

# Sharing God's hope

## GOD'S BIG HOPE

...that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence towards God and with proper conduct. This is good and it pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth.

1 Timothy 2: 2-4

## YOUR HOPES?

'What are you hoping for?' That's a great question whether it's asked in relationship to the presents for your birthday, your exam results or the opportunities and benefits which come with your new job. I guess we all like to be asked this one. So what would be God's answer if we put this question to him?

These verses give us some clues. Perhaps the first and amazing thing is that, unlike most of us, God doesn't want anything for himself – it's all about his hopes and longings for us.

Even more astounding, it shows us he doesn't have any favourites – it's for 'everyone'. So, guess what? That means it's for each of us. Whatever our age, gender, skin colour, abilities, tastes in music, even religion or lack of it – we can count ourselves included in God's big hope. If nothing else, this certainly tells us that God has a big heart for us as well as a big hope.

## HOPES FOR OUR SOCIETY

God hates not people but evil! He wants us to enjoy quiet and peaceful lives. Wars, street violence, sexual abuse, verbal attacks, and anything of a similar nature are abhorrent to God. God's hope for us all is that we should live in a peaceful environment. He wants us to be able to walk the streets at night and feel completely safe. He wants us to be able to walk out of our homes and leave the door unlocked without any anxiety that things will be stolen or the place trashed. He wants our parks to be places of beauty not litter and vandalism, he wants our schools to be stimulating and safe and the workplace to be affirming and fulfilling.

So people working towards any of these features are seriously helping God fulfil his hopes. These things and these people bring pleasure to God. What a wonderful opportunity not only to brighten up our lives but to put a smile on God's face too.

## HOPES FOR OUR SALVATION

God takes delight in a peaceful and positive environment. But he has an even deeper and brighter hope for us. The words keep occurring: 'Saviour', 'be saved', and there are more in the following verses. But what on earth does it mean?

It certainly includes setting us free from everything that traps us – whether it's our DNA, the way we were brought up, the consequences of our decisions or indecisions, or the people who manipulate or oppress us. It involves releasing us from dependence on things for our wellbeing and identity, so that we can flourish.

Yet there is something even better: God wants to overcome the barriers that keep us apart from him. He wants us to know that our real home is with him and that he is longing to welcome us into his love, security and friendship. Indeed, he knows that with him there is the power to be free and to flourish.

*Father God, thank you that you long for the best for all of us and that through Jesus you have acted decisively to bring your hopes about. Thank you also that we can join in your hopes through our prayers. Amen.*

# Sharing hope

*But have reverence for Christ in your hearts... Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.*

*1 Peter 3: 15–16*

## GET IT!

Like chocolates – hope is for sharing. Unlike chocolates, the more you share your Christian hope the more you'll have to enjoy yourself! First, though, we do need to have it ourselves.

Our hope comes from God. It's more than a naturally optimistic take on life. God puts hope into us. It's based on the resurrection of Jesus. That amazing event is the guarantee that things are truly changing for the better. But God doesn't leave it as something hanging outside the window of our lives – an historical fact that we look at. Our hope is 'the hope you have in you'.

Through the Holy Spirit God puts that objective ground for hope inside us too – Peter calls it a 'living hope'. Then it becomes a personal reality we can experience. It's like the difference between looking at a CD with great music on it and being able to listen to the music. Then it can excite us and get us going.

## EXPLAIN IT!

But first we have to live in such a way that people sense there is something different about us. 'Why are you clearing up the litter in our park?' 'Why do you visit people in the care home?' 'Why do you bother to help excluded kids?' 'Why do you go to church on Sundays?' 'Why do you respect women more than some other people do?' 'Why don't you get as much out of your bloke as you can?' 'Why do you have your teenager back?'

All these are ways in which people might ask us to explain the hope we have in Jesus. They won't necessarily use the set words! So we need to be alert to the real question behind their comments. We know that it all flows from the amazing goodness and kindness of God who loves us, forgives us, befriends us and wants us to help him. Others need to know the why and the what of the hope we have.

## JUST DO IT!

'Sorry, but I don't know as much as the Vicar!' 'My homegroup leader could probably tell you!' 'I'm not really as good as you seem to think!' Maybe all of these could occasionally be the right response, but normally when someone has spotted something about us they don't quite get, what they most need is for us to say, 'Well, Jesus is making me/us different.'

'Jesus helps us see everyone (including ourselves) and everything, differently. Somehow, his resurrection changes all life. God is telling us he thinks we're worth it – even the death of Jesus. He loves us – that is amazing. Even more, he wants us to love him and be his friends. There is nothing so evil or final that he cannot alter it completely. Not even a brutal death phases him! So we have this new take on life – the future's bright – the future's God's and so can we be. That's why I have this hope, and do you know what? You can have it too.'

*Father God, please change me so that others see something of Jesus in me. Please help me, when they ask, to point them to him and all he does for us. Amen.*