

Hope deferred makes the heart sick. Proverbs 13:12

We all have dreams. We have aspirations; expectations for life. You want to get married, have kids, go to this particular school, achieve a certain level of job success; and ultimately live a long and happy life.

Sometimes those dreams are realized. Sometimes those aspirations are realized, and sometimes they're not.

And when your dreams, your aspirations, and your expectations meet up against real life challenges, and things aren't as easy as you would have thought, and things aren't going the way that you would have thought, what happens is that real life batters and beats up our hopes, our dreams, our aspirations, and our expectations.

And if we're not careful, as life does this to you and to me on a consistent basis, the storm clouds of bitterness, the storm clouds of negativity, the storm clouds of disillusionment, and the storm clouds of discouragement can begin to crowd in on our hearts.

And when those storm clouds gather around you they hide your hope. And that hope deferred creates an unhealthy climate around you that dictates the stormy forecast of your relationships.

Hope deferred makes the heart sick.

You've seen it in your own life and in the lives of others around you. And if you've been on the other side of a person who has lost hope; well you know how difficult a time it can be for everyone involved.

So here is the one thing I want you to take away today:

When your dreams meet reality, choose hope.

Now I know that sounds like something I'm supposed to say, but it is true. It is true because that is what the Bible teaches. As we're going to see today, God is attempting to build hope in all of us. And let me be clear about this; we are not denying the reality of life, we're dealing with the reality.

If you are not now in a place where the storm clouds have rolled in to obscure your hope, to take the sunlight from your dreams and to rain on your parade; just wait, there are always clouds forming somewhere on the horizon.

But here is the good thing; when the clouds come, when reality overshadows your hopes and dreams and expectations, God is attempting to build hope in you. And what I want to show you is the hope-building process that God uses.

The reason we can say, ***when your dreams meet reality, choose hope*** is because this is what God is attempting to build in you. And if you open your Bible to Romans 5, I want to show you this hope-building process.

Romans 5:2-5 (NIV84)

2 And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us . . .

Now if you look at this pattern, *suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character and character produces hope*; you can see it played out over and over again in the lives of different biblical characters like Abraham, Moses, King David, Esther, and the Apostle Paul. No one would ever say that reality was denied in their lives! ***But God built hope in them through the reality of the struggles and suffering they encountered.***

But it is not just biblical characters where I've seen this hope building process play out. It has happened in countless lives of people I know, people whose story I have heard (Rick Warren) and in my own life.

Let me sketch this hope building process out for you. You **start with expectations**. We all have expectations. Sometimes those expectations are realized. But then reality reminds us that sometimes it doesn't work out according to our expectations.

That is when we find ourselves in **a season of suffering**. The thick gray clouds move in and this sadly is where many people get stuck and tragically where many people give up on God.

What is tragic is that *here, where people walk away from God*, is the place where God wants to build our relationship with him.

Suffering then gives way to **perseverance** and perseverance to **character**. In the character formation stage *God is deepening his character in us so that we look more and more like him*. And that leads finally to **hope**.

I'm not asking you to deny the reality that life will at times leave us without hopes and dreams fulfilled. I'm asking you to **trust God to walk with you through the hope building process**. The people on the other side of you will appreciate it also!

Let me just show you how this process works in the life of one biblical character. We pick up his story in Mark 1:10.

"As Jesus," oh, did I tell you this example comes from the life of Jesus? It begins with Jesus being baptized by his cousin, John.

10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Talk about expectations! This is a huge day for Jesus, huge promise; and watch what happens next:

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert

Now let me ask you a question. Based on what I just read, **who sent Jesus out into the desert?** That's right, it was the same voice that just said, "This is my Son!" And **what do we know about the desert?** The desert represents a place of suffering.

Now we don't like to think of God in that way, do we? We want to think God sends us blessings; not that God sends us into suffering. Do you know why we think that way? We think that way because **we don't think of suffering as a blessing.**

And here is an important truth; **if we believe that God can be trusted then even in times of suffering we can believe that God can bring blessing out of the desert.**

Look at what happened to Jesus in the desert.

13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals . . .

Forty days without food. Forty days being tempted by Satan. Forty days of persevering in this season of trial. And to top it off Mark says: he was with *the wild animals*. Do you know what that phrase means? There were wild animals in the desert. Jesus didn't have any food, he was tempted by Satan and there were wild animals all around him.

Jesus perseverance in the desert lead to character; the moment in which God shows up.

...and angels attended him. v.13

As we persevere God shows up and begins to build character in us so that we can look more and more like him. And it is in this character building stage that something powerful happens. ***Out of the forge of suffering comes a tangible hope that isn't based on fleeting circumstances; but a hope that is built on the fact that God is trustworthy, that God shows up even when our expectations are crushed.***

Jesus walks out of this desert with a built-in, forged-in *hope* in his heavenly Father. And that *hope* drives him to proclaim the good news. That *hope* drives him to Calvary. That *hope* drove him through Calvary to eventually walk away and leave behind an empty tomb, because *hope* had been built through a season of suffering, a season of perseverance, a season of character building, and a season of hope. **And hope pushes away the clouds so that we can lean into hope because our great God can be trusted.**

So here is what I want to challenge you to do in the season of suffering, be it today or some time down the road; I want you to **declare your trust in God.**

Here's what that means: that every day you need to get up and you can be dead level honest with your heavenly Father and say, "You know what, heavenly Father? I'm not really excited about what's happening. I don't really enjoy what's happening.

I have to pick up the pieces of this dream; I'm not really excited about what's going on here. But at the end of the day, I just want to let you know I still trust you. **I still trust you.** I'm not happy; in fact, I'm very, very sad. But at the end of the day, I want to let you know above everything else, I declare my trust in you." When you do that, it's one of the most significant moments of worship that you will ever give your heavenly Father.

You know I mentioned earlier that it is so *easy for people to abandon their faith in God when suffering comes*. It is easy to trust God when the sun is shining. **But godly character is forged in the desert**, in the days of suffering; when the world would tell you to abandon your trust in God.

But when you are in a season of suffering; when you don't see and feel God, when you don't know what is going on and everything in your body and soul says to give up hope, to stop trusting God; that is when you invite God to begin the process of hope building in you by saying, **"I trust you!"**

That takes you to the next step of **perseverance** when you **do the next right thing** and declare your trust in God. And the next day you declare your trust in God and do the next right thing. And you do that until this moment: **Then God**... Then God.

Andy Stanley describes the "Then God" moment as the time when **someone has been faithful and they've followed God, they trusted God, and then God shows up and does what only God can do.**

And don't miss this: when you declare your trust in God and you do the next right thing, it is *an invitation for God to show up*. And when God shows up, God begins to deepen his character in you so that you look more and more like his Son. And *that character formation leads to hope*.

So you have **a choice to make**. You can allow reality to beat you up when your plans and dreams and expectations don't work out. That will bring storm clouds into your life and into your relationship. *When there is no hope, when hope is deferred, it makes the heart sick.*

The other choice when reality knocks you to the ground is to *get yourself back up*, gather the shattered pieces of your dreams, *declare your trust* in God, do the *next right thing*, and *choose to fight for hope*. **When your dreams meet reality, choose hope.**

Choose hope because you are not in this fight alone. Hope not in the fleeting things of this world; but in the unshakeable foundation that is our God. **When your dreams meet reality, choose hope.**