart that caused Micah to cry out, **“Who is**

**a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of his possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love” (Micah 7:18).**

I proclaim to you a God who is loving and forgiving and who wants—even more than you want—to heal the pain in your family. But it must start with an honest acknowledgment: “God, I need Your cleansing and forgiveness”; “I’ve not been the wife that You wanted me to be”; “I’ve not been the son that You wanted me to be, God”; “I’ve not been the daughter that I should have been. I’ve hurt my parents and I want to make it right.”

## NOBODY WANTS TO BELIEVE THE PROBLEM IS SIN.

Perhaps you say, “I’m a sinner; no doubt about it. But I just don’t see how getting squared away with God is going to change things in my family. They’re just too messed up!” Here’s the deal: There is so much nonsense written today about the family. If I hear one more person tell me that the biggest issue in marriage is communication, I’m going to be sick! Everyone is talking about *fruit* issues when the *root* issue is always the same—it’s sin. You say, “My husband just doesn’t know how to communicate.” Yet he goes out with his buddies and talks up a storm for four hours about some sports subject that interests him! His problem is not communication; it’s pride. It’s pride that causes men to starve their wives emotionally and find their affirmation from the workplace or their buddies. It’s not that we don’t know *how* to talk; it’s pride that keeps us from opening up and making ourselves vulnerable and extending love.

Hope for the family begins when we get down to the root issue, and it’s always the same. It’s sin.

You say, “No. No, our problem is not sin; it’s financial.” But the deeper issue below the finances is a materialism problem, a spending problem. You think *stuff* can make you happy, but it can’t—only God can. “We have sex problems” or “discipline problems” or “substance abuse problems.” Do you want a surface makeover, or do you want life transformation? If you want the latter, then you have to get off the fruit stuff and get to the root stuff. Label that entire folder “sin.” When you’re willing to call it what it really is, God says, “Now you’re getting it!” Then His grace will begin to flow into your life, and the change you have been longing for will begin to develop.

## ONLY GOD CAN . . .

Only God can change our families. Psalm 127:1 is a favorite verse of mine, and I quote it often. **“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain.”** All your efforts, all your trying is completely in vain, unless you are linked in partnership with God. But if you and your family are linked in partnership with the Lord, then your best days are ahead.

Here is a preview of three things to expect when you commit to partner with God for His cleansing and transformation.

1. *This commitment to partner with God melts our pride.* “It’s me, God. I’m the biggest problem in my family.” Do you want to see God flow something great into your marriage? Before your head hits the pillow tonight, say to your spouse, “God’s been teaching me some important things. I want you to know that I have been a big part of the problem in our marriage. Would you just pray that God will make me a better partner for you?” That melts pride. You say, “What if my husband or wife doesn’t say it back?” Leave that with God. Be an instrument of God’s grace in your home. James 4:6 says, **“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”**
2. *This commitment to partner with God cleans the slate.* A lot of people don’t see transformation in their family because they’re like, “Things are so messed up right now! How could God possibly turn this into a masterpiece? There’s just too much negative to get beyond!” That’s the grace of God. You can get on a new page. You don’t have to build your future on the failures of the past. You can clean the slate. **“Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow”** (Isaiah 1:18). You can begin afresh to be the man or the woman that God wants you to be for your family. Clean the slate.
3. *This commitment to partner with God releases His grace.* God wants to flow His grace and favor into your family. You might have said something to your wife a week ago, and normally it would have gone nowhere. But God will give you favor in her eyes. **“Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you”** (James 4:10). When you link up in partnership with God, phenomenal things begin to come your way.

## LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL.

I can tell you for a fact that *nobody* at the end of life says, “Agh! If I could do it again, I’d spend more time at the office!” Nobody ever wishes he or she had given more time to hobbies and travel. Those are not the things that amplify joy and happiness. No, at the end of life, everyone always talks about the same stuff: their family, their spouse, and their kids. The apostle John said, **“I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth”** (3 John 4).

Whether they are our physical or spiritual offspring, it’s our family that brings us joy. It’s the celebration of a son serving Christ. It’s a daughter who is raising our grandchildren in the things we taught her. It is our Golden Anniversary. Those are the greatest joys of life, and they are worth fighting for.

## HIS GRACE IS FOR *ANY* SITUATION.

My grandparents bought a cottage up in the Muskoka region of Ontario, Canada, back in 1960, the year I was born. When my father grew up, he bought his own cottage there, and then one of my brothers did the same. We have a little family compound right next to one of the premier Bible conferences in Canada, the Muskoka Baptist Conference. Our extended family has been attending there for as long as I can remember. For the last several years, I have had the great privilege of proclaiming God’s Word at that Bible conference. I take a worship team from our church with me, and we minister in the morning and evening services for a week each summer.

This past summer was the first time that my grandmother wasn’t sitting in the second row when I opened God’s Word. Following a family wedding, Grandma set out alone on the four-hour drive Thursday morning to join us at the cottage and attend the final services of the week. (You say, “Why didn’t somebody drive her?” Believe me, you couldn’t tell her anything! She was going to drive herself.) As she was driving down the road, a car ran a stop sign and pulled right out in front of her. She never even touched the brakes. She was killed instantly and in the presence of her Lord.

By Thursday night, when Grandma hadn’t arrived at the cottage, we were starting to wonder where she was. My dad sat on the porch for six hours, praying and waiting to see her come up that driveway. She didn’t have a cell phone,

so we couldn't call her. Just waiting, waiting, waiting. And as the sun went lower into the sky, we began to fear the worst. It was time for the evening service, and I had to preach. I was speaking on the Twenty-third Psalm. Immediately after the service was over, I rushed out of the chapel and my older brother came to meet me.

"Grandma is with the Lord," he said. I walked a couple steps across the parking lot, bowed my head, and wept quietly for a few moments. Incredible, painful loss.

But if you look for God's grace in any situation, you can find it. It was the first time in nine years that my entire family had been together at the cottage: *all* my brothers, *all* their wives, *all* their kids, *everyone* together—though we live so far apart. There was quite a scene, crying and praying and comforting and ministering to one another into the night. The next morning my dad pulled us all together and said, "Here is what Grandma would want." He led us over to her cottage, and we prayed together and talked about what her life meant and what we would miss about her the most. I certainly did not feel like preaching, but Dad felt Grandma would want us all to be in the chapel service. (It used to make her crazy if people came to the cottage and didn't go over to the conference grounds for chapel.)

In God's providence, my message that morning was from Psalm 23:4: **"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."** I got up and preached my heart out. One of the phrases we studied was, **"He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake"** (verse 3), and how God guides the feet of His children into difficult circumstances so that we can proclaim the superiority of the life lived in God. He allows us to experience the hardest times so we can say for His glory, "God is faithful, and His promises are true."

When I came to the end of the message, I explained that "for His name's sake" is sort of the equivalent of raising a flag. We don't want to have *little* victory, half-mast victory; we want to have *big-time* victory, raising the flag to the top of the pole. We want to experience overcoming, super-conquering victory because of Christ who loves us. One of our worship team members began "raising the flag" by singing *It's All About You*, a song which proclaims everything as for the glory and fame of Jesus Christ.

Many of the several hundred people in the room had known my grandmother, and the presence of the Lord was being powerfully felt by all. I got

up and I began to wave the Christian flag, symbolic of our commitment that these difficult “**paths of righteousness**” would be for “**His name’s sake.**” We were grieving, but we were celebrating.

Just then my younger brother, Todd, rose from his seat, walked right down to the front of the chapel, put his arm around me, and placed his hand on the flagpole. This may seem like no big deal, but it was huge because Todd had struggled spiritually for many years. For a long time, he was totally disinterested in the things of God, which was a great burden to all of us, perhaps to my grandmother most of all. I wouldn’t embarrass him and give you the details because I love him very much, but let me just say that when he was in his twenties, he was so far from God it was like, “He is *never* coming back!” If you were to speak to him about Christ, he would get very angry and cut you off abruptly.

My parents and my grandmother fervently called out to God for him, and God in His grace got ahold of Todd’s life and brought him back. In recent years, Todd has been growing very close to the Lord. But until that moment when he joined me in raising the flag, he had been very private about the recommitment of his faith. It was a mighty victory for him and for our entire family to see him go public in worshipping Christ. In fact, it was one of the greatest moments in my life. Real joy, family joy!

## HOPE IS ALIVE.

I tell that story about my family because I want you to have faith to believe God for similar miracles of supernatural comfort and transformation in your family. Hope is alive when we are willing to believe that the sin problems which cause our family pain are within the reach of our loving and forgiving God. Hope is alive when we believe that the Lord desires to bring transformation to every part of our family, regardless of how dark or desperate the needs may seem this moment.

Psalm 42:5 says, “**Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence.**”

## A PRAYER TO GO HIGHER



*Lord, thank You for the hope that is found in You alone. I need it so desperately today! Things aren't going the way they should in my family, and it is causing me much heartache and pain. I recognize that sin is the root problem, and I confess my own personal sinfulness. (Be specific.) I have not been the Christ-honoring family member that I could and should be. Cleanse me of my sin and make me right before You. Thank You for having a bright future in Your heart for my family. I choose to wait and trust You for it.*

*Lord, help me to live in Your grace and be filled with Your hope each day. I ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.*

## A PROJECT TO GO DEEPER



Someone has said that when you've lost hope, you've lost everything. It's true, isn't it? Take a few quiet moments to reflect on a time in your life when you had lost all hope. Maybe it was because of a painful family issue like we've been discussing. Perhaps it was an overwhelming hurdle at work. Or maybe it was an insurmountable financial struggle. Whatever the situation, journal your thoughts and feelings and emotions. What was going on inside you at that time?

Once you've done that, think about what made the difference. What moved you out of the pit? Jot some things down. Then go back to the beginning of this chapter and read the promises of hope from God's Word; then meditate on them. What can you take away from these verses to help you live in confidence and power this week?

## A PRACTICE TO GO FURTHER



In the rest of this book, we are going to study how you can be an instrument of transformation in your family, but that is something you would never pursue without hope. Do you agree that family pain is the result of sin? Are you willing to turn to God in this moment and ask His forgiveness for your part in

Hope for the Family

your family’s pain? You may feel that the blame lies elsewhere, but there is no hope in that. God’s work in your family starts in the places where you are willing to acknowledge your own failures. Right there in those places, God’s work of transformation begins. What we confess God will cleanse, and what God cleanses He will work to transform. And the places where God is committed to transformation are the places about which we can confidently hope.

Take some time now and write down the things you want to see God do in your family, and then confess what you must do in each of those situations so that God’s work of grace can begin afresh and you can experience hope.

**Marriage Needs**

**My Part**

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**Children’s Needs**

**My Part**

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**Parents’ Needs**

**My Part**

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**Siblings’ Needs**

**My Part**

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NOTES

1. “Family,” at the website [www.barna.org/cgi-bin/pagecategory.asp?categoryID=20](http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/pagecategory.asp?categoryID=20). Accessed on 5 December 2001.
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