

### Holding On For Dear Life

In 1620, a young Pilgrim, John Howland, wearied by his cramped quarters aboard the *Mayflower*, decided to get some fresh air. He climbed to the top of the ship's deck at the most inopportune time. A gale storm was brewing, causing the vessel to shift suddenly. Howland lost his footing, stumbled overboard, and fell into the sea. As the treacherous waves crashed around him, Howland began groping frantically for anything that could save his life. Fortunately, a loose rope from the *Mayflower's* topsail was floating nearby. Howland grasped the rope with all his might. At times he was pulled some ten-feet below the surface of the ocean – even so John Howland never let go! Minutes later, alert crew members spotted Howland and pulled him out of the frigid water and safely back aboard the ship. Howland's refusal to give up had lasting consequences for himself and his family. He married soon after, had ten children, and later, eighty-eight grandchildren!

Adapted from Nathaniel Philbrick's *Mayflower*

Like John Howland, Christians are exhorted to "hold on" to hope in the midst of life's trials and tribulations. And if we "do not let go," we will be rewarded with a new life, a new community, and the greatest gift of all—an everlasting experience with God himself!

#### Monday – The Promise of Hope

*"The God who has fulfilled his promises to Israel in the past will continue to be faithful in the present and the future."*

J.M. Everts - Dictionary of Paul and His Letters

1. Consider Romans 15:4. What is it that invests hope in us?
2. Hope is experienced when we purpose to endure and when we consult and believe in the Scriptures. Reflect upon a time when God's words gave you hope. What stories/verses were most meaningful to you?
3. Read Isaiah 40:31. What promise does God give to those who are weary, yet "hope" in him?

**Digging Deeper** (optional) – Read 2 Corinthians 1:18-20. What does Paul mean when he says that "all God's promises...find their 'Yes'" in Jesus?

#### Tuesday – The Basis for Hope

*"The ostensible basis for Christian hope in the New Testament is the resurrection of Jesus."*

G.B. Caird - New Testament Theology

1. Read Romans 15:7-13. What themes does Paul seem to be dealing with? What do these have to do with hope?
2. Read Acts 2:23-32. Why is Jesus' resurrection our greatest source of hope? How does the agony of Christ's crucifixion deepen our understanding of hope?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23. According to Paul, why is Christ's resurrection central to the Gospel message? Why is it impossible to have hope without him (1 Cor. 15:19; Eph. 2:12)?

#### Wednesday – Hope for the Individual

*"For Christian hope is the power of resurrection from life's failures and defeats. It is the power of life's rebirth out of the shadows of death...The Christian hope is all these things because it is spirit from the Spirit of the resurrection of the betrayed, maltreated and forsaken Christ."* Jürgen Moltmann, - In the End—The Beginning

1. Read Romans 15:13. What does it mean to overflow with hope?
2. What promise does Jesus make to his followers in John 14:19? Why should this promise make us hopeful?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-58. Why is a new, redeemed, imperishable body necessary to experience the future life God has for us?

#### Thursday – Hope for the Community

*"We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality...For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."* Martin Luther King, Jr.

1. Many read Paul's epistles through the lens of the individual. But the reality is that almost all of Paul's epistles were written to Christian communities. Read Romans 15:13 as if you were hearing it for the first time in a group of people. How does it deepen the meaning?
2. Contrast our broken and sinful world with the hope that is revealed in Isaiah 11:6-9 and 60:18-22.
3. Read Revelation 21:24-26 and 22:2. How does John envision communal life and culture in the New Jerusalem?

#### Friday – Persevering in Hope

*"Hope is directed towards what is not yet seen, and therefore means patient endurance, the endurance that finds the meaning of the present moment not in itself, but in God."* C.K. Barrett - 1 Corinthians

1. Describe Paul's emotional state in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9. Have you ever felt this way? What principles for dealing with suffering can be derived from 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 9-11, and 12:7-10?
2. In Hebrews 6:19, our hope is described as an "anchor for the soul?" Why do you think the author chose this metaphor? What images does it conjure up in your mind?

**Digging Deeper** (optional) - Read Colossians 1:21-23. What rewards are promised to those who are not "moved from hope?"

#### For the Weekend: Weekend – Hope for the Future

*"There is nothing noble the human mind has ever hoped for or dreamed of that will not be fulfilled."*

Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest

1. Jeremiah 29:11 is a source of encouragement for many believers. Why do you think this is so?
2. How might 1 Corinthians 2:9 invite us to dream about the future?