

March 2, 2025

From Despair to Hope

Matthew 5:1-3; Mark 5:25-34

Some researchers believe that for at least the last two decades, Americans have been “living through an unprecedented period of hopelessness.” Studies show that middle-aged and older adults may be “dying of despair,” but even younger people have become “increasingly hopeless.” According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), “in 2021, 42 percent of high school students reported consistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, up from 28 percent in 2011.”

What’s causing this tidal wave of despair? Harvard’s Human Flourishing Program (HFP) suggests that much of our despair is caused by “stagnant wages, the over-prescription of opioids followed by a flood of deadly fentanyl,” the prolific use of smartphones and social media, “and the slow decline of religious belief and practice, among many potential factors.” According to HFP, we’ve also ignored “the role of hope itself, not only as an effect of one’s circumstances but also as a predictor of future flourishing in its own right.”¹

Life often brings moments of deep despair. We experience times when we feel powerless, unseen, and desperate for change. The Gospel of Matthew opens the Sermon on the Mount with a striking declaration: “Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs” (Matthew 5:3). In this beatitude, Jesus turns worldly expectations upside down. He taught that those who recognize their need for God, who come in humility and desperation, are not abandoned but blessed. It is in their emptiness that they find the fullness of God’s kingdom.

This promise of hope is beautifully illustrated in the story of the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25-34. She had suffered for 12 years and spent all her money on doctors, only to find that her condition worsened. Her illness made her ritually unclean, isolating her from her community and leaving her in physical and emotional despair. But despite everything, she did not give up hope. Hearing of Jesus, she believed that if she could only touch the edge of his cloak, she would be healed. She pushed through the crowd, unnoticed and unimportant to those around her, yet she was filled with desperate faith. When she touched his garment, “Her bleeding stopped immediately, and she sensed in her body that her illness had been healed” (Mark 5:29).

This encounter demonstrates the transforming power of faith and the compassion of Christ. The woman came to Jesus in absolute despair, believing he alone could restore her. She was not only healed physically but also spiritually and emotionally, as Jesus publicly acknowledged her and called her “Daughter,” a term of deep love and belonging.

The woman’s story is a powerful reminder that when we are filled with despair and are losing hope, Jesus is present and willing to restore us. He does not simply meet our immediate needs; he brings us into relationship with him, offering a hope that extends beyond physical healing. Our lowest moments are not the end of the story. Jesus meets us in our despair and calls us into hope. He invites us to reach out to him in faith, knowing that he sees us, values us,

and desires to bring us peace. No matter our struggles, we are not alone. In Christ, there is always the promise of hope.

1. In what areas do you feel overwhelmed by despair? How can Jesus' response to the woman in Mark 5:25-34 encourage you to reach out to him in faith?
2. What obstacles may be holding you back from fully trusting God, and how can you overcome them?
3. How does knowing that Jesus sees, values, and loves you impact how you approach your struggles and faith?

¹From "The Power of Hope Amid an Epidemic of Despair," by Brendan Case and Tyler J. Vanderweele, *Common Good Magazine* (August 1, 2024).