

Never Beyond Hope by J.I. Packer, Intervarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL: 2000.
(24 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. While there's hope, there's life.

“While there's life there's hope, we say, but the deeper truth is that only while there's hope is there life. Take away hope, and life, with all its fascinating variety of opportunities and experiences, reduces to mere existence – uninteresting, ungratifying, bleak, drab and repellent, a burden and a pain. People without hope often express their sense of reality and their feelings about themselves by saying they wish they were dead, and sometimes they make attempts on their own life.” (pp 9-10)

2. Fully Human, Full of Hope

“As atheisms stem from being disappointed and hurt in some way by the theism of theists, or by its exponents, so pessimisms flow from the shattering of natural optimism. Hope generates energy, enthusiasm and excitement; lack of hope breeds only apathy and inertia. So for fully developed, as distinct from partly diminished, humanness, there needs to be hope in our hearts.” (pg. 11)

3. Hope Comes from God in Christ

“...No realistic hope of better things to come can be drawn from the ways of the modern world.

What follows? Is there nothing good to hope for at all? There is, but we must seek this good hope outside the socio-politico-economic process. And this, by the grace of God, we may do. For God the Creator, who designed us, sustains us and knows our hearts, never intended that humans should live without hope. On the contrary, he makes himself known in the gospel as ‘the God of hope’ (Paul's phrase, as we saw). There he invites all the world to receive ‘Christ Jesus our hope’ (I. Tim 1:1) and accept renovation by ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col 1:27). As God the Father is a God of hope, so is his incarnate Son, Jesus of Nazareth, crucified, risen, reigning and returning, is a messenger, means and mediator of hope...” (pg. 13)

4. Believers are also Hopers

“...Hebrews 11:1 defines faith in terms of hope (‘Now faith is being sure of what we hope for’). Hope, the guaranteed expectation enabling believers to look forward with joy, is in truth one of the great themes of Christianity and one of the supreme gifts of God.”
(pg.14)

“What the Bible tells us about hope, in a nutshell, is this: Humans were originally created in fellowship with God so that we might exalt and enjoy him forever, first for a probationary period in this world and then in a place of ‘eternal pleasures’ (Ps. 16:11) that is off the map of this space-time universe. When sin infected our race, disrupting this fellowship, robbing us all of the hope of heaven and bringing us all under the threat of hell, our Creator acted to form a forgiven and reborn interracial human race, namely, the church, a community that should enjoy humankind’s original destiny and more through sovereign divine grace and personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. So believers in every age should live in the knowledge that they are God’s adopted children and heirs of what is spoken of as his glory, his city and his kingdom. They should know that Jesus Christ, who out of love gave his life for the church inclusively (Eph 5:25) and for each future believer personally (Gal 2:20), is now with them individually by his Spirit (Mt 28:20), to care for them daily as a shepherd for his sheep (Jn 10:2-4, 11-25) and to strengthen them constantly according to their need (Phil 4:13; 2 Tim 4:17), and that he will finally take them from this world to see and share the heavenly bliss that is already his (Jn 14:1-3, 17:24; Rom 8:17). With Paul, therefore, they should ‘eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope’ (Gal 5:5) – that is, the full fruit of being fully accepted by God, or as New Living Translation puts it, ‘eagerly wait to receive everything promised to us who are right with God through faith.’ The Christian identity is that not only of a believer but of a hoper too.” (pp 14-15)

5. Hope for both Here and Hereafter

“...those who have done most for the present world have been those who thought most of the next.” [C.S. Lewis] (pg. 17)

“...the heart of the Christian hope, both here and hereafter, is the saved sinner’s loving fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, worshiping, obeying and using enterprise to please the divine Three by your service. That is the essential and eternal reality of spiritual life; that is what heaven is fundamentally about; and if I am a real Christian, that is what my present life is beginning to be about already. Here and now, spiritual life brings joy, along with a sense of peace and fulfillment that comes from no other source, and the prospect is that it will continue so forever.” (pp 22-23)

6. Hope is not Pie in the Sky

... C.S. Lewis wrote:

“Hope is one of the theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do.

There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of ‘heaven’ ridiculous by saying they do not want ‘to spend eternity playing harps.’ The

answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them. All the scriptural imagery (harps, crowns, gold, etc) is, of course, a merely symbolical attempt to express the inexpressible. Musical instruments are mentioned because for many people (not all) music is the thing in this present life which most strongly suggests ecstasy and infinity. Crowns are mentioned to suggest the fact that those who are united with God in eternity share his splendor and power and joy. Gold is mentioned to suggest the timelessness of heaven (gold does not rust) and the preciousness of it. People who take these symbols literally might as well think that when Christ told us to be like doves, he meant that we were to lay eggs. (*Mere Christianity* [London: Fontana, 1955], pp.116, 119) ” (pg. 23)

7. No Inferiority in God’s Equation

“... the final answer to all feelings of inferiority is to remind yourself that your God loves, redeems, pardons, restores, protects, keeps and uses misfits, outsiders and failures no less than he does beautiful people of the kind that keep crossing your path and of whom you have been wishing you were one.” (pg. 24)

8. No Strength in Self

“The story of Samson is a cautionary tale, and it is appropriate that we Christians take Samson’s biography as a warning to ourselves. Samson was physically strong, that’s true. At the moments when God’s Spirit fell on him, God gave him unbelievable strength. But this very strength brought weakness – the specific weaknesses of self-centeredness, self-reliance, self-indulgence and self-satisfaction. All four are clearly here in Samson’s track record. Had he been less spectacularly strong, he would have been less vulnerable to these attitudes. As it was, he fought the Philistines well but seems to have made no progress at all in the war with sin – which meant that all through his life he was weak within.

We evangelical Christians are strong too in at least one sense, that is, numerically. When statisticians count numbers, they tell us that there are about forty million of us in the United States alone. We have seminaries, technologies and the megachurch movement. Our literature ministry expands and expands. God has given Christians impressive strength, yet our very strength makes us vulnerable. Are we in danger of falling victim to some of the same self-destructive weaknesses we see in Samson? That, I think, is a question we must face very seriously.

9. Defects in Character Destroy Credibility

Evangelical Christians live in an enclave. It is a large enclave, but it is an enclave all the same. We cannot escape our family relationship to each other. Who and what we are individually impacts all of us. And things in our enclave are not always what they should

be. We need purity of heart – especially in sexual matters. We know that there are folk in our Christian circles today whose sexual lives are all too similar to Samson’s. Beyond sexual purity there was a certain high quality of character that Samson never attained, and in evangelical circles we don’t always attain that quality either. In some of our Christian ministries we see an unwillingness to accept accountability, a desire to lead others and to be our own boss as we do so. We see emotional attitudes – resentment, bad temper, vindictiveness, discourtesy, unlove – that spell the same lack of maturity and sanctity that Samson displayed. Christians are quarrelsome. Christians are conceited. Christians are power-hungry egoists; we build empires. This happens over and over again.

The character flaws (Samson’s and ours) are real weaknesses – weaknesses that can have a tragic effect both on our personal lives and on the impact that our evangelical strength makes in North America today. Defects of character destroy credibility in no time. (pp 32-33)

10. Finding Forgiveness Brings Hope

“Christians live by faith in Jesus Christ, which means we live by being forgiven. And Christians (forgiven sinners) are given a share in God’s work in a way that, over and over, goes beyond anything we could have expected – certainly anything that we deserve. Samson’s story is not all gloom and doom and despair. It shows that we serve a gracious God who could and did use even a wild man such as Samson was. So in spite of all our shortcomings there is hope that God will reveal a positive role for you and me in the affairs of his kingdom.

So let us take courage and learn from Samson’s story the lessons it has for us. We must seek to get our lives – and keep our lives – in a shape that will glorify God. That’s not easy. It means fighting our sins, disciplining our thoughts, changing our attitudes and critiquing our desires in a way that Samson did not try for his glory, and by faith let’s seek strength to serve God in good works and good attitudes that at this moment we feel are beyond us. Those who seek find; for Samson’s God, who is our God, is a God of great patience and great grace. Thus there is great hope for us all. Praise his name.”
(pp 34-35)

11. God’s Grace to Dysfunctional Families

“...From chapter 12 to chapter 50 Genesis is about a dysfunctional family: Abraham’s family, traced through three generations, down to the death of Jacob. What you see in the story, looked at from that standpoint, is God’s grace to this one flawed family, God’s grace dealing with the dysfunctional relations of these dysfunctional people. And God’s grace triumphs in the end in the lives of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and of Joseph and his brother as well. By seeing God’s grace to Jacob’s family, in spite of all the pain

its members inflicted on each other, we can find hope for our own. One of the things you see most gloriously in this family history is the many-sidedness of the grace that God shows: the grace that forgives and the grace that forbears, the grace that helps and the grace that holds, the grace that renews and the grace that restores, as members of the family fumble and stumble and make mistakes and relationships go wrong. Our God is a God of great grace. If you feel as many do nowadays do that you are a victim of dysfunctional or broken family relationships, there is much to encourage and help you in the story of Jacob. (pp. 40-41)

12. Blessing by Breaking

“... our God is a God who blesses us through breaking us” (pg. 49)

“In God’s gracious dealing with us he breaks us and humbles us and brings us down lower than we ever thought it was possible for people to go. What feels like death is then followed by what we find to be resurrection. It happens in Christian lives repeatedly. As the last line of a poem written by John Donne on his deathbed put it: “Therefore, that he may raise, the Lord throws down.”(pg.50)

13. Living in Peace

Peace (Hebrew, *shalom*; Greek, *eirene*) is one of the great Bible words in both Testaments. Its overtones are always of total wellbeing and happiness, so that *peace* in English is hardly forceful enough to express it. It means, to start with, peace with God, sin forgiven, guilt gone, your person accepted. It also means peace with yourself. If God has forgiven you the grisly things you’ve done, then you’d better start forgiving yourself; you must learn to be at peace with yourself now that you are at peace with God. It means peace with your circumstances too. If God, the Lord of circumstances, is at peace with you, you can be sure that henceforth he orders and controls circumstances for your good, as Romans 8:28 explicitly declares he does. So even though things may feel rough, just because you know they’re there for your good, you can live at peace with them and at peace under them.” (pp. 114-115)

14. A Man of Zeal

(quoting Bishop J.C. Ryle, first bishop of Liverpool, England)

“Zeal in religion is a burning desire to please God, to do his will, and to advance his glory in the world in every possible way. It is a desire which no man feels by nature – which the Spirit puts in the heart of every believer when he is converted – but which some believers feel so much more strongly than others that they alone deserve to be called ‘zealous’ men... A zealous man in religion is preeminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that this person is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thoroughgoing,

wholehearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing, and that one thing is to please God.

Whether he lives or whether he dies – whether he has health or whether he has sickness – whether he is rich or whether he is poor – whether he pleases men or whether he gives offense – whether he is thought wise or whether he is thought foolish – whether he gets blame or whether he gets praise – whether he gets honor or whether he gets shame – for all this the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing; and that one thing is to please God, and to advance God’s glory. If he is consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it, --he is content. He feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him. Such a one will always find a sphere for his zeal. If he cannot preach, work and give money, he will cry and sigh and pray... If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, he will do the work of Moses, Aaron and Hur on the hill. (Exod. xvii. 9-13[referring to the work of intercession].) If he is cut off from working himself, he will give the Lord no rest ‘till help is raised up from another quarter and the work is done. This is what I mean when I speak of “zeal” in religion. (*Practical Religion* [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1959], pp. 130-31).” (pp. 163-164)

15. More on Zeal

(quoting Douglas Rumford in his book *Soulshaping*)

Zeal should not be confused with emotionalism, extroversion, or even with frenetic activity. It is better described as an unwavering confidence that results in a steady application of the truth of God in life. The person with zeal frequently steps back for renewal and then steps out again in quiet boldness – to share her faith, to stand firm against the temptation to compromise, to go the extra mile when the road is tangled with brambles and brush ... Strength comes with the doing of the task. In physical exercise, when you lift body weights, the body demands more blood supply to the area when the demand is made. In the process, the new circulation routes form, supplying more blood – which means more strength to the area. But if no demand is made, no strength is supplied! If you want to experience spiritual vitality, put yourself in a place where the demand is made on you. For example, bring Jesus Christ into your conversation; say yes to mentoring a young child who has just begun walking with Jesus; reach out to a neighbor in need; pray with a person for healing. Until you step out in faith, your faith will not grow. When you do step out, you will be amazed at your experience of God’s presence. It may not – in fact, usually does not – come in a dramatic way. But there is a solid peace and confidence that you’ve done the right thing and God is pleased. (pp. 452-53) (pp. 164-165)

16. Zeal, etc.

“... The path of zeal is one that Nehemiah and Jesus and Paul trod, and in this... they set a benchmark and a standard that all believers should aim at. We cannot justify ourselves in not being zealous. We are called to be zealous for God, as an expression of our love for him, and we don't please him unless we are zealous for him in this way.” (pg. 165)

17. God Moves as He Wishes

“Nehemiah, the Jew, was nothing more than a high-class slave in the royal palace. There was no slaves' trade union, and the job he was doing for the monarch as the royal cupbearer, which means he was the royal winetaster, was actually a vital job. Winetasters were employed to taste some hours in advance the wine that the big man was going to drink at his evening meal, just in case it was poisoned. From the winetaster's standpoint it was a high-risk occupation; as far as the king was concerned, it was a very necessary and salutary one. So here was Nehemiah, the Jewish slave, winetasting 365 days of the year. How could he hope to get away to do the rebuilding job that his friends had told him he was qualified to tackle? There seemed no possibility of such a thing happening. But Nehemiah believes what his friends have told him, and so he prays, and they pray with him, 'Grant me mercy in the sight of this man.'” (pg. 167)

18. All with God's Help

“... In fifty-two days, start to finish, he mobilized the inhabitants of Jerusalem and of the land immediately surrounding to rebuild the city wall to a height of probably ten feet and just as thick, with a total length of something like 1.75 miles. After fifty-two days of solid slog, the wall was up. This tremendous achievement called for massive organization. His book records the details of that organization. It was brilliant. But Nehemiah never ascribed success to his organizational skill; the work was done, he wrote, 'with the help of our God' (Neh. 6:16).” (pp. 167-168)

19. Pray and Commit Plan to God

“Pray first and commit your cause to God. Pray first and take the steps that seem appropriate. Pray first and let God guide you in what to do in the crisis.” (pg. 169)

20. Death Followed by Resurrection

“As the late great C.T. Studd, pioneer missionary in China and India and Africa (yes, all three countries) once said, 'If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice is too great for me to make for him.' Zeal in the service of the Lord matches the greatness

of the Lord's love in our redemption. It's obvious, isn't it? Those who have been greatly loved should love greatly and serve zealously in return. We sing, 'Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.' We are right.

C.T. Studd used the word *sacrifice*. His point was that there's always something that has to be left behind if you're going to embrace God's vocation for you. One rather portentous but nonetheless very profound way of expressing this is to say the Christian life according to the New Testament is to be lived according to the baptismal pattern, which means that experiences of renunciation even to death (or what feels like death) constantly precede experiences of resurrection in which you're made rich again. But the resurrection doesn't come until after the death. And it's round the circle of that pattern for each of us over and over again: death followed by resurrection is the recurring sequence. This is part of the Lord's discipline for our personal living, just as it's part of the pattern of the Lord's work in the church and in the world. People like C.T. Studd understood this." (pp 169-170)

21. Whitefield's Zeal.

"(George) Whitefield for years and years, as his amazed friend Henry Venn tells us, used to work an eighty-hour week, preaching up to twenty-five one-to two-hour sermons and expounding the Scriptures, with prayer and singing, in many private houses. He never seemed to feel weary; he loved doing it. He knew he'd been greatly loved by Jesus, and he loved serving the Savior and showing his gratitude.

The Lord gave George Whitefield incredible strength and incredible freshness for his thirty-five years of ministry before, finally spent, he was taken home in his middle fifties. He had said he would rather burn out than rust out, and so he did. But that's zeal. That's how the Lord will use a zealous man. Whitefield was the lightning rod of renewal on both sides of the Atlantic for almost a complete generation." (pg. 171)

22. Jonathan Goforth's Zeal.

"...Have you ever heard of Jonathan Goforth, pioneer missionary in China at the end of the nineteenth century, agent of God in revival in various parts of the Chinese church? When Jonathan Goforth proposed to the English lady whom he hoped to marry and who later wrote his biography, he said, 'Will you give me your promise that always you will follow me to put my Lord and his work first, even before you?' Writing his biography forty-seven years later, she frankly admitted that she hesitated at the time before she said yes. But having been his life partner in evangelistic and pastoral mission in China for more than a generation, she testified that she was very glad she did." (pp. 172-173)

23. Zeal in Loving God and Neighbor

“Zeal that is needlessly rude and rough with people is to that extent unspiritual. Zeal that, however firm and strong in its endeavors, is as gentle and restrained as possible in dealing with our fellow humans is thereby revealed as an expression of love to God and neighbor, which is how it should be. That is the sort of zeal we are to seek.” (pg.173)

“...disappointment must not be allowed in any way to diminish our zeal for the honor and work of God. Whatever happens, we must keep our priorities in place and look to God as steadily as we can to ensure that our energy in pursuing them, even if temporarily lessened, will not be permanently reduced. This is important, for we all have our disappointments from time to time (finding we wasted our input and labor, or been let down, or deceived, or denied justice, or been disabled, or penalized, or have lost someone or something that we valued enormously, or had our hopes dashed some other way).” (pg. 173)

24. Being Faith and Zealous

“The book of Ecclesiastes spends chapter after chapter pointing out that life is full of disappointments, situations of frustration and waste and tragedy that ‘under the sun’ seem to make no sense. Nonetheless, the book ends on an upbeat note of hope that is very positive, even if not very informative. Having stated that the whole business of life is to fear God and keep his commandments, the writer declares: ‘For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil’ (Eccles. 12:14). Judgment, we must remember, is for approbation and reward, as well as for retribution upon wrongdoers; this is Ecclesiastes’s low-key way of expressing what Paul passionately articulates in his admonition to the Corinthians: ‘Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain’ (I Cor. 15:58).

God’s people are never left without hope, even if it seems that everything around us has gone wrong. In God’s sight all faithful endeavor has lasting value, even when humanly it appears to have been fruitless. So we must never be found less than zealous in living for the Lord we serve and love.

...maybe you and I need to reorder our public image and our self-image a little bit so that we have a different goal than always to appear in public as a ‘nice’ person. What’s important is that we should appear in public not necessarily as compliant, tolerant, jolly persons but as faithful and zealous ones. Sometimes we shall be up against things that call for quite strong words and quite vigorous action. We won’t be loved for speaking those words or taking that action – just as Jesus, in the short term, wasn’t loved for clearing the temple. But faithfulness to his Father required it. And faithfulness to our heavenly Father is going to require of us from time to time that we say in our hearts,

Never mind what they think. This is what I ought to be saying; this is what I ought to be doing; I know I should; so Lord help me and I will.

...Arrow prayers, as we call them, only take about a second to offer, but they make a tremendous difference to what happens. You and I should also get in the habit of firing off arrow prayers to God when something that is difficult to say, difficult to do, or something that's going to get us into hot water in the short term nonetheless has to be said or done.

“...God, prompt us to take to heart what Paul says in Romans 12:11, ‘Never be lacking in zeal.’ This is as explicit and as strong as a command can be. If ever we find our zeal sagging, may God give us grace to look back to the cross and brood a little on the greatness of God’s love, the greatness of God’s faithfulness, the overwhelming reality that Christ died for our sins to save us, renew us, give us our new life here and our hope of glory hereafter, and ... our zeal will return to us.” (pp. 174-175)