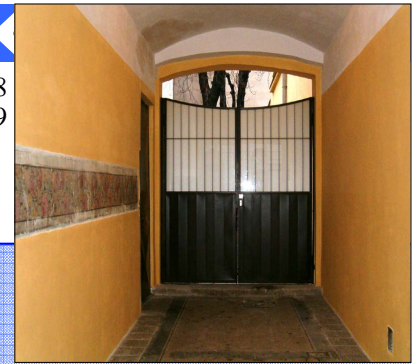


# SERVANT LEADERS

## *HOPE: MENTAL TOUGHNESS*

by Sara Tusek



### *FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE*

In II Corinthians, St. Paul discusses three vital qualities which God gives as a gift to all Christians:

- *Faith*
- *Hope*
- *Love*

The August 2008 *Servant Leaders* examines faith, while the June 2008 *Servant Leaders* is on the topic of love. This issue is about hope, a word that's making the rounds in this fall's political campaign. Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama's theme is that Americans need to regain hope in order to solve the many pressing problems both domestically and internationally.

### *WHAT IS HOPE?*

"Hope" is a both noun and a verb. It is synonymous with the words "anticipation" (noun) and "expect" (verb). Being hopeful is sometimes seen as being naïve and unrealistic, especially if the hopeful person is expressing optimism by anticipating and expecting good things for the future.

Hope is often seen as fragile, as a kind of mental magic that will collapse easily when the hoped-for event fails to materialize. The phrase "hope

against hope" seems to imply that hoping itself can be so hopeless that we have to hope in spite of this weak, frail hope. But maybe there's more to hope than meets the eye.

### *HOPE GIVES ENERGY*

You've seen this kind of movie: it's the last 3 minutes of the championship basketball game, and OUR TEAM is down by 12 points. Our powerhouse player has just fouled out; our second-best player sprains his ankle. It looks hopeless. Even the cheerleaders are drooping.

Then the coach sighs, looks at the pudgy, non-athletic boy who's been bench warming all season and says, "You may as

well go in there." How much worse can it get?

The boy goes in. His mere appearance, bringing with it freshness and unspent energy, revitalizes the team. He receives and passes—score! The court is alive with action.

The other team panics and begins to foul us! Their best player goes down and limps off the court! We score! Again! It's into overtime!

We win!

*To p. 2*





## Hope: Mental Toughness continued from page one

### **HOPE GIVES COURAGE**

During times of great stress and danger, hope provides courage and a boost to the emotions (the heart). Think about a family with a young daughter in the hospital. She is very ill and the doctors can't offer any positive news. The family is devastated and begins to lose hope. Then someone comes to be with them—a relative, a friend, a clergyman. This new person, who's not worn down by worry or fear, can offer bracing words of hope.

In spite of knowing that hope is simply that—hope, not facts or proof—the family cheers up. They communicate their hopeful attitude to their daughter, bringing her new fortitude and the will to live. You can't say that hope alone can cure her, but having hope is surely preferable to being in despair.

### **HOPE BUILDS TOUGHNESS**

Sometimes Christians want a worry-free life. They expect and anticipate that God will reward their belief in Him by making sure that all is well in their personal lives. This attitude is expressed by Christians who define "blessing" as getting what you want, when you want it, and not having any obstacles in your path.

This is not a reasonable attitude. If Christians are truly following Christ, and imitating His example, they know that His final earthly blessings consisted of persecution, abandonment and crucifixion. Christ demonstrated toughness when He hung on

the cross, suffering as a human being through His own choice. He didn't ask His Father to rescue Him—Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was that His own will was to be spared the cup of suffering, but that He was submitting to the Father's will: "Not my will, but thy will be done."

We are not as tough as Christ by nature, as we are just creatures, made of dust. But we can become tough by exercising hope. Every time we choose to bring hope into a difficult situation, we strengthen our "hope" muscle. If even in the smallest

of circumstances we consistently act with the hope that God has the situation under control, we will learn how to hope. Then when the big trials come to us, it will be natural to hope.

### **HOPE IS PERSISTENT**

In Emily Dickinson's poem, "Hope is the thing with feathers," the poet compares hope to a small, persistent bird living in the human soul. The

bird has just a tune, no words: sometimes we don't even know exactly what to hope for (we don't have words), but we still hope (we sing the tune and never stop).

It's hard to point to an outcome and connect it with hope, as who can say that an attitude alone can cause something to happen? But surely to hope is better than not to hope.

Hope gives energy, courage, toughness, and persistence, so why not try hope?

