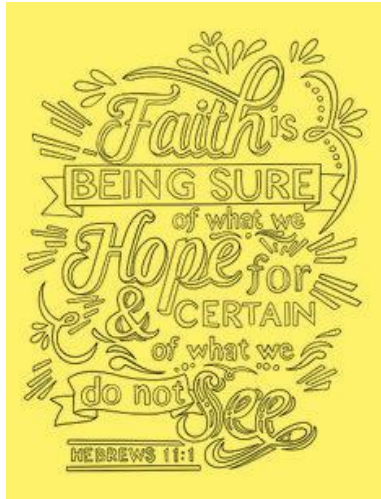


FAITH, HOPE AND PRAYER
Laurie's Message for Friday, May 8, 2020



Hello Apostles Family and Friends!

As we come towards the end of week seven (7) of Governor Wolf's stay at home order, I can't help but be anxious for the time when Franklin County is among the counties moving from Red to Yellow restrictions and then from Yellow to Green restrictions. I have empathy and concern for all the individuals and business owners who are struggling financially or otherwise as this crisis lingers. I can only imagine the daily decisions they are faced with while trying to make ends meet, and what new hurdles they will encounter as they begin the re-opening/re-employment process.

With increasing frequency, I have heard individuals state (or post on Facebook) that they "hope" we can soon go back to normal, or that we just need to have "faith" that this pandemic will soon be over and pray that their lives can resume. I have probably made similar statements myself. Many people are yearning for what they know or had in the past - or in other terms "normalcy". Normalcy as we knew it probably is a long way off and may never be achievable, but we can and should be "moving forward" with planning for what will become a new normal. Our new normal must incorporate social distancing principles and new safety guidelines, as eradication of COVID 19 may take years. Re-opening our community and moving forward will certainly require a different mindset, thinking outside the box and involve new ways of doing things. We will be forced to say goodbye to some traditions and procedures and start establishing new procedures and traditions. What will the new normal be like? How long will it take to achieve some sense of comfort in newly formed routines? When will we be able to go out to dinner at a restaurant with friends? Will we be hit with another hard wave of COVID 19 in the fall as predicted? What about in 2021? Questions such as these plus the sense of apprehension one feels when an answer is unknown or uncertain, are probably the catalyst for the increased frequency of statements that center around "faith", "hope", or "prayer" for everything to turn out okay when the restrictions are lifted.

Hearing the repeated statements of "hope" for this or having "faith" in that has led me to ponder whether one needs to have "faith" to be able to have "hope", or whether one must possess "hope" to have (or enable) "faith"? Or, are the two (hope and faith) one in the same? As I took my walks through the neighborhood this week, I decided to think through this this quandary. Ultimately, I came to the

conclusion that a person with “faith” will typically be more optimistic than someone without faith because they believe in someone or something that can’t be seen or isn’t tangible to touch, and therefore would be more likely to have “hope” for outcomes for which they do not have full control because they have put their trust in God (or whomever it is that they believe in.)

You probably know me well enough by now to realize that after coming to this self-derived conclusion, I then needed to consult the bible and on-line resources to see if I was correct.

Hebrews 11:1-3 (NIV) tells us:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.

³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Per the **dictionary**, Faith is complete trust or confidence in someone or something; strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.

This is exactly what we learn from Hebrews 11:1-3! This tells me that “faith” is the linchpin between a person and God and makes God become a somewhat tangible reality to our senses.

Romans 15:13 (NIV) tells us:

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hope is defined in the **dictionary** as the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best; to look forward to with desire and reasonable confidence; to believe, desire, or trust.

I found it interesting that in the Bible, God is called the “God of Hope”. This tells me he is the source of all real hope. And the biblical use of “hope” in scripture is interpreted as a strong and confident expectation – which is also stated in the dictionary (desire and reasonable confidence). Therefore, one must have “faith” to have “hope”, because without faith in God, there would be no confident expectation or reasonable confidence associated with hope. My self-derived conclusion is correct!

Taking this discussion one step further, it seems to me that Faith and hope would be diminished after a while if we did not have a way to communicate with God. God gave us the gift of prayer, and through this gift we get to converse with God. By praying, we strengthen our relationship with God, it deepens our faith and gives us hope.

Since yesterday was National Prayer Day, I decided to research prayer a bit and this scripture passage called to me. I believe we are all a bit anxious these days.

Philippians 4:6-7 NIV

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This passage tells us to take all our worries to God through prayer. We are to pray about everything and all situations. This reinforces why I have been hearing or reading (or saying) so many statements about faith, hope and prayer! The one short sentence which makes up verse 6 is packed full of instruction. I decided to look up “petition”, “thanksgiving” and “request” as it seems to me this passage instructs us to include all three when we pray. **Petition** (or supplication) is prayer that expresses our need of God. We need God, his power, presence, and wisdom. **Thanksgiving** is prayer with gratitude. We gratefully acknowledge that God exists, and we are grateful for all that he has done for us and will do in the future. **Request** is praying for specific needs or things we want granted or for which we expect answers. What lovely guidance and it is guidance that I will try to follow.

Dear God, thank you for always watching over us. Your power, presence and wisdom are felt with increasing strength as we weather this COVID 19 storm and come to terms with the changes the future will hold. Thank you for guiding the scientists and healthcare professionals who are working tirelessly to overcome this virus and help those afflicted. Please help those who are struggling because of the virus, whether it be through illness, loss of employment or business, or anxiety to find comfort and peace. Please guide our leaders to make sound decisions for re-opening our nation, individual states, and localities. Please bless us as individuals to have the will power to wait patiently, be compassionate to one another, and to use common sense while moving forward in our lives while integrating new safety measures and processes into our gatherings, businesses, and operations. We ask your support and grace to allow us to fondly remember the past while we willingly move forward to the future and what the “new normal” will hold. Amen.

Blessings to all,
Laurie