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Passion and Purpose. Hope and Charity Part II

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If then, hope is the foundation of passion and purpose, what is hope? The first element is the affirmation that the future is positive and good. For some, this is a difficult aspect of hope. Due to the loss of loved ones to death, or estrangement, the future doesn't look bright. For others, the irremediable consequences of choices or bad experiences make the future gloomy. Yet, when we find someone else who needs us and when we recognize how precious life is, hope returns. If there are those who do not value us, there are those who do, or who will, or who can. If we give ourselves to others, they will reciprocate with a gift of their love and companionship. My daughter is a person filled with hope. She could fall into a mud hole and turn it into a swimming pool. Some of this is personality; most of it is hope. Everyone can have hope, if they so choose.

The second element of hope is the confidence that change will make a difference. When IBM was in trouble as a company, they employed and empowered a group of people they called "change agents." One of the principles which they discovered about "change agents" is that if you are going to change things, then you had better make a difference. Hope demands change, expects change and at the same time makes change inevitable. Hope also expects change to bring progress and benefit.

The third element of hope is that my actions can make a difference. Futility is the belief that no matter what we do, it will not make a difference. In the face of futility, we give up. Hope dashes the power of the sense of inevitability. Hope declares that nothing is inevitable until after it happens and that until that time, our efforts can make a difference. It is this element of hope which fuels the pursuit of purpose borne of passion.

The fourth element of hope is the confidence that I can make a change. Here is where hope often needs help. Often people who need to make a change say, "I have tried everything." What they often mean is that they have tried a "quick fix," or, they have tried a "gimmick." None of these works. What they have not tried is working in collaboration with someone who will help them by walking through the "darkness" with them. The same Apostle Paul whom we quoted above, talked about "bearing one another's burdens." The reality is that we were designed by God to need help and to give help. Hope is most powerful when it is collective. And, that collective-ness requires only "two or three," not thousands. United, not only do we stand, but we also succeed. United, we sustain our passion by joining it with the passion and purpose of others.

The fifth element of hope is the determination that I am willing to persist in the change until it makes a difference. Relentlessness is a character trait birthed of hope. The most common failure in health matters is the termination of a "diet" before the desired result

had been achieved. Hope allows you to continue no matter how long it takes. Also, hope not only allows, but demands that you continue the effort no matter how hard it is. Hope gives you "sheer dogged endurance." It is that "bull-doggedness," which inevitably leads to success. Passion united with hope pursues purpose relentlessly, not tiring until the task is done.

The sixth element of hope is the knowledge that changing does not make me a better or more valuable person. The changes we want to make are not in order to become acceptable or worthwhile. The marvel and the miracle of "humanness" is that we are valuable and worthwhile no matter how young, old, sick, well, tall, short, thin, fat, handsome, ugly, rich, poor, or other descriptive phrase we could use, we are. Change does not make us better. Change may make us healthier. Change may make us thinner. Change may make us stronger. But, we are intrinsically valuable because of being a creation of God's. Hope frees us from self-rejection and self-loathing and liberates us to pursue our goals with joy and purpose. It is this element of hope which empowers purpose because it emanates from who we are, not who are what we want to be.

The seventh element of hope is that our exercise of hope always impacts others whom we love and care about. Here is the ultimate payoff in human terms of hope and its result. We get to influence for good those we love. Hope is contagious. When we exercise hope, others catch that spirit. When we demonstrate the effects of hope, others take hope and are encouraged. Hope is a "journey" and it is a journey which we never take alone.

The eighth element of hope is that we are not alone. This is the summation of number four and number seven above. It is the truth on the basis of which all hope is founded. It is the message of one of the most beloved works in human history: The Twenty-Third Psalm. It states, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me." The reality of God's presence is that which ultimately makes us not alone, but it is also the presence of an entire community which prevents our isolation and alone-ness. This element of hope is also birthed of the reality that others have overcome the same adversity and so can and so will we. Not being alone gives companionship to passion, purpose and hope, which companionship provides strength and sustenance for our pilgrimage.

The ninth element of hope is that it is personal. Just as I am not pursuing a goal or a change to be acceptable to others; I am not pursuing my purpose to be acceptable to myself. I am not working to please others, but to fulfill my own goals, aspirations and dreams. The only sustainable purpose is one which is internalized, that is, one which comes from my own heart and desire. If my purpose is for my wife, children, boss, etc., it will not last.

The tenth element of hope is that hope is not competitive. I am not trying to outperform anyone else. I am determined to reach my goals, not beat someone else's. Mikhail Baryshnikov said, "I never try to dance better than someone else; I only try to dance better than myself." Everyone can win at the "game" of purpose, passion and hope, for it is truly the "game of life." And, the game of life is not a zero-sum game with winners and losers. Everyone can win, and everyone can lose. The wonder of exercise is that it is not what others can do, but what I am doing which matters. I can't lift 500 pounds while others can, yet, their ability is not injuring my health. The success of others does not limit or eliminate my success.

Ultimately, passion and purpose will be unique for each person but with some universal similarities. Sustainable purpose, empowered by passion and founded on hope will always be directed toward others. Often, that purpose will also be directed toward those who are “other” than us, as well. That is, it will be directed toward those who look, act, live and are different from us. It is in caring for those “other” than us that we find our own value and purpose in life.

Another universal similarity is that such a purpose will be an expression and even an extension of love, which is not a feeling, or an emotion but a commitment. It is love because the focus is on the benefit and welfare of the recipient. It is love because it is done without regard to gain on the behalf of the one who is motivated by love. It is commitment because it is not compromised due to difficulty, disappointment or defeat.

Finally, this sustainable purpose does not have as its object the changing of others, but the serving of them. It has as its object the meeting of the needs of others in terms of their choosing. It is not focused on changing them but on caring for them, for it is in caring for others that any purpose finds a voice which resonates with truth.

So, we find there are three: purpose, which is ultimately an articulation of the tenets of one’s faith; hope, which is our empowerment to pursue and fulfill our purpose, and finally charity, which makes “others” the object of our faith and hope. The greatest of these three, which is itself the expression of the sum of the three, is “charity” -- love.