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Cultivating Hope

I recently heard a powerful story, and I'd like to share it with you. It was about an experiment from the 1950s. They took several rats of the same breed; they had two groups, one domesticated and one wild. Humans, of course, raised the domesticated; they were fed and cared for their whole life, while the wild were fierce creatures who survived by their own wits and strengths.

They placed the first rats in small buckets of water where they couldn't climb out or reach the bottom. The test was to see how long they could swim before drowning. The first test revealed that the domesticated rats would keep swimming for forty to sixty hours before giving up. Then, they placed the wild rats into their buckets, expecting a longer swim time because the wild rats were known to be strong in the water; however, after just fifteen minutes, the wild rats gave up and drowned.

They were shocked at the difference because, remember, these are the same breed, with the only difference being one was wild and the other domesticated. The deduction was that this was not a physical difference, so it must be a mental and physiological difference based on their upbringing. So, they tried a new experiment with the wild rats and placed a new batch into the buckets. This time, at fifteen minutes, right before they would give up, they would rescue them from the water, hold the rats, and dry them as they recovered. Immediately, they would place them back into the water to see how many more minutes they would try to survive. Now, this time, the wild rat, with the new knowledge that there was help, would go on for another forty to sixty hours. The conclusion was that the rat had the ability to stay strong as long as it had hope that it could make it to victory.

Now, I'm not calling us rats by any means; however, there is an important lesson that I believe we can learn from this experiment. In this life, we believers will face resistance from the enemy on every step we take towards God. Struggles, difficulties, and even persecutions will be thrown at us, and it will require a strength beyond our own ability to overcome. It tells us in 1 Peter 1:6-7, *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,"*

These tests and trials will either diminish us, or we will become stronger in the Lord. The key is to allow our faith in God to pull us through to victory. We will face many situations in this world that will require faith in God to make it; some of them will be demonically inspired, and others will be simply the hardship of life, but either way, they are coming, and we can win in all of them. God's plan for our lives depends on us boldly walking through every test and trial, and we will not fail because He cannot fail.

I've seen believers stand amid a fiery furnace and refuse to run, standing on the Word of God, and then when they came through, they didn't even smell like smoke. Then, I've seen

others give up and run when they didn't get their way in church. The main difference between the ones who have faith and those who fail is always hope. There is a reason the number one target of the devil is your hope: If he can put out the fire of hope in you, then you will stop believing. Hebrews 11:1, *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* Faith is built upon hope; hope is its foundation; you will never find faith without seeing hope first. This gives us great insight into preparing for future battles and hardships. Your hope is the enemy's number one target because if he can extinguish your hope, you will give up quickly; however, if your hope is strong, you become a fighter. We are short-sighted if we do not build our hope today and every day.

I want to share three essential tools for cultivating our hope in God as our strength. Then, when we face difficulties, we will find faith for victory. Number one is simple: surround yourself with people who are walking down the path of faith. Build friendships and a community around you of people who dare to believe in God's word.

Number two: plant the Word of God into your inner man. Read it, confess it, study it because it will form the base of who you are in God. It says in Joshua 1:8-9, *"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."*

Number three is personal to you and the Lord: write down everything you believe God has spoken about you and your future. Keep track of every note from your prayer time and every true prophecy spoken over you. We call this your personal blueprint that God has for you. Paul told Timothy about this hope-building practice of reading what God has spoken about you and to you. *"This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare,"* 1 Timothy 1:18

There are many beautiful victories ahead of you on this incredible adventure we are on. Let's be prudent and build up our hope daily in a manner that the devil is worried about us. God has a plan for us to win every single battle, and we will as long as we don't give up. You are already victorious in Him.

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