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## ABOUNDING IN HOPE

Romans 15:13

By

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Romans, Lesson 101

## Abounding in Hope Romans 15:13

Romans 15:13 is a wonderful prayer that Paul wants every believer to experience: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

When you read a verse like that, you must ask yourself, "Does that verse even come close to describing me? Can I honestly say that my life is *filled* with *all* joy and peace in believing? Do I *abound* in hope?" And, since we all tend to give ourselves the benefit of a doubt in these matters, I need to ask, "Would my family or good friends describe me as being *filled* with *all* joy and peace in believing and *abounding* in hope?"

To varying degrees we all fall short of experiencing that verse and so we all can benefit by thinking about what it means and how we can grow in these qualities. I can't imagine anyone saying, "I'm not interested in having joy and peace. I don't want to abound in hope." We all want and need these qualities, and yet even among believers, very few can legitimately claim to be filled with all joy and peace and to be abounding in hope.

A common factor among those who are depressed is that they lack hope. Discouraged people and those who are apathetic about life also lack hope. While the following statistics ([upliftprogram.com/depression\\_stats](http://upliftprogram.com/depression_stats)) describe the American population at large, I would guess that they would not be much different for evangelicals:

Depressive disorders affect approximately 9.5% of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year.... Pre-schoolers are the fastest-growing market for antidepressants. At least four percent of preschoolers ... are clinically depressed.... 30% of women are depressed. Men's figures were previously thought to be half that of women, but new estimates are higher.... 15% of depressed people will commit suicide.... Depression will be the second largest killer after heart disease

by 2020—and studies show depression is a contributory factor to fatal coronary disease.

Those are *depressing* statistics! I realize that there are often complex factors that cause depression, including various physiological components, so I'm not suggesting an easy, one-size-fits-all solution. If you are severely depressed, you should get a medical check-up. But before you turn to anti-depressant drugs (which have some serious risks; see web site mentioned above), consider seriously seeking God to fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a most practical verse for us all as we navigate life's trials!

The God of hope wants us to be filled with all joy and peace in believing, so that we will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We'll look at the *source* of this abundant hope; the *foundation* for it; the *human* and *divine means* for abounding in it; and, some practical strategies for growing in God's joy, peace, and hope.

1. The source of this abundant hope is the God of hope.

By "the God of hope," Paul means that God is the source or giver of hope. He is also the object of our hope, but here the focus is on God as the source of hope. In Romans 15:5, he describes God as (lit.), "the God of perseverance and encouragement." He gives those qualities to those who seek Him. In 15:33 & 16:20 Paul describes Him as "the God of peace." He gives peace to His people. Thus if we lack hope, the first place we should look for it is God, who is the source of true hope. Beat on His door like the friend asking for bread at midnight (Luke 11:5-8) until He gives it to you. And remember, biblical hope is not uncertain, like when I say that I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow because I have plans to be outside. Rather, biblical hope is certain because it rests on God's promises; but we haven't experienced the fulfillment yet.

The word *hope* in verse 13 links back with *hope* in verse 12c (citing Isa. 11:10), "In Him shall the Gentiles hope." *Him* refers to Jesus Christ and the promise of salvation that comes to all peoples through Him. This means that if you have not come to Jesus Christ as a guilty sinner and put your trust in Him as your only hope for eternal life, then (as Paul puts it in Eph. 2:12), you have no hope

and are without God in the world. What a bleak description of life without Christ!

I have a book by humorist Dave Barry titled, "Stay Fit and Healthy until You're Dead." He pokes fun at the fitness craze in America, but his title also uncovers the raw truth that we all tend to suppress: It is 100 percent certain that you're going to die, no matter how fit and healthy you are. Unless you have Christ as your hope, you don't have any true hope beyond the grave (1 Thess. 4:13), but only "the terrifying expectation of judgment" (Heb. 10:27). Put your trust in Christ as your Savior today!

It's significant that the theme of Romans is "the gospel of God" (1:1, 16, 17; 15:16) and Paul mentions *hope* in Romans more than in any of his other letters. In 4:18 we read of Abraham with reference to God's promise that he would have a son and become the father of many nations, "In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.'" In 5:1-5, Paul elaborates on our hope through the gospel:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

In 8:20-21, Paul mentions the hope of the fallen creation as it waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Then he adds with regard to our waiting eagerly for the future redemption of our bodies (8:24-25):

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? But if we hope

for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

In 12:12, we are to rejoice in hope as we persevere in our tribulations. In 15:4, we have hope through the perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures. And, as 15:12 indicates, Jesus Christ is the object of all our hope. He is the Savior who has freed us from condemnation. He has given us eternal life as a free gift. Our hope rests completely in Him and the promise of His coming (Titus 2:13). As the apostle John tells us (1 John 3:2-3),

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

So if you're lacking hope, you know where to find it: Seek the God who is the source of all true hope and put your hope in Christ as your Savior and Lord.

2. The foundation for this abundant hope is to be filled with all joy and peace.

Paul doesn't pray that you will have a little bit of joy and peace trickling into your life now and then. Rather, he prays that the God of hope will *fill* you with *all* joy and peace so that you will *abound* in hope. He piles up these superlatives to show us what God can give us and wants to give us. Have you ever stopped to fill your water jugs at the spring that's on the side of the road at the top of Oak Creek Canyon? There are two spigots that flow 24-7, 365 days per year with that delicious, cool spring water. Paul wants our "jugs" of joy and peace to be overflowing so that we are continually abounding in hope in God. Again, while we all fall short of this, don't settle for an empty or partially full jug. Ask God to fill you to the brim with His joy and peace and hope.

Paul has already mentioned *joy* and *peace* (in reverse order and also in connection with the Holy Spirit) in 14:17, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Both joy and peace are listed as part of the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in the believer who walks in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 22). As qualities that the Spirit of God produces in

us, the joy and peace Paul is talking about do *not* come from having a certain personality type. A person with Holy Spirit-produced joy is not just a person with a bubbly, optimistic personality. A person with Holy Spirit-produced peace is not just a laid back guy who never gets ruffled at anything. Rather, these are qualities that are not natural. And they do not come from being in favorable circumstances where just about anyone would be joyful and full of peace. In fact, they are often most noticeable when a person is in a situation where almost everyone would be depressed or anxious, but the Spirit-filled believer is full of joy and peace in God.

It's also important to understand that the joy and peace that Paul is talking about are not a "Pollyanna positive" outlook that denies the reality of sorrow, grief, or genuine concern. Paul had great sorrow and unceasing grief in his heart over the great number of Jews who were rejecting Christ (9:2), yet he could write here about being filled with all joy. As I've pointed out before, the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament is, "Rejoice always" (1 Thess. 5:16), but the shortest verse in the English New Testament is, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). There is no contradiction. Paul described himself as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10a). By the way, Paul mentions *joy* 21 times in his letters; the next closest is John with nine times. It's especially helpful to study *joy* in Philippians, where Paul was in prison and being wrongly criticized by fellow believers, and yet he was rejoicing always in the Lord.

We also need a realistic view of Spirit-produced peace. It does not mean that we glibly shrug off concern for difficult problems. Paul was filled with peace and yet he mentions the daily pressure on him "of concern for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28). So we're not talking about a "who cares, whatever" kind of peace, where a person irresponsibly shrugs off every concern. Biblical peace comes from taking all of our anxieties to God in thankful prayer (Phil. 4:6-7): "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Thus biblical joy is an inner delight in God and His sure promises that gives us comfort and contentment in every trial. It comes from knowing that our sovereign God will work all things,

including tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword, together for our good because we love Him and are called according to His purpose (8:28, 35). Biblical peace is the inner contentment and freedom from crippling anxiety and fear that comes from being reconciled to God and, as much as it depends on us, being at peace with others (5:1; 12:18). As we've seen, it comes through taking every concern to God in thankful prayer. Being filled with God's joy and peace is the foundation or platform that results in abounding in hope.

We all want this kind of joy and peace so that we will abound in hope, but how do we get these qualities? Paul mentions a human means and a divine means:

3. The human means of this abundant hope is to keep believing in God and His Word.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace *in believing* . . ." Paul does not specify the object of our faith, but obviously it is the same as the object of our hope (15:12), Christ, "the root of Jesse who arises to rule over the Gentiles." In the Bible, hope and faith are sometimes virtual synonyms. Hebrews 11:1 tells us, "Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Psalm 71:5, "For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, *You are* my confidence from my youth." So to hope in Christ is to believe in Christ. It is to look to Him alone to fulfill all the promises of God to us. We find those promises in Scripture, which is why Paul said (15:4) that the Scriptures give us hope. Or, as he said (10:17), "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." To have and increase in abundant hope, we must believe and keep on believing in God and His Word.

But you may wonder, "How do I get this kind of faith that helps me abound in hope even in the midst of trials?" Part of the answer is to know your God and His ways through His Word. The Word shows God to be faithful to His people in all sorts of trials. Quite often, He delivered them as they trusted in Him, but sometimes He permitted them to suffer and die, promising rewards in heaven. In Hebrews 11:33-38, the author mentions those . . .

who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of* righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; [then, without missing a beat, he continues] and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

Knowing God and His ways through His Word will show you that He is completely trustworthy. Even if you suffer a martyr's death, He will give you the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

The other part of having this kind of faith is to choose to believe God in spite of horrible circumstances that seem to be contrary to His promises. After Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and slaughtered many Israelites, Jeremiah grieved and lamented, but then he directed his thoughts toward God (Lam. 3:21-24):

This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. *They* are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."

Or, as I've already mentioned with Abraham, whose body and whose wife's body, were beyond the physical ability to conceive a son according to God's promise (Rom. 4:18): "In hope after hope he believed ...." He chose to believe God's promise in spite of circumstances to the contrary. The human means of growing in abundant hope is to believe and keep believing in God.

4. The divine means of this abundant hope is the power of the Holy Spirit.

"... so that you will abound in hope *by the power of the Holy Spirit.*" Did you notice that the three members of the trinity are all mentioned in the context here? God the Father is the God of hope.

The object of our hope is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God who is also the root of Jesse. The power for joy, peace, and abundant hope comes from the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Holy Spirit is, of course, nothing less than the power of God that created the universe! He spoke and it was done (Ps. 33:9). The Spirit's power is the resurrection power that gives new life to dead sinners (John 3:6-8). The Holy Spirit opens our minds so that we can understand the truths of God's Word (1 Cor. 2:9-13). The Holy Spirit is the power that produces His holiness in us as we walk in dependence on Him (Gal. 5:16-23; 1 Cor. 6:11). The Spirit confirms our adoption as children of God and helps us as we struggle to pray (Rom. 8:15-17, 26). The Spirit strengthens us with power in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (Eph. 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit seals every believer so that we are kept for the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). And so, as Paul says here, the Holy Spirit is the power who produces in us His fruit of joy and peace as we trust in Him, so that we abound in hope.

### Conclusion

I conclude with some practical strategies for growing in God's joy, peace, and abundant hope:

- Begin each morning by spending 20-30 minutes (minimum) in God's presence, reading and meditating on His Word, praying, and singing.

As I've told you before, the godly George Muller, who trusted in God to provide for over 2,000 orphans at once through prayer alone, used to make it the first business of every day to have his soul delighted in God. If you lack joy and peace and hope, ask God to fill you with these qualities for His glory.

- Memorize some of God's wonderful promises that kindle joy, peace, and hope in your soul so that you can meditate on them throughout the day.

Romans 15:13, 8:28, 8:32, and many other verses like them will help you to set your mind on the things above rather than on the problems that are getting you down (Col. 3:1-4). The Psalms

are loaded with verses of trust in God in the midst of life-threatening situations.

- Immediately confess all grumbling as sin and instead deliberately think each day of things that you can thank God for.

Begin by thanking Him each morning for sending His beloved Son to save you from your sins. Thank Him that you have His Word to guide and sustain you. Thank Him for all your blessings and even for your trials (1 Thess. 5:18), which help you to grow.

- When you feel overwhelmed with despair or depression, talk to yourself: Tell yourself again and again to hope in God.

The depressed psalmist did this repeatedly (Ps. 42:5): “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 42:11: “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.” Psalm 43:5: “Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.”

- Read the biographies of godly saints who have run the race before you.

As I’ve often said, I’ve gained more from reading Christian biographies than from any other source outside of the Bible. Read how William Carey, Hudson Taylor, George Muller, Charles Spurgeon, Adoniram Judson, and many more men and women of faith trusted God in the midst of overwhelming trials.

Here’s a parting quote from Judson, as he suffered horrible torture and deprivation in a squalid Burmese prison. A friend sent him a letter and asked, “Judson, how’s the outlook?” Judson replied, “The outlook is as bright as the promises of God” (exact source unknown, but you can find the quote on the Internet). Judson was abounding in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. So can you!

## Application Questions

1. John Piper often says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Discuss how this statement relates to our need to fight depression and experience hope in God.
2. Paul says (1 Cor. 15:19), "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." Why must our hope be anchored to eternity rather than to this life only?
3. Do a quick read through Philippians (it's short) and note every reference to "joy" or "rejoice." Also, notice the frequent references to "mind" or "attitude." Is there any correlation?
4. Which of the concluding strategies for attaining joy, peace, and hope do you most need to apply? When will you start?

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