

Christmas Gift Exchange

Despair for Hope

Despair and Hope are polar opposites. Both have to do with thoughts of the future, but one is decidedly negative, while the other is decidedly positive. Despair is to be overcome by a sense of futility or defeat; giving up all expectation of good—it is hopelessness. Hope is an optimism based on an expectation of positive expectations—it is to expect good with confidence.

Often, we can feel afflicted, perplexed, or struck down. Our circumstances can seem so terrible that the only expectation we have is for more bad things to come our way. Yet Yahweh wants us to shift our focus from things which are seen to things which are not, from things which are temporal to things which are eternal. When we do this, we may be “in every way afflicted, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... Therefore we do not lose hope... For our momentary, light affliction is working out for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:8-18).

Topic: Hope is an optimistic expectation of the future. Despair is a pessimistic expectation of the future. Many troubles confront us now and here. Yet, hope is warranted. Yahweh provides hope through His word, His presence, and His people.

- What is the primary hope that Christians have? (See 1 Peter 1:3-9).
- How heavy is our consternation and suffering when weighed against our eternal glory?
- How does Christmas tie His word and presence together? (See Matthew 1:18-25).

Association: It is important to know of the circumstances of others and that we know the spiritual truth we share and enjoy. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

- What are the temporary afflictions do you suffer?
- How do we know that God cares about those afflictions? (Consider the point and implications of Christmas)
- How easily do you shift your focus from the physical realm to the spiritual realm, from the earthly circumstances we face to the heavenly reality to come?
- How have God's people helped you either by relieving earthly circumstances or by pointing you to the eternal realities of our relationship with God?

Guidance: Shifting our focus from the earthly and temporal to the heavenly and eternal is critical to our embracing hope and leaving despair behind.

- What are the best ways that we can better embrace our role as God's people pointing people to God's word and helping them to embrace God's presence?
- Pray with and for one another concerning all these matters.