

# Faith Is Action

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## HOLD ONTO HOPE



It had been three days since Jesus was crucified. His disciples were filled with grief over His sufferings and death, and fear for themselves. Although Jesus had repeatedly foretold of His death, promising to rise from the grave, when His death actually took place, they were left with devastation and disbelief. Some were hiding behind locked doors in Jerusalem. Others fled the city. Two of those who left the city met up with an interesting “stranger” on their sorrowful journey.

*“And behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs (7 miles). And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that while they communed together and*

*reasoned, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. (They didn’t recognize Him.)*

*“And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that you have one to another as ye walk and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?*

*“And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and*

# Hold Onto

# HOPE

SHARON HARDY KNOTTS



*have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done”* (Luke 24:13-21).

These two men were followers of Christ: *Cleopas*, and the other is not named. Most Bible scholars believe it was Luke, the author of the book. Cleopas was also called *Alphaeus*, the father of *James*, one of Jesus’ twelve disciples (Acts 1:13). He was married to a woman named Mary who was related to Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25). So Cleopas was a relative of Jesus by marriage, and his wife, Jesus’ relative, was one of the women who came to the tomb and found it empty.

Cleopas and Luke were traveling by foot to Emmaus, a town seven miles away which is a good length of time to have a conversation. We don’t know how long it took, but the more they talked, the sadder they got. The more they talked, the more doubtful, discouraged, dismayed, and disillusioned they became. Apparently, their situation was so dire, the Lord Himself came alongside to minister unto them. He realized their faith was on the line, and they were about to drop off the precipice of faith to the wrong side.

When you are discouraged and walking along with somebody else who is discouraged, you feed off one another’s doubts, and your

despair deepens. We need to be around people of good courage when we are discouraged. But here one was sad, and the other was sadder. While they commiserated in their despair, Jesus came alongside, but they didn’t recognize Him, and that was for a purpose. Lost in their sad thoughts, they were probably looking down at their feet, shaking their heads as they re-wound the same hopeless story, becoming more woeful with each replay.

### Who Is This Guy?

Then Jesus—a *stranger* to them, shows up and says, “*Why are you so sad?*” Of course, He didn’t ask this because He didn’t know what was going on! He wanted to interject Himself into their conversation where they were beating up on themselves and falling deeper into the pit of despair. And we know the devil was right there on their shoulders, whispering lies in their ears, and what they didn’t think of, he did!

Jesus asked, “*Why are you so sad?*” Cleopas looked at Him and said, “*What? Are you a stranger here in Jerusalem?*” Allow me tell you how he would probably say it today: “*What planet are you from? Where have you been the past three days? Man, don’t you read the newspaper? It’s on the front page of ‘The Jerusalem Post.’ It’s the headline story on CNN. It’s number one on Facebook and*

*Twitter. It's all everybody has been talking about since Passover!"*

At Passover, the city of Jerusalem would have been bursting at the seams. Every hotel and inn was filled up. *No Vacancy* signs were posted everywhere. Jerusalem was abuzz with activity. The best way I can describe how big a story this was is to recall the aftermath of what happened in New York City on 9/11. On every TV channel you turned to, you kept seeing the same scenes over and over. It was the front page story in every newspaper, and all anybody talked about for days, weeks, and months. What would you have thought if somebody would have said, *"Why is everyone so gloomy?"* He would have had to be from the jungles of Ecuador where some are still not connected to civilization, not to know what happened on 9/11.

Cleopas said, *"You don't know what things have happened?"* Jesus played right along: *"What things?"* I'm sure by now they had stopped looking down at their feet and were looking up to see who this guy was. Jesus did not explain Himself; nor did He reveal Himself. He pressed them a little more. He wasn't looking for information. He knew the facts. He wanted them to convey in their own words their feelings of despair, so He could minister to them. They were at the point of throwing away their faith, and He wanted them to con-

front their doubts and unbelief and discouragement head-on. Many don't want to do this; they are afraid of facing rebuke or rejection, but you never need to be afraid of confronting your doubts when Jesus is walking by your side.

They said, *"We are talking about Jesus of Nazareth."* They told how He was a prophet mighty in word and deed. When He taught, people were astonished at His words and said, *"Never a man spoke like this!"* Some said that He had a demon in Him. Others said, *"How can a man who opened the eyes of one blind from birth have a demon?"* When the council asked the blind man, *"How did he do this—He's a sinner?!"* The blind man said, *"Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. What I do know—I was blind, but now I see!"* (Jn.9:25). They said, *"Jesus was a man mighty in word and in deed before God and all the people, but the rulers and the chief priests hated Him; they rejected Him, and delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him."*

### Trust vs. Hope

Pay attention to verse 21: *"But we **trusted** that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."* The word *trust* in the Greek text is **ELPIS**, and is usually translated *hope* which it should have been here. In most places the

Greek word for *trust* is **PISTIS**—the word for *faith*. Therefore, what they said was: “*But we had **hoped** he was **the One**...*”

They had *hoped* Jesus was *the One*— the Redeemer; the Savior; the Messiah; the Christ; the prophet Moses said God would raise up: “*a Prophet like unto me, and unto him shall ye hearken*” (Deut.18:15). They had *hoped* He was the One of whom Isaiah prophesied: “*God will send Immanuel—God with you. His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace*” (Isa.7:14, 9:6). The One who would “*restore the tribes of Jacob, and be a light unto the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the world*” (Isa.49:6). **They had hoped He was the One!**

After 400 silent years, John the Baptist had come on the scene of Israel’s darkness declaring: “*He is the true Light that lighteth every man. I am not the one—I am bearing witness that He is the true Light! He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world*” (Jn.1:7-9, 20, 29).

They were sure He was *the One* when they saw Him healing the sick and those who were hopelessly crippled from their mother’s wombs; when they saw Him cast demons out of maniacs and restore their sanity; when they saw Him multiply the fishes and loaves and feed the multitudes; when they saw

Him cleanse lepers and raise the dead. No doubt they were there at the tomb where Lazarus was buried for four stinking days. Jesus commanded, “*Lazarus, Come forth!*”, and he came forth still wrapped in grave clothes. Perhaps they helped roll the stone away. (Jn.11:43-44). They said, “*We had **hoped** He was the One, but now He’s dead, and so is our hope.*”

Their lament: “*We hoped He would **redeem** Israel.*” They were saying the right thing, but not believing it. In Greek, *redeem* is **LUTROS** and means “to release by payment of a price.” It referred to the OT law of the *kinsman redeemer*. They didn’t realize that was exactly what Jesus did on the cross: “*For you were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1Pet.1:18-19). John recorded the song of the saints in Revelation 5:9: “*Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.*” Paul said Jesus blotted out with His blood “*the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, that was contrary to us*”—all the accusations of ‘Guilty!’ — “*and took them out of the way nailing it to His cross. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*” (Col.2:14-15). Satan, *the accuser of the brethren*, has no authority to accuse us, because Jesus nailed

every accusation of our sins to His cross. Yes, Cleopas and Luke were talking right, but they didn't believe the words they spoke. *They saw the cross as a defeat—not a triumph!* And all their hopes were nailed to that cross and then buried in the ground three days before!

Jesus still did not interject to set them straight. He wanted them to get out all their doubt and unbelief, so He could deal with it. They continued: *“Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive”* (vv. 22-23).

They said, *“We were astonished!* We were still in shock of Jesus' crucifixion, because we thought He was the One. What were we do? We might as well disband the body of believers. We might as well go back to fishing and tax collecting and our former occupations. It was over. Our hope was gone. Then these women said that they went to the sepulcher, and Jesus was gone, and a band of angels told them that *He was alive!* *Why should we believe these women?”* Notice they said, *He was alive—not He is alive,* because they did not believe them. Luke recorded: *“It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women which told these*

*things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not”* (Lk.24:10-11). The Greek word *idle* is DELIRIUM, transliterated into English, meaning an altered mental state.

In that day women could not give testimony in a legal investigation. Her testimony was considered foolish, hysterical, and unreliable, and was not permissible in a court of law. This certainly confirms the NT was written by the Holy Ghost, because it was the women who first saw and were spoken to by the angels, and Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, a woman. Why would He appear to someone whose testimony would not be accepted in a court of law? If you are smart enough to make up the NT, you are smart enough to know not to have Jesus appear first *to a woman!* Everybody would say, *“She's a woman, what does she know?”* But Mary was the first evangelist after the resurrection. Jesus said, *“Mary, Go tell my brethren I ascend unto my Father”* (Jn.20:16-18).

### The Remedy for Doubt & Unbelief

While Jesus still did not reveal Himself, He did reprove them: *“O fools and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken”* (v.25). (When He called them *fools*, He didn't mean it in a derogatory sense. He was saying, *“Where are your senses? Why*

aren't you thinking?") "*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*" (vv.25-27).

He chided them like a rabbi, because He was a rabbi: "*O you foolish ones! Stop and think about it: You know the Scriptures; you know what Moses and the prophets said about Messiah—that He would suffer many things first and then enter into His glory.*" They were focused on the glory. Many Christians today focus on the glory! They want to be behind the pulpit and have the glory; they want to be on TV and receive the glory; it's all about recognition and glory.

These disciples were looking for the *Christ of glory*, and they overlooked *His sufferings*. But no suffering—no glory! "*If so be that if we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together*" (Rom.8:17). Looking for the Messiah in great glory, they overlooked prophecies that spoke of His sufferings, such as Psalms 18, 22, 69, Isaiah 52 & 53 and others. He had to expound to them the Scriptures beginning with the writings of Moses and give them a refresher course in the Bible. He could have just said, "*It's me—Jesus.*" He could have turned on His candlepower, the outshining of

His glory like He did on the Mount of Transfiguration, and said, "*Here I am—the Light of the world.*" But almost always, that is not the way to deal with doubt and unbelief. If God deals with our doubt and unbelief with supernatural dreams, visions, trumpet sounds, angels, and prophecies, then the next time we're besieged with doubt, we will have to have a bigger vision, a greater dream, a louder angel, a brighter light, and we will become dependent on those things. The remedy for doubt, fear, and unbelief is to get in the Scriptures!

He chose not to manifest Himself to them in their faithless state. He could have sent an angel like was sent to announce His birth: "*Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people: For today in the city of Jerusalem, the Savior is risen from the dead. Go, you will find Him in Galilee. He is not wrapped in grave clothes anymore, but you will see Him sitting on the shore preparing bread and fish for you.*"

No, He didn't do anything supernatural, because He knew if they only had a physical, emotional experience, later they would doubt those things. Later, the devil, or even their own minds would say, "You know, you were really in a traumatic state of mind. For three days and nights you hadn't slept or hardly eaten; you were so grieved, your mind was playing tricks on

you. You thought you saw Jesus, because that is what your mind does to protect itself when you can't take any more trauma."

Consider when ten disciples told Thomas that the Lord is risen, and they saw Him. Thomas said, "*I won't believe until I see him for myself, unless I touch him for myself*" (Ref. Jn.20:25). Jesus knew an emotional experience wasn't what they needed. For their faith to be able to endure all the trials and tests they would face up ahead, and for you and me, and everyone who would come into the kingdom of God and face trials of doubt, fear, and unbelief, the only remedy is to get into the Word of God and expound the Scriptures.

### **"Abide With Us!"**

Jesus' *Seven Mile Sermon* and their journey were coming to an end: "*And they drew nigh unto the village whither they went; and he made as though he would have gone further*" (vs.28). He prepared to say goodbye. "*But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent*" (vs.28). The use of *constrained* is strong language in the Greek text. It was the custom of Eastern hospitality to invite a guest to join you for a meal—that was a given. It was getting dark, and they would have offered him a place to stay just to be hospitable, but that was not

what was happening here. It was not just the obligatory thing. No, they *constrained* Him. They insisted He stay!

We understand, for three days they felt like a black cloud was over their heads. They had rehearsed their story of woe, and with each replay they grew more despondent. But after listening to this *stranger*, for the first time since Jesus died, they began to see a little ray of hope breaking through that cloud. Something had ignited on the inside. This tells us, when you are in a battle and test of faith, you need to get around saints who will speak to you the Word of God; who will pick you up, and exhort you. Don't get around folks who tell you what God can't do; rather, get around folks who will tell you what God can do, what He will do, what He is doing! Stay away from the doubters, the naysayers, the negativists. Get to church where you can hear the Word of God.

I am always confounded by some people who do the dumbest thing when they are in the test—*They stay home from church!* You call and ask where they have been, and they say, "Well, I've been in a test," Well, don't you think it might be a good idea to come to church where you can hear a testimony and word of the Lord to help you in your test? When you hear others' testimonies how God brought them out, and you believe

it, you will get your own testimony. You must be around those who can remind you of the Scriptures. Cleopas and Luke were uplifted by Jesus' words. He was ready to just go on His way, but they pressed Him, "Come in with us!"

*"And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it and brake it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"* (vv.30-32). After Jesus had joined them at the dinner table, they gave their guest the honor of saying the blessing. Jesus took the bread, and like a rabbi would have done, raised it to Heaven and spoke the Jewish blessing: "BARUCH'ATA ADONAI ELEHEYNU MELECH HA 'OLAM LECHEM MIN HA ERETZ." (Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.)

*Deja vu! We've seen this before! We've heard this voice before!* Just as they recognized it was Jesus, He vanished out of their sight. My God, their faith was lit on fire! They realized it was the Lord who had listened to them for seven miles as they moaned and groaned. They said, "Our hope was dead, but when He expounded to us the Scriptures, He

*fanned the flames of hope with the Word of God. Didn't our hearts burn within us while He walked with us along the way?"* The construction of the Greek grammar means *they were still burning after Jesus was gone!* By then it was bedtime, and they had walked seven miles, and you know they were tired. They hadn't slept well in three nights, so I imagine they put on their night caps and went to bed expecting to have good dreams, don't you?

*"And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread"* (vv.33-35).

After having walked seven weary miles to Emmaus, they turned around and walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem! By this time it was dark, and they didn't have street lights or pavements. That didn't matter—they had a fire burning in their souls and hope to light the way. I'm sure they covered those seven miles back much quicker than they did coming. This time they had a spring in their step as they talked excitedly, rehearsing everything Jesus said. Because *hope brings joy*, the joy bells were ringing in their souls, and I think they were

singing the hymns they used to sing with Jesus when they all gathered together on the Mount of Olives. Before they knew it, they had arrived at the place where the disciples were hiding, running over and smiling from ear to ear. The fire of hope Jesus had lit was still burning, and they were excited to share their good news.

Allow me to elaborate how it could have happened: Over-talking each other, they exclaimed, *“We saw the Lord! He IS alive!”* Then turning to the women, Luke may have said, *“Ladies, we’re truly sorry for not believing you when you said that you went to the tomb and saw the stone rolled away, and Jesus’ body was gone, and then you saw angels who told you He is alive. We shouldn’t have called you hysterical women making up tales.”*

While they were telling their story, they got an illustrated sermon: *“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, (Shalom) Peace be unto you”* (v.36). *Shalom* means complete peace—in every part of your body, soul and spirit. *Hope always brings peace.* Then for one nano-second, they became afraid and thought He was a ghost! *“But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my*

*feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me have. And when he had thus spoken, He showed them his hands and feet”* (vv.37-40).

He urged them to feel His hands and wounded side: *“Come on, touch Me! I’m not a ghost. I have flesh; I have bones.”* Starting to take it all in, their joy was resurfacing: *“And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have you any meat?”* (v.41). As the reality of what they were hearing and seeing began to sink in, it seemed momentarily too good to be true! Touching Him filled them with wonder at the resurrection power of God. Then as further proof that He was not a spirit, He asked them for something to eat (*meat* referred to food in general). *“And they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and of a honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them”* (vv.42-43)

### Averting the Crisis

What a celebration they must have had. These dismal disciples who had been beleaguered by doubts and despair were filled with glee. But Jesus wasn’t finished. This was too crucial of a point, and the crisis had to be addressed. He knew after 40 days, He would return to His Father and wasn’t coming back for a long time. They were going to have to

know for themselves, out of the Word of God, what they believed. It couldn't be because an angel came every two weeks to give them a new word. It couldn't be because somebody gave a new prophecy every month. It couldn't be because they had new visions and dreams on a regular basis. It couldn't be because they had supernatural goosebumps. I am certainly not discounting these things, because we are living in the time when the Bible said and Peter confirmed on the day of Pentecost: "*And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, and on my servants and handmaidens... and they shall prophesy*" (Acts 2:17-18).

I am not denying the supernatural gifts and witnesses of the Spirit, but we can't become dependent on these exclusive of the Word of God. The devil can talk you out of those things with the proverbial *you just had too much pizza before you went to bed* rationale. But the Word of God—the Scriptures that record what Jesus said *is forever settled in Heaven!*" Jesus said, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*" (Mk.13:31).

They had eaten, sitting back, relaxed, with their guard down. It

was almost like it used to be before Jesus was crucified. But it was never going to be like it used to be. This was a new day, and they weren't prepared. Jesus had clearly told them before: "*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. But now you are the light of the world*" (Mt.5:14, Jn.8:12). Jesus knew their lights needed re-igniting.

*"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me"* (v.44). They were schooled in the Scriptures from childhood, and for three years, He had personally disciplined them, explaining their fulfillment in Him. But it was as though they had no idea why He had been delivered up unto death, and no expectation of His resurrection. The only result could be hopelessness and regret. And the only remedy was to go once again to Scripture.

*"Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures. And he said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day"* (vv.45-46). Jesus did the same thing with them as He had done a few hours earlier with Luke and Cleopas. *He opened up the Scriptures*, starting from

Moses, who wrote the first five books of the OT, through the prophets and the psalms. *And He opened up their understanding to understand the Scriptures.*

In every reference to the Messiah, they were to understand it was written about Him. He said: *“What you are doing is **overlooking the sufferings and focusing on the glory.** When the sufferings came, and you didn’t expect Messiah to suffer and die, you got shook up and started to doubt your faith, and lost your hope. But when you go back and read what the Scriptures say, you see Christ had to suffer.”*

The devil understands *“It is written.”* When he comes pouring doubt and unbelief on you, you must have something with which to counteract it. When he lies: *“If God loves you, why are you in this test? If you’re such a good Christian, and God’s really watching over you, why did this happen to you? Why are you suffering like this?”*, the only rebuttal that will shut him up is the Word:

*“All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”* (2Tim.3:12). *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”* (Phil.1:29). *“For even hereunto were you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps”* (1Pet.2:21). Jesus said that

we are to rejoice and get happy that we are counted worthy to suffer for His name. When we suffer now, it is so that we might reign with Him then: *“If so be that we suffer with him that we may also be glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Rom.8:17-18).

Just like the disciples, Christians today want to skip the sufferings and go straight to the glory. For those with the mindset that Christians aren’t to experience sufferings, when they come, it is a major blow to their faith. This gives the adversary place to project his lies into their wavering thoughts. The antidote is the Word. Jesus opened up the Scriptures and prodded them: *“And ye are witnesses of these things”* (v.48). They were the ones to whom He had entrusted the preaching of the Gospel: *“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in my name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (v.47). If they failed to take up the mantle of ministry, who would?

He repeated the mandate to wait for the promise of His Father, the coming of the Holy Spirit: *“But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until you be endued with power from on high”* (v.49). The disciples were from Galilee, and at the time, Jerusalem was the last place they wanted to be. They had been

hiding behind locked doors out of fear of the Jews who had crucified Jesus. Apparently, they thought they could be next. When your heart is filled with doubts and fears, and your hope has been cast away, your imagination is fertile soil for Satan's seeds of worsening things to come. But in the midst of their struggling, He gave them the unsinkable hope of the Word of God. They didn't know when the Holy Ghost would come, but Jesus promised them if they would hang in there, "*you shall be clothed with power from on high.*"

In both situations, Jesus dealt with their doubt and unbelief in the same way—not with supernatural goosebumps, but with the Word of God. Many Christians today want somebody else to do their Bible study for them. They want someone else to dig out its truths and give it to them. You have to get into the Scriptures for yourself, because when it's midnight and you are all alone, and you try to call someone and get the answering machine, you need the help and power and hope of God's Word. Paul said: "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope*" (Rom.15:4).

When you feel there is nowhere to turn, and doubt is coming down on you like a black cloud, your hope comes from the

Scriptures. They were written for a purpose—that we may learn from them by looking at the experiences of those who trusted God and were delivered, so through perseverance, we might find comfort and hope. The word *comfort* in Greek is made up of two words: *PARA* means *alongside of*, and *KALAYO* means *to call*; thus, "*to call alongside of you.*" When you get in the Scriptures, *comfort and hope come alongside you*. I just had a flashback of two guys walking down the road. They are sad, downcast, full of doubt and fears, *when a stranger comes alongside them*. As they continue down the road, He reminds them what the Bible says, and it gives them comfort and hope.

### When All Hope Is Gone

I will end with a true story I first heard on the radio years ago by Christian apologist, Ravi Zacharias. He told of his friend who was taken prisoner in a Vietnamese prisoner of war camp, a cruel place with horrible living conditions. He was tortured daily to deny his faith in Christ and his belief in God, but he would not. The relentless torture turned into weeks, months, and a year later, it continued. Struggling daily to survive, a second year came when something broke, and he said, "*I can't take it anymore! I will no longer believe in God. I will denounce my faith!*" He had

come to the place where *he had lost all hope.*

The next morning, for the first time in years, he didn't pray. He was summoned by the commanding officer and given the despicable job of cleaning the camp latrines: in the jungle, cleaning filthy, putrid toilets. He had to empty the wastebasket that held used toilet paper. The filth and stench were so nauseating, he almost could not stand on his feet. Then his eye caught a piece of paper with English writing on it. He hadn't seen anything written in English for over two years, and his interest was piqued. He looked around to make sure no one was watching, grabbed the piece of paper, quickly wiped off the feces, and stuck it in his pocket.

That night, after everyone was asleep, he sat in his bed in the darkness and pulled the covers over his head. With his little flashlight on, he pulled the smeared paper out of his pocket and wiped away the stains. He was straining to read it when to his astonishment, he saw it was a page out of the New Testament! It was Romans, Chapter 8, and he began to read: "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*" Tears ran down his face as he read on:

*"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribula-*

*tion, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? As it is written, For thy sake, we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter, Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Weeping, he cried in repentance, asking God to forgive him for losing hope, for giving up on Him, and for saying that he was going to deny Him. The next day, he went to the commander and volunteered to clean the latrines. Sure enough, when he got to the waste basket, he saw it, another soiled piece of paper with English writing on it. Again, he wiped away the feces and stuck it in his pocket. Every day he volunteered to clean the latrine. Every day, page by page, he collected almost the whole NT, and every night, he sat in his bed reading the Word of God with tears falling down his face as the light of hope burned brighter and brighter in his heart. Later he learned that someone had given the camp commander an English NT, and he was using the pages as toilet paper! But those

filthy pages saved his life.

With new hope in his heart, he began thinking: *I'm getting out of here. I am not dying in this place!* So he began to devise a plan to escape. One day some of the guards took him for questioning. They asked him, *"Are you planning to escape from Vietnam?"* Fearing for his life, he said, *"No, I am not planning anything."* When he went back to his place, he really felt bad about lying. The next day they came for him and roughed him up a little bit: *"Aren't you planning on escaping from Vietnam?"* Again fear gripped him, and he said, *"No, I am not planning to escape,"* and they let him go. When he went back, he began to weep in shame. He said, *"God, if they ask me again, I'm going to tell them the truth no matter what the cost."*

The guards came the third time and said, *"Come on, tell us the truth: Aren't you planning to escape from Vietnam?"* He looked at them boldly and said, *"Yes, I am! Are you going to kill me now?"* They said, *"No—we want to come with you!"* Not long after, they all escaped by boat to Thailand. He returned to California and became a Christian businessman. Because when all hope was gone, he found hope in the Scriptures.

*There are two points I want to make:* The first is the obvious: As American Christians we have

Greek Bibles, Hebrew Bibles, Women's Bibles, Men's Bibles, Married Couples' Bibles, Teenager Bibles, Comic Book Bibles... We have Bibles galore, but many don't read them! That man had to wipe somebody's fecal matter off the pages, so he could read the Bible! Would you want to stand next to him when you get to Heaven, if you have been neglectful in reading your Bible?

Secondly, when you run out of hope, IT is your answer. Ask God to open your understanding to what you're reading, because it will give you hope and comfort. *No matter what, hold onto hope!*