ON BECOMING MORE HOPEFUL

HOPE IS HERE! HOPE IS NOW!

by Fr. Tat Hoang, C.Ss.R

PHOTO: Marc Olivier Jodoin

PHOTO: Dolina Modlitwy

Introduction

Hope is a vital force that sustains the Christian life, offering light amid darkness and strength in times of difficulty. Rooted in trust in God's promises, Christian hope is not mere optimism or wishful thinking; it is a confident assurance that, no matter the trials we face, God's love and mercy will prevail. In our daily lives, hope empowers us to persevere through challenges, to seek meaning in moments of uncertainty, and to extend compassion to those in need.

As we look toward the 2025 Jubilee of Hope, declared by Pope Francis, we are reminded of the profound call to rekindle this hope within our hearts and communities. This special Jubilee invites us to reflect deeply on the hope that Christ brings and to be instruments of hope for a world marked by uncertainty and suffering.

In this series of reflections Fr. Tat Hoang, C.Ss.R., invites us to contemplate the vital role of hope in our spiritual lives. Drawing from Scripture, the Redemptorist tradition, and daily experiences, Fr. Tat explores how hope can uplift us in difficult moments and inspire us to trust in God's unceasing love. Through these reflections, we are encouraged to live with hearts anchored in the hope that Christ offers. The introduction to Fr. Tat's reflections are offered as part of this edition of Hope magazine. We will feature more of Fr. Tat's reflections on hope in upcoming emails during the Lenten Season.

Fr. Tat Hoang offers a simple yet profound paradigm for cultivating hope which he calls the "Care-Share-Dare" model. This three-step process invites us 1) to be grateful for everything we have and see while remembering God's past faithfulness; 2) to be mindful of our actions, words, and thoughts; 3) think "good" about others in small, tangible ways—through kindness, perseverance, and by sharing hope with others. The world as well as we in our personal lives continue to face significant challenges that can leave us feeling overwhelmed or disheartened. With the 2025 Jubilee of Hope beginning, Fr. Tat believes it is an opportune moment to renew and strengthen our sense of hope, not only as individuals but also as a community of faith. He offers us this simple framework that to help us to stay grounded in hope, even when life feels uncertain, by reminding us that hope is both a gift and a practice.

ON BECOMING MORE HOPEFUL:
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THE METHOD: Care-Share-Dare

10 Basic WAYS to become (more) hopeful

CARE

1. Be grateful for everything you have and see.
2. Be mindful of your body, words, and actions.
3. Think "good" about others.

SHARE

4. Learn to hear other people's experiences.
5. Learn to share your LIFE (Love, Imagination, Faults, Experience).
6. Learn to forgive yourself and others (loved ones and enemies).

DARE

7. Dare to pray. (Be patient to yourself, care for others, believe in God).
8. Dare to learn at least one new thing a day. (Have a sense of humor).
9. Dare to serve others. (Selflessness is hopefulness).
10. Dare to lose your life in order to save it.

(Dare to be baptized in the death of Jesus Christ in order to rise with Him. Jesus is the hope of all hopes. We have to accept death and trust in the resurrection of Christ.)

SUMMARY: Hope is an action, not a destination. (Every breath you take is hope.)

PHOTO: Diana Simumpande

PHOTO: Jon Tyson

The Many Ways to Hope

There are many ways to be hopeful and to be hopeful for others. I personally have ten ways to become more hopeful which I have outlined above and which I will talk about in this and upcoming emails. I pray these can be a source for renewed hope in your life. Hope is here. Hope is now. I am convinced that we can live without happiness, however, we cannot live without hope. Hope motivates us to go on faithfully and joyfully.

What is hope? Where does hope spring from? Hopefulness is selflessness. A person who has hope is truly selfless and shares himself or herself with others. There are so many signs of hope around us and within us. The issue is we have to care enough to recognize that we are surrounded with plentiful beauty and magnificent graces from God. We just need to open our hearts to be grateful; open our minds to be mindful of what is coming in and going out of ourselves. Hope is what we share with one another; it is not just what we receive. And as human beings, our hope must go beyond today's truths. Our hope needs to be a "dying to ourselves for others." We are invited to "fall upward." We must carry our cross daily and follow Jesus. If we dare to do all of this, hope becomes more visible and real in our lives and in the world. I call my approach to hope as going from Care to Share and then to Dare. It travels slowly from "within" to "without" and then to "beyond" us. Some of the qualities of hope:

- **Hope calms.**
- **Hope energizes.**
- **Hope rejoices.**
- **Hope endures.**
- **Hope includes.**
- **Hope recognizes the "third possibility."**
- **Hope never dies.**
- **Hope reaches out.**
- **Hope wills to sacrifice.**
- **Hope is for eternal happiness.**

How to be more hopeful in the midst of hopelessness and tiredness today? How can we get hope? Where does hope come from? Who can give us hope? In the next sections of this Reflection we will examine and learn a few ways that are already lived and experienced by so many hopeful people in life. We will come to understand that hope can be found within us. It can be found around us. And it can be found in God himself.

—Fr. Tat Hoang, C.Ss.R.

PHOTO: Nico Smit

THE METHOD: CARE

1. Be grateful for everything you have and see.

Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wildflowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them.

—Mt 6:28-29

Be grateful for what you have and who you are. That also means that you should be also joyful with what you do not have and who you are not. Gratitude is the first way, if not the best way, to be more hopeful. A lot of us have forgotten this point.

Fostering an attitude of gratitude is our number one responsibility. Who am I to complain and expect more? If we think more carefully and reasonably, everything we have is given as gifts. I cannot say, "I deserve it. I am a priest now. I deserve to be respected and treated with more privileges." Or "I am your mother. You have to listen to me." Or "I pay you five dollars so I expect you to serve me a nice cup of coffee." Or "This is my house. You, get out of my place." All these attitudes are embedded in our culture and lifestyle. I have a right…to speak, to own, to vote. If we are not careful, we become very abusive of the true meaning of our rights.

How to be grateful for everything we have? I am drinking a cup of coffee this morning. As I am holding this cup of coffee in my hand, I am grateful for those who made this cup of coffee available to me. As I am putting on a pair of shoes, I am thankful to those who made these shoes available. I remember that Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh said, "It's not a miracle that a person can walk on water, but the miracle is that a person knows that he or she is walking on the green grass." The miracle is that you can walk. The miracle is that you are aware of the green grass around you and under you. The miracle is that so many elements evolve together, for instance, green grass,

you, peaceful land and caregiver, to make this one activity possible.

Ultimately, the miracle is you. You are a miracle. To be able to think, to smile, to be hungry and satisfied after eating, to desire happiness—all is a miracle. How can you do this? Have you ever thought about all that has gone into making and supporting and educating you? In order for me to write these words and describe my ideas with you, I have needed so many people to teach me, to nourish me and to love me.

Being grateful also means being joyful with what I don't have. What I do not possess and own is so much. I am not, for example, married-white-American-rich. I am not a leader, a good speaker, a good writer, a good singer, a good baseball player, a doctor, etc. The list can go on and on. A grateful person recognizes and embraces the differences and uniqueness of each individual person and creature on this planet. Each one is there for me to enjoy and inter-connect with. I am who I am for others as well.

"Blessed are those who are grateful, the kingdom of God is theirs."

Paradoxically, a grateful person has everything. Everything belongs to a grateful person. I am so convinced that "Blessed are those who are grateful, the kingdom of God is theirs." I would rather be a useful helper than to be a useless leader. I mean that I can joyfully and happily play one instrument rather than dream to play all the instruments in the orchestra. I am happy with what I don't have. I am joyful with what I am not.

The attitude of gratitude will help us to compare and compete less with one another. Gratitude will also lessen our opportunities to become strong judgmentally minded people. We constantly make choices and judgments about ourselves and others. We waste so much time and energy trying to become what we cannot control at all. At the same time, we become bitter and angry.

Foster an attitude of gratitude, because it gives us hope. Gratitude respects differences and processing. Gratitude understands patience. Patience gives reason a value. Hope involves patience and time. When we are grateful, we become more open and calmer to receive and identify the authenticity of each creature around us. Hope is not a destination but constant action.

The late Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen van Thuan said, "A line is made up of many points carefully and completely marked next to each other" (Road of Hope, pg. 978). A hopeful day comes from many hopeful minutes of the day. A hopeful life is a combination of many moments of hopeful choices.

Hope is not over there. Hope is right here and right now. A grateful person is a hopeful person. A grateful person hopes for others.

2. Be mindful of your body, words, and actions.

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound,
your whole body will be filled with light."

—Mt 6:22

With all vigilance guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life.

—Proverbs 4:23

Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong
to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.

—Mk 9:41

A Vietnamese proverb says, "Người buồn nhìn cảnh có vui đâu bao giờ." That means when a person feels sad, his or her worldview will be also sad. To be more hopeful, he or she should take care of or be aware of one's body, words, and actions. These three factors of a person are as important as anything else. Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, was concerned about the wholeness of a person. Before we wonder about others' hopes, let us ask how I am doing with myself.

Your Body: "Exercise is good for your body."

Sometimes, if not every day, our bodies need some rest and care. Some people greatly abuse their bodies by eating too much junk food and drink, by excessive worry, and by poor sleep habits. Others neglect their bodies by working overtime, taking excessive or unnecessary medications, not exercising, and having too much noise or too many distractions in their lives. A healthy spirit comes from a healthy body. A hopeful outlook comes from a healthy body. When we feel good about ourselves, we are more likely to feel good about others.

We also have to be careful with our level of reliance on bodily comfort, convenience, and control to feel good about ourselves. There are only a few people who can afford a high-level of comfort, convenience, and control in their lives. And in fact, a lifestyle of comfort, convenience, and control does not guarantee a person anything beyond a short-term solution. If our happiness is too dependent on comfort, convenience, and control, then we have no true hope. Our body is trained to grow, to learn, to adapt, to appreciate, and to connect. If we only take care of our bodies for the sake of the body itself, then our happiness and hope become very self-centered and unreal.

Quality care for our bodies also includes the relational part of it. As I'm writing this I'm reading Fr. Ronald Rolheiser's Our One Great Act of Fidelity. He mentioned the importance of being touched. He quoted from Brenda Peterson's grandmother's discovery: "Skin needs to be touched!" Wow! When was the last time your skin or body was cared for, touched, embraced, and caressed with love, passion, respect, and understanding? This quality of body care could bring a person to a level of healing, compassion, enlightenment, and heaven. Hope is here. Hope is now. Hope is where two or three people care and love one another.

Your Words Matter

Words express our attitude, feeling, and belief (unless, of course, we are lying). On the one hand, words can help us to communicate sufficiently and easily accomplish our goals. On the other hand, words can also confuse and mislead others and lead us to destruction and division. Words are powerful. It is like a two-edged sword. It can heal us, or it can kill us.

As a priest, a preacher, and a leader, I have so many opportunities to speak in public and private. I can give advice and speeches to adults in churches and children at schools. People invite me all the time to say and to share a few words. Now if I do not reflect before I speak, my words could become very dangerous weapons. If I say it right and nice, they will praise me and "like" me. But if I say something controversial or hurtful, my words could divide and discourage my people in a heartbeat. My words instead of bringing more joy and hope to others, can become more salt in the wounds of other people. And my life could become more hectic, crazy, and hopeless.

In my Vietnamese proverb: "Cái miệng làm khổ cái thân." It means your mouth hurts you. Or "Lời nói không mất tiền mua, lựa lời mà nói cho vừa lòng nhau." It means "words are not paid with money, carefully select the words to speak to please one another." We need to be mindful of what we say in private and in public. Do not create more complications and messiness and confusion. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

One of the killers in our society is gossip. Pope Francis said to his audience in Rome, "If the Church continues to gossip, the Church cannot move forward." The way we talk and communicate also shows the way we think and believe. Hope starts with you. Hope is you. If you sow hopelessness and untruthfulness, you never reap hope and peace.

Your actions above all are important. What you think and say matters, but your actions are most significant. People do not care what was your motive. They just look at your actions in order to judge you. Think carefully before you act. Do some reflection and study before you make a decision. Because what you are about to do can change your life completely and rapidly. Act wisely so that you do not regret it. My four-step discernment is a Pray-Learn-Decide-Trust movement. In order to speak well and decide rightly, we need to pray and learn about whatever the issue may be. Do not "Just do it" or "Just say it."

As a parent, your actions are more serious regarding your children. Your action is everything. If you teach your kids not to "eat and text", then you can do not do it yourself (at least in front of them).

If you are the ones who keep your promises and carefully act with consideration and mindfulness, then you will find hope around you every day. If people trust your words and actions, they can count on you. You will bring more hope to them.

3. Think "good" about others.

"God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day."

—Gen 1:31

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

—Mt 5:1

Thinking "good" about others does not mean to think that everything is always okay and good. I recently watched a movie from 2008 called *The Russell Girl*. The mother of Sarah Russell appears to be quick to speak and optimistic. When the daughter returns home to share the news of her recent diagnosis of leukemia, her mother ignores her daughter's presence and condition. She cuts her off all the time and imposes her ideas and plans on her to the point that the daughter does not have a chance to talk about the pain she is feeling. Thinking "good," or positive thinking about others means being patient enough to give people a respectful space and time to be themselves.

We also have a tendency to blame ourselves or others for our own unhappiness. When we see ourselves as a sinful, terrible, and evil person, we can easily project these images to others.

Thinking "good" about others also means being aware of people and things around you. You never know what is going on with them. Do not assume or presume. Keep looking and listening with respect, wonder, and support. Be helpful to one another.

Thinking good about others can also make us more hopeful about ourselves. Yes, it is a hopeful approach and it starts with you and me individually. You have to believe that everything that was created in the beginning was good. Everything we inherit now was made and exists with purpose. Of course, there are a lot of mistakes and imperfections; and many times nobody wants things to happen the way they do. But when we change our negative thinking into positive thinking, we give ourselves some hope. We can then create a small world around us with some goodness and hopefulness. I believe that goodness will conquer all things.

Caring for another person is the first step of hope.

There are many ways to care for others. We can be grateful, mindful and think good about others. Caring will help others to feel confident and strong enough to share. The next section of these reflections is called "Share;" it will focus on how sharing can also be a path toward greater hopefulness.

PHOTO: Nick Fewings

THE METHOD: SHARE

4. Learn to Listen to Other's Experiences.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

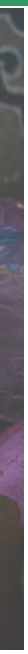
—Mt 7:7

"You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye."

—Mt 7:5

Why do you have to "learn to hear other people's experiences"? Because the next three steps—to listen to others' stories, to share your life and to forgive yourself—are not easily accomplished. It takes time. It takes daily practice. And it takes some trust and sacrifice on your part. Listening to others is not easy at all. In fact, listening to others in order to appreciate and to learn from the other person truly takes skill and discipline. It is not a built-in mechanism.

Hearing Other People's Experience (H.O.P.E.) is the name of the Hope Group that I was involved in every Monday at a homeless shelter in Chicago. I learned so much from this program as we would come together every morning to reflect on Scriptures and then to share with one another stories, glories and some worries. Hearing other people's stories and reflections gave me hope and compassion.



Each person is a mystery. We can easily overlook or not care about our own life in an effort to live for someone else. But each person is like a documentary still in progress that nobody is able to watch completely just yet. Hope starts with listening and hearing. We need someone to be willing to hear in order for someone to share. Are you willing to listen and hear without judging or criticizing or imposing your answer on the other person? How can one learn to hear well?

Listening without agenda or criticism means that one has to let go of ego and presumptions about that person. If one believes that he knows more than the other person, then he cannot finish listening to him/her. He could jump in and finish the story himself. Which is rude and unfortunate.

Listening without an agenda requires a sense of curiosity, learning and adventure. Curiosity will help you to hear actively and openly. Curiosity will help you better engage. It also motivates the speakers. Your curiosity can also help the speaker to discover a new way to approach and to know a deeper truth about self and others. A curious and adventurous spirit will push one to move beyond the "status quo" or an indifferent mindset to acts of imagination. Hope in definition is something one never sees but truly believes in. Therefore, a person who has the ability to be curious and adventurous, will have a positive and hopeful outlook in life.

The opposite of listening without an agenda is listening with an agenda. It means one listens in order to defend oneself. One listens to prove that he knows more, and does not need to change. Can you imagine how hard it is for any of us to accept our mistakes and mis-perception—either about ourselves or someone else? Sometimes we only selectively listen to those who please and support our ideas. This type of person thinks that he/she is free and smart, but he/she is really like a tiger imprisoned in a big, secured cage that nobody can get too close to.

Therefore, we should learn to listen to other people's experiences. Everyone has something to teach us. Even a child can teach us so much about life. A bad incident can show us a way to become more grounded in life. They say, "the best enemy can be your best teacher (though maybe not your best friend)." Or "those who were born in 1970 can learn from those who were born in 1972." Personal stories can become universal stories. Hearing others' experiences can widen our perspective and inspire us.

How do we hear others' experiences? We can hear by reading books or articles. We can watch inspirational videos or movies. We can call someone on the phone or listen in person. "Ask and you will receive. Knock and the door will be opened." We also need to learn how to "ask" and how to "knock". Asking questions can be an artful way to connect and respond to others, instead of a way to show off, to hurt and to manipulate others. And when we "knock," we must be careful not to knock to check up, to rescue, or to bring down others.

Finally, to become more hopeful we need to gain one "bit of hope" at a time.

If you are not used to listening, trust that you can learn to sense and select the best way to communicate and unlock the treasure box of another person. Each person is very unique and different. Enjoy and be respectful!

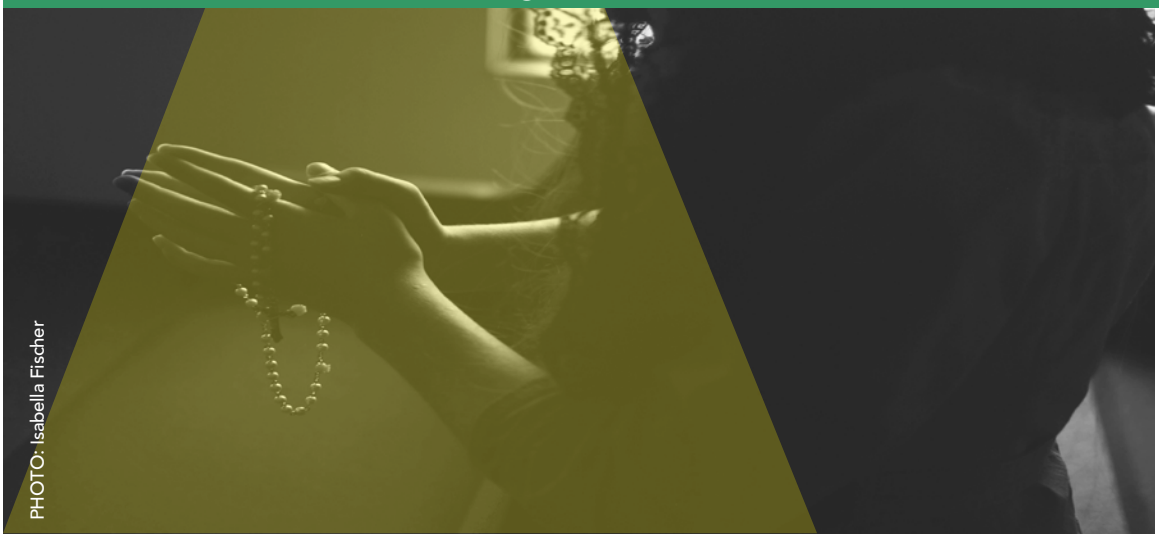


PHOTO: Isabella Fischer

5. (Learn) to share your LIFE

Jesus said to them in reply, "Give them some food yourselves."

—Mk 6:37

If we can share, we already are advanced in many ways. Because we cannot do everything by ourself, and we cannot exist by ourselves. We need one another. Therefore, sharing will help us to reflect better, to listen more clearly and to see the whole picture of our situation.

I also want to warn you that we need to choose the right person with whom to share the story of our lives. Sometimes our lives becomes more complicated or messy if we share with the wrong person. Our story could be misunderstood and misinterpreted by the wrong listeners. Furthermore, our story could become a topic of gossip for others.

So, why should we learn to share our life stories with others? First, because we are unique, rich and beautiful in our experiences and life. No one is like anyone else. We are here for a reason. We are here with a mission. Of course, we are not perfect, but we are perfectly imperfect. In the eyes of our family and friends, we are imperfect. In the heart of God, we are "perfect." We were created and born in the image and likeness of God. We are holy as God is holy. We are perfect as God is perfect. We are merciful as God is merciful. We usually read these phrases as if they are not fit or applicable to us. Or as if they never happen to us. But, indeed, they are for us. They are ours.

In our lives, if we have one or two good friends that we can share with, we are rich. We are very blessed. So we should not feel so bad if we have few good friends around us. Those good friends do not nag us every day; they respect us and allow us to be ourselves. If they are not around constantly, it does not mean they do not care for or love us. Best friends are the ones who are willing to help. Reach out to them for help. Ask them to be with you. Sometimes, the most difficult thing is to trust others; we don't want anyone to know our "weaknesses." So, we keep everything

inside. I encourage each of us to find a way to reach out and to channel the "hopelessness" we sometimes feel. It can be our weakness or our strength. It depends on how we share it.

When we share our life we share our "love story," our imagination, our failures and our general experiences. We always can choose how much we want to share with a trusted friend. Take time to share. And when sharing, if we listen to ourself we can reflect and learn more about ourself.

Our "love story" is our vocation story. Sometimes it is because of this story that we feel miserable and hopeless. It may be a sad story. But I believe we each have some good moments when we just fell in love. Or we have a good relationship with God and our family. We can share any good "stuff" that we always remember and treasure. We can also share our good moments at work or school or in friendships.

Our imagination is very important too. Do not suppress it. Our imagination is our dream and our hope. Do not be afraid and critical of dreams. Maybe we say our dream never happens, so we just stop dreaming. I believe that if I share my dream, people around me can help me to accomplish it as well. If we talk to a hopeless person, we should not forget to ask that person about their dreams. We can often see in their face a subtle smile and a little light of hope. When we touch someone's imagination, we reveal and uplift their dignity and power.

Faults or failures are very sensitive things to share. Unless we share the love story and the dream, we will never be able to trust enough to share our personal feelings: our emotions, guilt, shame, downtimes or brokenness. Yes, I am aware that we have to be very careful when we tell others about our failures unless we are very free and confident in our own skin.

I also believe that sharing our failures helps us to grow and overcome our fears and shadows. Sometimes, we concentrate on our own brokenness and shamefulness to the extent that we do not have enough time and energy to focus on the positive in our lives or our strength. If we can name and claim our weaknesses then we can tame them; and we do not need to be afraid of them any longer. When I was in philosophy studies at the age of 26, I asked myself three questions: 1) who am I? 2) who are my people? 3) who is my God? The first two questions had the same answer: I am (we are) perfectly imperfect. Sometimes we think we are the worst, but in reality, other people also have imperfections although these may be different from ours. Therefore, we should not be embarrassed to share our failures with our trusted friends.

Our experiences are unique and precious. Our experiences include our finances, sexuality, morality, religion, (extended) family, childhood and teenage years. I grew up in a poor family in Vietnam. I knew how to cook when I was five years old. I walked to kindergarten school by myself for almost a mile every day. I learned how to make money when I was 13 years old. It sounds like a very tough life, doesn't it? But honestly, I did not feel that way because everyone had to do the same in my village. I have to thank God for the experiences that I had. They shaped my personality and character today. What is wrong with the hardship of life? What is wrong with coming from a poor family? Billions of people on this planet are poor. But it does not mean they are unhappy or without dignity.

So, if we can share our lives—our love, imagination, failure, and experience—with someone else, then slowly we can find a light within ourselves and a bright light at the end of the tunnel.

6. (Learn) to forgive yourself and others (your loved ones and enemies).

Then Peter approaching asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me,
how often must I forgive him?
As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you,
not seven times but seventy-seven times.

—Mat 5:21-22

Jesus asked us to learn to forgive seventy times seven means that we have to forgive all the time and everyone. This is the only way we truly live in peace and in hope—hope for the future, hope for healing, and hope for unity.

What happens to those who do not forgive or are not willing to forgive either themselves or others? They will carry that bag of stones on their shoulders everywhere with a heavy spirit of hatred, resentment, division and suffering. Therefore, if one wants to have hope and wants to truly hope, such a person's hope needs to be pure. We cannot continue to lie to ourselves about our condition and our feelings. Hope must be honest, authentic, and positive.

One who wants to have hope needs to forgive himself or herself first. Indeed, forgiveness is not easy at all. The older you are the more mistakes you've made. You might say something inappropriate in public or in private. You may desire something that you feel deep within you. You may deal with losses and pains and sickness in your life that you never could imagine. The older you are the more impatient and anxious you become. When you are young you have the weaknesses of a young person. When you are older, you have a series of mistakes that you have made. Sometimes we hold onto our pasts so long that we constantly visit and condemn themselves. For example, you married the wrong person when you were young. You intentionally or unintentionally aborted your baby in the past. You sexually abused someone in the past. These kinds of acts are not easily forgiven or forgotten. These feelings become guilt and shame.

What's the difference between shame and guilt? In her **TED talk, Brené Brown** said: "Shame is a focus on self, guilt is a focus on behavior. Shame is, 'I am bad.' Guilt is, 'I did something bad.' How many of us, if we did something that was hurtful, would be willing to say, "I'm sorry. I made a mistake?" Shame is highly correlated with addiction, depression, violence, aggression, bullying, suicide, eating disorders. Here's what we need to understand: The ability to hold something we've done, or failed to do, up against who we want to be is incredibly adaptive. It's uncomfortable, but it's adaptive.

Shame and guilt are real. These feelings can translate directly or indirectly into actions that can control our lives. Therefore, if one does not deal with these real feelings, one cannot move on to hope. Dr. Brown also offers tools to overcome our shame and guilt. Recognizing shame and guilt, letting it go and forgiving ourselves are important steps towards gaining a positive attitude. Forgiving ourselves is the first thing to do in order to develop hope.

How about forgiving others? This is another elephant in the room that each of us

needs to ask ourselves. Do I have any (hidden) "enemies" in my heart? If we do we also need to address and acknowledge or confess this. The people we do not forgive could include our best friends, our loved ones or our spouses. They are the ones we used to trust the most.

Why do we have a hard time to forgive other people? Maybe because we still love them. Or we can not forgive them because we believe we made a mistake in our relationship to them that can't be forgiven. Or we cannot forgive them because they hurt us badly and repeatedly. Or we cannot forgive them because we want them to suffer like we have. These are a few possible reasons. I hope that we can become capable of recognizing these feelings in ourselves and also gain the courage to make changes in our relationships when appropriate. If you are falling into a deep well of unforgiveness, you should seek some help or support in order to truly taste a hopeful life.

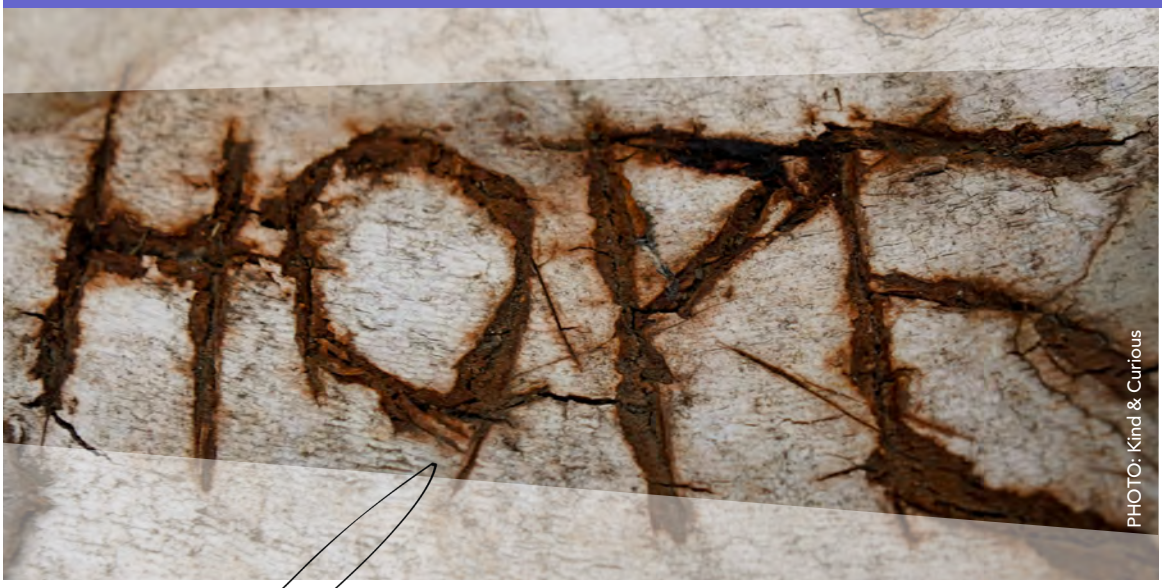
True forgiveness takes time and practices. We won't master forgiveness in a short time. I encourage each of us to learn and to practice forgiveness regularly, first towards oneself, then towards others. We should not focus too much on the mistakes committed in the past. We can learn to forgive and let go right now in our daily lives. Do not expect too much. Do not judge too much. Do not be too critical. Do not compare and compete. Be silent in order to listen, to meditate, to see and to live harmoniously with other people. Let's be grateful for everything we have, and we are. Be grateful also for what we do not have and who we are not. With this, I believe we can foster hope within ourselves right here and right now. Our hope will bring healing, happiness and harmony.

In conclusion, methods 1, 2 and 3 focus on how to become more hopeful and care for oneself. Methods 4, 5 and 6 focus on ways to become more hopeful and ways to share our lives with others. We need to change ourselves first before we can change the world. We cannot live by ourselves and attain hope. Each life is connected and related to everyone else.

I would like now to move to the last part of this reflection by asking each of us to go deeper: to bring our hope to the level of joy, serenity and fulfillment. The next three methods are to pray, to learn and to serve.

PHOTO: Paul Keiffer

One who wants to have hope needs to forgive himself or herself first.



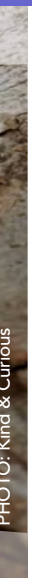
THE METHOD: DARE

7. Dare to Pray.
(Be patient towards oneself, care for others, believe in God.)

"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."

—1 Thes 5:16-18

Why do I call this step "dare"? Because this part will be a challenge for us all. It sounds very simple and obvious, but not many people want to do it. When we do pray, learn or serve, we often do this out of a sense of duty. For example, I have to pray so that I can make God happy, and I can go to heaven. I have to learn or study so that I can get a secure job, make a lot of money and be sure that no one will laugh at me. Or I have to serve others so that I can become a "saint." All these reasons can stop us from doing things naturally and willingly. For me, to pray, to learn and to serve, in and of itself, will open up a new level of happiness and hope. Therefore, we are dared and called to pray, to learn and to serve by God.



What is Prayer?

According to Abraham J. Heschel:

- To pray is to have a sense of awe. (p5)
- Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable wonder of living. (p5)
- In prayer we shift the center of living from self-consciousness to self-surrender. (p7)
- Prayer clarifies our hope and intentions. (p7)
- Prayer is an act of self-purification, a quarantine for the soul. (p7)
- In prayer we come close to hearing the eternal theme and discerning our place in it. (p15)
- Prayer is an invitation to God to intervene in our lives. (p15)
- To pray is to dream in league with God, to envision his holy visions. (p19)

—*The above quotes came from the book,* ***Quest for God****, by Abraham Joshua Heschel.*

Why does praying give you hope? Think about it. When you are praying:

- You surrender
- You are quiet
- You reach out for help
- You recognize you are not perfect
- You stop be busy
- You stop worrying
- You stop running around

How do you pray? You can pray anytime and everywhere:

- You can pray while you are driving;
- You can pray while you are sitting alone in your office or your home;
- You can pray while you are walking;
- You can pray while you are watching a movie or news;
- You can pray while you are studying and exercising.

What do you say in order to pray? You can say whatever you want—from your heart and mind and your soul and your strength:

- You can recite a prayer;
- You can make up one prayer spontaneously;
- You can ask questions;
- You can quietly project your will to God;
- You can intentionally give your weaknesses over to God;
- You can thank God;
- You can ask God for an answer;
- You can tell God and yourself that you focus on your daily duty without thinking about God;
- You can observe and gaze on the beauty of creation;
- You can go to a sacred ceremony;
- You can read a sacred and spiritual book like the Bible.

Daring to pray will create in you a last
praying will change God's mind to do so
help us to change ourselves to love God a
is so easy, so convenient and so helpful.
of hope, not just for ourselves but also fo
healthier and more holy. W

What are you supposed to feel when you pray? Do not worry. If you pray you gain. It's like you go to a gym to work out. While you are working out, there is only sweat and hard work. But after you finish, you feel good and you feel more healthy. It is the same with praying. If you pray frequently, then:

- You become more peaceful and resilient (less violent and hopeless);
- You experience greater interdependent and greater humility (less individualistic and prideful);
- You become more capable of listening and more patient (less ignorant and selfish);
- You become more sensitive and respectful (less rude and arrogant);
- You become more spiritual and disciplined (less materialism and lazy);
- You are blessed and mindful and grateful (less complacent and indifferent);
- You become more prudent and wiser (less judgmental);
- You become more compassionate toward others (less self-centered)
- You and God become one (less controlling);
- You and the Holy Spirit become one (less sadness);
- You are not doing things, but God acts in you (less control).

sting hope. Sometimes, we think that
something for us. In contrast, praying will
d and know God's will more clearly. Praying
ul. Praying will give us a more solid sense
for others. Praying helps us to be happier,
We become more hopeful.

PHOTO: Michael Starkie

8. Dare to learn at least one new thing a day. (Have a sense of humor).

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Do not be amazed that I told you,

'You must be born from above.'"

—*Jn 3:7*

How can I be born again? Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Jesus has the word of eternal life. If we eat the Body of Christ and drink his Blood we never feel hungry. In order to be born again, we need to keep renewing ourselves with a new heart, new mind and new soul.

"Dare to learn" brings you hope. The question we often hear is when was the last time you "upgraded your phone"? But in this case, the phone is us. When was the last time we learned something that was positive, profound and worth sharing? My friend, Tien, always asks me whenever we reconnected, "Hey Tat, anything new?"

Learning can also become routine and habitual. We learn by observing, reading and studying. Sometimes, though, we are simply trying to survive and fulfill our responsibilities. We do not have the motivation or energy to continue to learn new things beyond this. Oftentimes, we respond habitually throughout our day. We go through the "red lights" and we do not notice them. We talk unconsciously. We merely react. Prayer will help us to think and reflect before, during and after our daily activities and conversations.

In order to have hope, one needs to be humble: to listen, to be hungry to know, and to be compassionate in our efforts to connect with others.

Being humble is a quality of an excellent student. Being humble is hard. It requires silence and openness. We are not the center of the conversation. We become a listener and learner. Sometimes we may notice that our voice is dominating a conversation from beginning to the end; then we are not learning at all. We want to prove to people that we are right; or that we know more than others. Being open is to be grateful, vulnerable and empty within and thus to create a space for new things.

Unless we feel imperfect, we can never learn more. To have hope is to hunger for more. There's so much to learn. The world is evolving every second. Life is developing and changing constantly. Therefore, if we do not strive to discover new things, we can become complacent. Unfortunately, people are bombarded with "the same old stuff" that is often not even truthful. Or we only focus on the same kind of information that only confirms what we think we know.

We can build hope through interactions with others that are done in a spirit of charity. Sometimes we think we are the most unfortunate person in the world. We need to get outside of our comfort zone to meet other people who might have the same or even worse situations than ours. When we help someone, we have the opportunity to learn so much from that person.

There are also many ways to learn: by listening, reading, observing, asking questions, sharing, giving thanks, praying and meditating. In all we must be humble and prayerful, even when we discuss and disagree with others. We may not be used to listening and learning. We may think at times that we know everything about others and about ourselves. We don't give others a chance to change or to explain. When we do this we shut down the opportunities to learn.

Why should we "dare to learn" at least one new thing each day? Sometimes we don't know what we want to learn. We get in the habit of doing and thinking the same thing every day and every week. But we can learn something new about ourself by asking each day, for example: "Who am I today —physically, spiritually, psychologically, relationally? Who are my people? Who is my God?"

If we aim for heaven, we have a lot of questions to answer. If we live to become a saint, we never get bored of learning. We can learn almost everywhere and anytime, including in our most hopeless moments. Live each moment with openness and mindfulness of blessings and surprises!

We can build hope through interactions with others that are done in a spirit of charity.

PHOTO: Mor Shani

9. Dare to serve others (Selflessness is hopefulness)

"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

—Mat 25:40

Dare to serve" is my favorite way to remain in hope. This way does not only give hope but also joy. In fact, serving others is the ultimate level of hope and joy. Serving others is the fruit of all ways and practices and talents. If we say we pray, then we must show others the fruit of our prayer life. If we say you learn a lot, let's show our wisdom and experiences. If we say we are grateful and humble, then our humility and attitude must be naturally joyful.

Hope does not exist in the air or in abstract form. Hope is not a feeling. Hope is a concrete action and result of good deeds, and strong belief. We cannot just guess and blindly believe in hope. That is dangerous and destructive. We cannot make decisions based only on our instincts or personal feelings; decisions need real discernment and prudence.

Selflessness is hopefulness. How do we have what we possess now? Such as our smart phone, computer, house, clothes, food, coffee, peace, car, gas, light, health care, road, etc. All these conveniences come from the hard work and sacrifice of so many people, including poor and young laborers. If we only see our money and investments as a reflection of ourselves, then our hope and blessings become very selfish.

A person who is selfless has a lot of hope. They expect very little for themselves. They pay forward what they are and what they receive. They count every blessing as a free gift from above. They become an instrument of peace and an agent of charity. They see themselves as only one piece of the whole puzzle. Their neighbors are their sisters and brothers. Strangers are their friends whom they have not yet met. Their hearts are open to more love and compassion.

How can all these things help us to have hope? This is the big question for which we always want to find an answer.

WE MIGHT ASK, FOR EXAMPLE, HOW CAN I HAVE HOPE WHEN:

- I have suffered losses in my life?
- I have lost my job or possibly my house?
- I am physically or psychologically abused by people around me?
- So many people live in poverty and fear?

OR HAVE YOU EVER ASKED QUESTIONS LIKE:

- Why am I still here?
- What are the world leaders doing during times of crisis?
- Who delivers all the food, drink, and other "stuff" into the local stores, and to my door that sustains my life?
- How are people from other continents, who live in poverty or in the midst of war, surviving?
- What can I do to make even a small difference to those around me?

These two sets of questions are coming from two distinct mindsets and expectations. The first one comes from an attitude of self-centeredness and blame. The second set comes from a broader perspective of compassion, connectedness and hope. We can sit here and expect change in any way we want. However, if we do not want to be "the change," it will hardly happen in our lifetime.

Remember, hope never happens if we only meditate and dream. Hope needs real and concrete action from each of us every day. Hope requires perseverance and persistant action. This thought will lead us to the last step in these ten basic ways to become more hopeful.

10. Dare to lose your own life in order to save it.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

— John 12:24-25

The last enemy of our battle for hope is death. Everyone has to face death. All of us are afraid of death. Jesus promises us and shows us eternal life if we believe in him. He is the first fruit of the resurrection. He is the source of hope. He is the hope of all hopes.

The only certain and lasting hope is to listen to his words and put them into practice. His word hold eternal life. We cannot read the Bible and remember it easily. So we need to read, study, meditate and live it every moment of our lives.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The Bible is the way, the truth and the life. It gives us life and life eternal. We need to read with the eye of the heart. We need to read as a believer. We need to pray with Scriptures to know how to live our lives daily.

Hope is here. Hope is now. God gives us the mind to observe, to think, and to decide. God gives us all of creation to support us daily. It's up to us to recognize, to realize, and to return to God as the source of hope and purpose in this life. Do not let the world fool you. Be alert and do not be afraid because God is with us always.

Death is not the end. Death is part of this life. Death is part of us. We should not try to avoid our death or treat death as our enemy. Death is our friend. God is in control. If we believe in Jesus, the Son of God, we will never die. This is a big task for everyone because it requires faith. Faith is given to those who ask for it. Faith belongs to the humble and childlike. God reveals his mysteries to the little ones. We should not try to control our lives. Let go and let God. We will be fine.

Meditate on the blessing of God for you: The LORD bless you and keep you!

The LORD let his face shine upon

you, and be gracious to you!

The LORD look upon you kindly and

give you peace!

—Numbers 6:22-27

God is here. God is now. We have everything. We are blessed!


Lord.
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e;
out me
me.
trains my hand
for battle –
my protector
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9 I will sing a
I will make m
PSALM 145

SUMMARY:

Hope is an action, not a destination.
(Every breath you take is hope).

"Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

—Jn 3:18

Can you choose hope? Is hope an object for us to pick and choose? Hope is like Jesus in the Gospel of John. If you do not believe in the name of the only Son of God, you have already been condemned. Hope is like the air—you cannot choose to have air or not. You cannot say I don't like the air; I don't want to have air in me. Hope is also an action, not a destination. We should not set our goal of hope for a distant future. We should not say, "Tomorrow I will have hope. Right now, I have to take care of something else that's more important;" or think, "One day I will be perfectly hopeful. Believe me."

The late Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, venerable of God, wrote so much about hope. During his thirteen years living in confinement and prison, he wrote ***The Road of Hope***. He believed hope to be real. It is right here and right now.

In closing, I would like to leave you with some of my favorite quotes from Cardinal Nguyen's works. May God bless you and may you cultivate a growing sense of hope with each passing day!

PHOTO: Mor Shani

Quotations from the works of Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan

"A straight line consists of millions of points joined together. Likewise, a lifetime consists of millions of seconds and minutes joined together. If every point along the line is rightly set, the line will be straight. If every minute of a life is good, that life will be holy. The Road of Hope is paved with small acts of hope along life's way. A life of hope is born from every minute of hope in one's lifetime. (#978)

"To be deeply imbued with the love of God is to be deeply imbued with a love of the world. To hope in God is to hope in the salvation of the world. (#954)

"Some think the more science advances, the more religion will recede. In the hearts of many, "God is dead." They think their consciences are liberated, but such liberty fills them with confusion and panic. They lack hope. (#960)

"The person of hope is a person of prayer. The object of one's hope is also the object of prayer. The person of hope is God's collaborator. God looks to that person to complete his work of creation and redemption. (#964)

"We pray to God, but he relies on us. He established the Church as the instrument of salvation. The Church bears the responsibility for carrying out God's work and represents the greatest hope for every one of us. (#965)

" Hope lies within them, if only they could see it. (#966)

" Live completely in the present, but also live completely in eternity. Concern yourself with the salvation of your neighbor, but do not forget that you do this with God and for God. Work with all your might to make progress, but rely also on light from heaven. Dedicate yourself to the world with a love that is spiritual. If you do not bear great hope in your heart, what meaning does life have? (#968)

" Do not lose hope because you lack resources. As one cardinal said, "Use the same means as the apostles. They had no machine to rely on. They preached and wrote letters, and with such measures they conquered the world." If you can't see the truth behind this statement, perhaps your outlook is not apostolic enough. (#977)

" Every day prepare for a new Pentecost around you. (#979)

" Cry out one message: "Unity for all." (#982)

" Believe in one power: The Blessed Eucharist, the Body and Blood of our Lord which gives you life. (#983)

" Clothe yourself in one garment and speak one language: Charity. (#984)

" Hold firmly to one guiding principle: Prayer. St. Teresa of Avila: "One who does not pray does not need the devil to lead him or her astray; such a person will cast him or herself in darkness." (#985)

" Observe one rule: The Gospel. (#986)

" Loyally follow one leader: Jesus Christ and his vicar. Our Holy Father the pope; likewise follow the bishops, the successors of the apostles. (#987)

" Nurture a special love for Mary. John Mary Vianney said: "After Jesus, my first love is Mary." Listen to her and you will not go astray; work for her and you will not fail; honor her and you will gain eternal life. (#988)

" Take as your wisdom the science of the cross…. If the cross is the standard by which you make your choices and decisions, your soul will be at peace. (#989)

" Have one ideal: to turn always to God the Father, a Father who is full of love. (#990)

" You need fear only one thing: SIN. (#991)

" Cherish one desire: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). (#992)

"There is only one thing lacking: "Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me" (Mk 10:21) (#993)

"Make use of the most effective apostolic method: Personal contact. Developing personal relationships is more effective than preaching and writing books. Contact between one person and another—heart-to-heart—is the secret of perseverance and success. (#994)

"Only one thing truly matters; Mary of Bethany chose the better part when she sat at our Lord's feet (Lk 10:41-42). If you are not living an interior life, if Jesus is not the very life and soul of your activities, then you don't need further instruction, the consequences of such a way of living are all too clear. (#995)

"You have only one food: The will of the Father (Jn 4:34). That is, you live and grow by the will of God. Your actions must proceed by the will of God. It is like food that nourishes you with strength and happiness; apart from God's will, you would die. (#996)

"Only one moment exists for you in all its beauty, and that is the present moment (Mt 6:34; Jas 4:13-15). Live it completely in the love of God. (#997)

"The only statement you must affirm and live is the eight Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12). … Live according to the Beatitudes and you will experience a happiness that you will communicate to all you meet. (#998)

"You have only one important work: Your mission. It cannot be described as big or small, because when you perform your mission, you are doing the work of your heavenly Father. He has determined that you alone are to perform this work to carry out his plan in history (Lk 2:49; Jn 17:4). Many people invent complicated ways of practicing virtues and then complain how difficult it is. The performance of your mission, however, is the most certain and simplest path of virtue you can follow. (#999)

"There is only one way to become holy: through the grace of God and your decision to live by that grace (1Cor 15:10). God will never withhold grace; but is your will strong enough? (#1000)

"You have only reward: God himself. When God told Thomas Aquinas: "You have written well of me, Thomas; what reward do you desire?" Thomas rightly replied, "Only you, Lord!" (#1001)
