

As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long— though I know not how to relate them all.

I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign Lord; I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.

Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.

Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come. – Psalm 71:14-18

Today I had a thought I haven't had before, and those always make for good days. I was in discussion with a friend when we stumbled on the topic of hope. I've heard hope treated as a thing we either have or don't have, that can be stolen from us, or lost, or found. I've heard hope treated as a state of mind, the result of good news or sunny afternoons. I've heard hope dependent on circumstances – the same way we treat happiness. And I've heard hope treated like an action, something we do by force of will. Today, I began to wonder what it might look like to treat hope as a spiritual discipline.

I was first introduced to the formal Spiritual Disciplines through the work of Richard Foster, a Quaker theologian whose book, "The Celebration of Discipline", was named one of the top 10 books of the twentieth century by Christianity Today. In it, he looks at the inward disciplines of fasting, study, prayer, and meditation, the outward disciplines of service, simplicity, submission, and solitude, and the corporate disciplines of worship, confession, guidance, and celebration. These disciplines are activities to help us grow spiritually just as the discipline of weight-lifting helps us grow physically.

So what of this idea of hope as a spiritual discipline? Is hope something we can do, or practice, or is it something that happens to us, based on the world around us and within us? Looking through scripture, hope is strangely absent until the book of Ruth. Then it is used interchangeably with the idea of wishes ("I sure hope I get a pony") and trust ("I put my hope in my studying during finals"). Sometimes it happens to us ("Our hopes were dashed when we were defeated") and sometimes it's something we do ("I still have hope even when all seems lost.")

Living in COVIDland, hope is in short supply (if it's a thing) or a lost art (if it's an activity). So how do we create more (if it's a thing) or do it more (if it's an activity)? The key is in this Psalm. How do we grow hope? With my new and improved Hope Growth Plan.

So, a new Hope Growth Plan for us today:

1. **Remember:** What has God done in the past? This requires reading/listening to our bibles to hear God's amazing story. This requires hearing from others all that God has done for them. This requires taking the time to write down stories from your own past of God's righteous deeds and saving acts. I can tell you of safety in danger, of finding what was lost, of direction in confusion, and together we would remember.
2. **Reflect:** After we remember all that God has done, we have to take the time to reflect on it. "The unexamined life is not worth living," Socrates said, and we are perfect examples. God has done marvelous things, but the full impact of them is lost on us if we don't reflect on what they mean.
3. **Recite:** With social media and instant communication wide open these days, we have never had a better chance to tell of God's amazing deeds. Yet we don't. I know this because when someone does, I will get an email from people sharing it with me, which just shows how rare it is. Share your stories of God in your life with your family, with your friends, and with "the next generation" as the Psalmist declares.

If we can Remember, Reflect, and Recite regularly all that God has done, I don't think hope will be a problem for us. If we are real about God's control, trustworthiness, and love for us, hope will become a natural state of mind. And then we can truly begin to share the gospel and have it heard.

Today for your reflection, take 10 minutes each to Remember, Reflect, and Recite all of God's "righteous deeds".