



Hope—for 2021

By Wes Eby, Global Representative

First a confession: I am a retired educator—have been for many years— and no longer face learners in a classroom or virtual setting. Therefore, I cannot fully empathize with teachers and school administrators who are dealing with the challenges the coronavirus pandemic has thrust upon us. Yet from my three decades as a full-time teacher and administrator and another decade and half as a part-time educator, I believe I can say something of value to the people actively involved in my life-long passion—education. Would you kindly allow me to speak? If so, I ask for your grace as you read a few rambling thoughts.

As we enter 2021, I refuse to make a list of all the negative circumstances that we dealt with in 2020. But as I reflect on the past 12 months—which are stored in my mind’s vault and reject any attempts to eradicate them—I will not allow the negative memories to overwhelm and defeat me. Instead, I choose to intentionally focus on these facts:

- I am a survivor.
- God has been with me.
- I am overwhelmed with blessings.
- HOPE has stabilized and sustained me.

A story from our pastor’s sermon on the first Sunday of this year has impacted me. The noted violinist Isak Perlman broke a string on his instrument while playing in a concert. The music stopped abruptly. Perlman surveyed the situation, made some adjustments to the remaining three strings, and signaled to

the orchestra conductor to resume the concert. The gifted musician then continued playing with the disabled violin, creating heavenly music. The audience watched and listened in amazement, and at the conclusion erupted with a prolonged ovation, honoring a man who refused to give up despite adversity.

While this story's credibility has been questioned, it does teach a powerful point. Without question, the coronavirus pandemic has interrupted the education process at every level and for an extended time. And even with the vaccine, the pandemic is not over yet; the future is unknown. All educators have been playing a violin with three strings; they do not know when the instrument will be repaired. The normal education process that has been in place for decades has been "disabled," and creating music again seems impossible. But somehow, somehow, they *are* succeeding. Like Perlman, they have analyzed the situation, made necessary adjustments, and continue to "play." I heap kudos on all teachers and administrators, along with their support staff, who are assuring by their actions that the education process will continue—even with the unexpected interruption and unwelcomed changes, even with a three-stringed violin.

Before this year, I have never selected a word of the year, but I have chosen "HOPE" as my word for 2021. Without it, I cannot live; I cannot be the person God has designed and called me to be. I am using an acrostic of HOPE to establish my personal goals for this new year.

H—honesty

I purpose to be more open and transparent with God, my family, my friends, my colleagues, and, most importantly, myself. I find it easy to hide, keep my feelings to myself, avoid meaningful dialogue, and escape any type of conflict. I want to remove any appearance of hypocrisy or deceit in my life. And I desire to be more vulnerable and willing to take some risks while also being open to communication. Difficult? Certainly. That is what God is calling me to do—to be. And I have HOPE.

O—optimism

I purpose to be more positive, to view challenges as opportunities, to look for the best in people and circumstances, and to take the "downs" in my life and turn them into "ups." This is ambitious, I know, for the enemy of my soul stealthily slips into my thought life and plants the negative. I am not speaking of situations when true and sincere constructive criticism is needed—and at times I need someone to point out the rough edges of my behavior and attitude. Optimism is a word full of HOPE, and I am claiming it.

P—patience

I purpose to be more tolerant and self-controlled. Wow! "Is this possible?" I ask myself. This reminds me of the been-around-a-long-time prayer: "Lord, please give me patience, and I want it now." Everyday life brings irritations that frustrate but require self-control. They could be situations such as sitting in major traffic slow-downs on Interstate 4; waiting for a table at Olive Garden after church on Sunday; checking my watch every five minutes as I wonder when I will be called for my doctor's appointment; and failing to connect with a "live" person on the telephone and hearing a computer-generated voice instead. The

list is endless. And I am determined to be more tolerant of people and situations that annoy and aggravate. And HOPE will let me succeed.

E—empathy

I purpose to be more compassionate, to endeavor to fit into another person's shoes, and to see through their eyes. For me, this has been a challenge—no, an opportunity—and I am resolved to improve in this area. I want to be a person who encourages table servers instead of complaining about slow meal service that is probably not their fault . . . to give a cordial word to the cashier at Walmart who is exhausted from standing for hours. . . to affirm my pastor for his excellent sermon after devoting countless hours in preparation . . . to greet strangers with smiles and cheery greetings . . . to send notes of encouragement to the educators who work overtime to provide quality instruction. . . to be more sensitive to the real needs of my spouse and family members. I am holding tightly to HOPE.

I have also selected a key Bible verse as my scriptural treasure for this year:

"I pray that God, the source of all **hope**, will infuse your lives with an abundance of joy and peace in the midst of your faith so that your **hope** will overflow through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13, VOICE, emphasis added).

In writing to the church in Rome, the Apostle Paul, by divine inspiration, would have looked down through the centuries and envisioned what you and I would need to survive and thrive in 2021. Paul's prayer in Romans 15:13—"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"—proclaimed that God is the source of all HOPE, not just a part or even most of it, but 100 percent. I asked God to infuse and permeate my life with an abundance of joy and peace in the very situation in which I find myself (a crippling pandemic) so that my HOPE will overflow, indeed overwhelm me, by the blessed Holy Spirit. My friends, this is exciting news that makes me very emotional. This says that with God as my source of all HOPE, I can handle anything 2021 tosses at me. If I made it through 2020 with all its frustrating, confusing, why-is-this-happening challenges, why should I fear the future? I will view these as new opportunities while I overflow with HOPE through the awesome power of God's Spirit. Hallelujah!

Like all current educators, I, too, am playing with a three-stringed violin. My life has changed, and I do not know if it will ever return to pre-COVID-19 days. But if that is what God wills and has designed for me (indeed, for all of us), I will continue playing. HOPE will continue to sustain and stabilize me. And if another string breaks, I plan to keep on playing.

Wes Eby lives in Lakeland, Florida. He taught in public and Christian schools, as well as at the university level. He served at the Global Ministry Center in the Publications International Office, the Herald of Holiness Office, and the Global Nazarene Missions International Office. You may contact Wes at weseby@tampabay.rr.com.