

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

December 17, 2019

One of the words we associate with CHRISTmas is the word, "hope." "Hope" is a frequent word in Scripture, occurring 165 times in the English Standard Version of the Bible. Here's just one example:



Psalm 130:5-6

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word

*I **hope**; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.*

Apart from the Bible, we use the word, "hope" quite often, frequently as a synonym for "wish": "I hope the Orioles continue to do well"; "I hope it doesn't rain on our picnic," etc. When used as "wish," I spell "hope" as **hope**.

The other main use of "hope" among Christian folk is "the hope we have in Christ": "*We have this **hope** as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure*" (Hebrews 6:19a). Or again, "*I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day*" (2 Timothy 1:12). When used in this fashion, I spell "hope" as **Hope**.

It seems to me, though, that there are at least two other spellings of "hope" that convey important content for those who follow Jesus. The first of these has to do with *misplaced* hope.

We humans frequently put our hope in things and in people who are insufficient for the load we commit to them. We hope that making a certain amount of money, completing a certain educational program, or securing the blessing of a certain person will make our lives secure and meaningful . . . only to discover that, having achieved these things, they are unable to deliver what was promised or expected. Sometimes we even place such burdens on expected Christmas gifts.

I spell this kind of misplaced hope as "**H(h)ope**," suggesting by this unusual spelling that we have placed "Capital H Hope" in something or someone unable to carry that load. The Bible's spelling for this is i-d-o-l.

My fourth spelling of "hope" has to do with the way in which I think God intends for us to live our lives, hour by hour and day by day: "*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*" (Colossians 3:17). This fourth "hope" is spelled "**h(H)ope**," indicating that we do the ordinary things we do every day in the light of the anchor-for-the-soul Hope by which we lean into the Future God has promised.

Not only are there four ways to spell "hope," but there are also three "tenses" in which to understand hope. With respect to the **past**, h(H)ope looks back on past experience and sees both God's faithfulness and God's forgiveness. Because of the forgiveness we have found in Jesus, we not only



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are set free from guilt for our own Sin, but we are able to offer forgiveness to those who have sinned against us. H(h)ope, on the other hand, experiences the past as pursuing us with guilt, isolation, and faithlessness.

With respect to the **present**, h(H)ope experiences most days as purpose-full, effective, and fulfilling: *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. . . . As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*¹ H(h)ope, on the other hand, experiences the present as boring and meaningless. (I'd almost be willing to say that it is impossible for someone who is living in h(H)ope to be bored.)

Finally, with respect to the future, h(H)ope lives "on tiptoe," trusting God's faithfulness and anticipating ways in which that faithfulness will be experienced, both in time and in eternity. Persons who live in H(h)ope face the future with anxiety and dread, seeing death as an extinguishing rather than a transition into Eternal Life.

One of my favorite verses that brings this all together is John 5:24, where Jesus told us, *"I assure you, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me **have** eternal life (PRESENT). They **will never** be condemned for their sins (FUTURE), but they **have already** passed from death to life (PAST)."*

Amid all the hoopla of this season, how filled with Hope and h(H)ope are you? If you want a quick read on how you're doing, take the *Spiritual Values Inventory* that follows and score yourself. It just might point you in a different direction this CHRISTmastide

Dave



¹ Ephesians 2:10, 4:16

The *Spiritual Values Inventory* ©

Welcome to the *Spiritual Values Inventory*. This inventory is designed to assist you in examining your life in the context of your spiritual values. Please complete the Inventory by entering the number that represents your answer in the blank to the right of each statement. Sometimes the choices may not seem to fit the way you would like to answer. At those times, please choose the answer that seems closest to your desired response.

Please use this Key to record your responses. Please respond to all of the statements.

1 = this is never true for me 2 = this is seldom true for me 3 = this is sometimes true for me

4 = this is often true for me 5 = this is always true for me

1.	I have many friends.	
2.	Sometimes I'm sad or angry without knowing why.	
3.	I am truly connected to God.	
4.	Sometimes I am too emotionally dependent upon others.	
5.	I think I know what my "spiritual gifts" are.	
6.	It's too late for me to change.	
7.	I regularly read the Bible, or other material related to my spiritual values.	
8.	I spend a lot of time worrying about bad things that might happen.	
9.	I expect my life circumstances to improve.	
10.	I have no really close friends.	
11.	I am doing what God intends for me to do with my life.	
12.	I often feel guilty.	
13.	I feel able to change my life.	
14.	Most of my friendships are one-sided.	
15.	I'm helping to accomplish God's purpose for the world.	

Scoring instructions are on the reverse side of this sheet.

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Scoring the *Spiritual Values Inventory* is a simple, three-step process:

1. Using the table below, write your response for each statement in the space provided.
2. Reverse the score for items followed by "(R)." In order to do this, subtract your response for these statements from 6 in order to derive their corrected score. For example, if your response was "5," then $6 - 5 = 1$, which is the "true" score. Write the corrected scores by each of your responses.
3. Total all the scores—reversed and non-reversed alike. Your final score will be somewhere between 15 and 75.

In general, the higher your score, the more likely it is that you are aware of your core spiritual values, and that these values are helping you to grow spiritually and to live effectively. If your total score is fifty (50) or less, you may wish to discuss your scores with your Pastor, Bible Study Leader, or with someone else whose spiritual life you respect. God has more in store for you than you have yet discovered!

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord,
"plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).*

Subscale		Items in Scale	Score
<i>Vocation:</i> Your Sense of Life Direction	3	_____	
	5	_____	
	7	_____	
	11	_____	
	15	_____	
<i>Responsibility:</i> Your Sense of Living Effectively	2	_____ (R) _____	
	4	_____ (R) _____	
	8	_____ (R) _____	
	12	_____ (R) _____	
<i>Community:</i> Your Sense of being Connected to other People	1	_____	
	10	_____ (R) _____	
	14	_____ (R) _____	
<i>Hope:</i> Your Expectations about the Future	6	_____ (R) _____	
	9	_____	
	13	_____	
Total Score:		15-75	

Understanding the

Spiritual Values Inventory

You have just completed the *Spiritual Values Inventory*, which is designed to assist you in examining your life in the context of spiritual values. Your responses to the *Inventory* will be used by your Counselor to determine areas of your life that are already strong contributors to your feelings of Hope, as well as identifying areas where additional work may cause your experience of life to be more positive. The *Inventory* is divided into four areas that have been found to affect a person's experience of spiritual well being. These areas are summarized here so that you can begin already to consider how you feel about these aspects of your life—even before you discuss your responses with your Counselor.

Area One: Vocation

Area One looks at your experience of relationship with God. It has been found that certain beliefs about this relationship contribute to a sense of well being, while other beliefs tend to make persons feel discouraged and hopeless. While your Counselor will not try to change your mind about what you believe, she or he may suggest to you other ways to think about questions of faith or books to read to get a different perspective. The final decisions, of course, are up to you.

Area Two: Responsibility

Area Two examines your perception of how effectively your life is working at the moment. The statements in this section invite you to examine your awareness of negative emotions that seem to come from “nowhere,” and to consider how much you worry about things in the future. In addition, you look at how much you feel guilty about things in the past, and consider how “needy” you feel with respect to important persons in your life.

Area Three: Community

Area Three takes a look at your interpersonal relationships. Do you see yourself as a person with many friends and with meaningful, enduring relationships, or do you feel pretty isolated? Are your friendships mutual relationships, or do you seem to have to carry what seems to be more than your share of the effort to keep things going?

Area Four: Hope

Area Four, the final section of the *Inventory*, looks at some focused dimensions of Hope. An important aspect of Hope is the sense that who I am, what I think, what I feel, and what I do affects my environment—especially the people who are important to me. This area of the *Inventory* also asks about whether you feel able to change your life for the better, and about the extent to which you are able to celebrate life as a gift.

This quick survey of the *Inventory* gives you an idea of the things you and your Counselor may discuss together soon. Perhaps some things have occurred to you that you would like to talk about further. You have taken some significant steps toward becoming a more Hope-full person already: you have taken the initiative to ask your Counselor to work with you in discovering more about yourself; you have given thoughtful responses to the statements in the *Inventory*, and now you have taken the time to review this handout. All of these actions indicate a willingness to grow!