



HOPE-FILLED FUTURE

6 Ways to
Encourage
Yourself

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Introduction

When you think about your future, what comes to mind? Can you see yourself growing and succeeding—or is it hard to imagine moving beyond your current situation?

Much of your life up to this point has been determined by your upbringing, surroundings and circumstances. Especially as children, we aren't in control of the many things that influence our "default settings."

While you may not be fully responsible for where you are today, you do have a responsibility to decide where you're going to go from here. If you don't make that decision, you'll continue going the same way you've always gone. So, what do you want in life?

But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve.

Joshua 24:15 (NLT)

This is where people get hung up on destiny, thinking they have to figure out the *one thing* they're supposed to do. Now, God has given us purpose and principles in His Word to guide us, but He won't stop you from picking a direction. He gave you free will. **You have the ability to determine what you plant in your heart and what kind of person you will be.**

If you aren't satisfied with the harvest you're getting in life, God can't violate your free will and plant new seeds (or beliefs) in your heart Himself. That's up to you. He has given you all the tools you need.

When you think ahead, do you want your life to make a difference? Do you want to wake up every day with a sense of purpose and hope? Do you want to enjoy a great marriage, awesome friendships and a family that pursues Jesus? You can begin to establish that future now!

It starts with making a decision. When you decide to set your heart on God's Word, **you'll develop great beliefs about who God is and who He made you to be.** Let's go over six specific ways you can build a future full of hope, purpose and fulfillment.

Encourage Yourself

It's crucial to develop the ability to strengthen ourselves.

How do you encourage yourself? It's awesome when someone is around to share a timely word of encouragement. Unfortunately, we don't always have that luxury. Issues may come up when we don't have someone there to strengthen us—whether it's financial trouble, a parenting or spousal issue, or a health problem. That's why it's crucial to **develop the ability to strengthen ourselves.**

Whatever was written beforehand is meant to instruct us in how to live. The Scriptures impart to us encouragement and inspiration so that we can live in hope and endure all things.

Romans 15:4 (TPT)

As three-part beings, we are spirit, soul and body. Although we can be encouraged in all of these areas, the most powerful way is spiritually. Romans 8:5-6 tells us the spirit world is dominant.

Taking care of your body to keep it healthy can be uplifting, and physical exercise can refresh and strengthen you. If you're feeling down mentally or emotionally, changing your environment can help. If you've been staring at the bills or arguing with your spouse, you might refresh yourself by going for a walk or grabbing coffee with a friend.

But how do we encourage ourselves spiritually? One of the best ways is by daily meditating on God's Word. Focusing on it and getting it into our hearts is vital. I'm not talking about memorizing Scripture, but by reading it and absorbing God's Word deep into our hearts.

When you need a boost, draw power from God's Word. Speak His incredible promises over your life confidently. Own them as yours because they are! You can strengthen yourself with His power and provision—that type of encouragement is always there for the taking!

Stand Against Discouragement

Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.

Did you know that encouraging yourself influences those around you?

First Samuel chapter 30 provides an example of the power of encouraging yourself in God and its effect on others. David and his men had just returned home to discover their houses had been destroyed by the Amalekites. Their wives, children and all their possessions had been taken. David and his men “wept until they were too exhausted to weep [any longer]” (1 Samuel 30:4, AMP). They were devastated! Their distress quickly turned to blame, and they turned on David.

David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him... But David felt strengthened and encouraged in the Lord his God.

1 Samuel 30:6 (AMP)

When we're discouraged, it's easy to make poor choices and say or do hurtful things. But in the midst of this discouragement, notice what David did. While in distress, surrounded by despair, with no one else to encourage him, **David found strength and encouragement in God.**

In fact, David not only strengthened himself in the Lord, but his encouragement started sweeping through the camp. His entire military rallied again, and in the end they successfully recovered everything and everyone. David's encouragement in God spread beyond himself to influence the hearts of six hundred warring men who went from broken and discouraged to following their leader to victory!

Billy Graham once said, “Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.” David would definitely agree! **The way we lead influences everyone around us.** You don't have to give in to discouragement.

Find encouragement in Christ, and watch how your influence spreads!

Strengthen Yourself With Prayer

When Jesus prayed, it strengthened Him to continue on and fulfill the call of God on His life!

Prayer can strengthen you, but not all types of prayer.

Many of us were raised to believe prayer involves begging, bugging and pleading with God to get Him to do something. However, at the root of begging and pleading is the **misbelief that God is unwilling or is withholding** what it is we're praying for. Contrary to this idea, the Bible tells us to ask and believe. (See Luke 11:13, John 16:24, Matthew 21:22, Philippians 4:6-7, Matthew 7:7-11.)

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV)

Notice that Hebrews 4:16 doesn't suggest we timidly creep up to God, hat in hand, tugging on His sleeve until we get an answer to our prayers. It says we are to come *boldly*, and to where? The throne of discipline? The throne of unapproachability? No—the throne of *grace*! **Grace is God's unearned favour and it is your right as a believer to approach boldly and ask for what you need.**

So how can prayer strengthen us? When we understand that God wants and has the best for us, it begins to **change our beliefs, bringing them into alignment with the truths in His Word.**

Whatever you're dealing with, remember you have God's grace—His ability. Thank Him in advance for what He's already promised you. You have a right to come to your heavenly Father to be strengthened in His presence and power. You can talk candidly with Him, like a child would talk to an incredibly invested, loving parent.

Jesus often spent time in prayer. When Jesus prayed, it strengthened Him to continue on and fulfill the call of God on His life.

Come boldly to the One who loves you more than anything!

Make the Choice to Be Grateful

Gratefulness has a way of kindling joy deep within us.

If you want to sense the presence of God, start with thankfulness.

On rough days we may think, "Well, I have nothing to be thankful for." But truthfully, we always do. We just need to make a choice—we can focus on the problems in our life or **focus on God and give thanks for all that we have in Him.**

You see, even in the midst of deep hurt, true loss or grieving, we hold the power to choose gratitude. Now we certainly aren't thankful for pain or losses. But **despite them, we can be thankful** for an ever-present God who loves us and never leaves us. In the middle of whatever it is we're dealing with, God is right by our side, in the thick of it with us.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.

Psalm 100:4 (NKJV)

Now, happiness in life comes from happenings. It's the activities we enjoy, like going for coffee, bowling or taking vacations. But joy has a different source.

Gratefulness has a way of kindling joy deep within us so that even in the midst of heartache, we can say, "Father, I choose You. God, You're so good." **Consciously choosing to speak words of thankfulness** causes your spirit to stir up the hope and encouragement found in Jesus.

The world without Christ knows a discouragement so deep, it feels hopeless. But as believers, **even on our hardest days, we still have Jesus.** That can fuel our souls with the greatest hope, and it's something to be thankful for!

Learn to be thankful every day to God and for the people around you. And don't be shy to express it! When we begin to focus on thankfulness, it makes a heart-changing difference!

Your Thoughts are Seeds

Whatever is in your heart is determining your future.

In Mark 4, Jesus told a parable that He said was the key to understanding the rest of His teachings—the story of the farmer scattering seed. This parable has been taught countless times, but if we're not careful we can miss the stunning truths within it. I'm going to focus on one in particular.

God is not the farmer. You are. In other words, you are responsible for what you plant in your heart. Proverbs 4:23 tells us to guard our heart, which means that job is under our control.

Whatever is in your heart is determining your future. It's deciding who you'll be, the emotions you'll consistently experience and even the things you struggle with.

Then Jesus said to them, "If you can't understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables?"

Mark 4:13 (NLT)

You can pray for a breakthrough, but that's only part of the equation. The truth is, **you won't harvest what you have not planted.** God created a system of seedtime and harvest. Do you want pumpkins? Plant pumpkins. Do you want more joy? Plant His promises of joy.

God cannot trespass on your free will and do the planting for you. The good news is, **He has given you everything you need in His Word.** As you meditate on His promises and principles, you're planting His beliefs in your heart. Those seeds will begin to grow peace, joy and purpose in your life.

Today, roll up your sleeves and decide to do the work of a farmer. Cultivate great beliefs about your identity, relationships, money, health and every other area. **As you plant the truth in your heart, Holy Spirit goes to work to produce a great harvest!**

Meditate on Purpose

Worrying is negative meditation.

Meditation is one of the most powerful ways to encourage yourself!

Everyone meditates, although few do it on purpose. Without even realizing it, we often meditate on the future. **Biblical meditation is different. It's about picturing the future—filled with God's promises—in your mind.** Memory looks back into your past, but the type of meditation I'm talking about looks ahead into your future.

Television, books and social media often feed us our content for meditation. For example, maybe you're struggling with a job situation and you start focusing on newscasts about the poor economy. Or while watching documentaries on cancer, you begin to fear you'll become one of the statistics they're quoting. You have mentally moved into your future and are meditating on the worst possible scenario.

Worrying is negative meditation. It causes you to think about the future and picture scenes of defeat. As you continue meditating like that, you start giving into what you might think is reasonable. But consider this: reasonable people always fit themselves to their surroundings. They don't bring change; they accept the negative. **But unreasonable people push against the status quo.** Their faith in God's grace flows out of them and changes everything!

I'm not saying it's unreasonable to watch shows on different topics or watch the news, but don't meditate on it. Be informed, but also recognize that **you are blessed and are an overcomer.**

I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways.

Psalms 119:15 (NKJV)

We need to decide what to focus on. Do you spend time in the Word of God daily, encouraging yourself in what He says about your future?

Conclusion

Make the decision to pursue God first!

We all know we can learn from experience. But experience is not the best teacher. How many of us wish we could go back and redo parts of our lives, knowing what we know now? **The best teacher is Holy Spirit.** He can bring things to our attention ahead of time.

With that in mind, I want to tie this eBook together by diving into the wisdom we can find in God's Word about setting priorities. When you read Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, it seems pretty depressing. Yet the book of Ecclesiastes has a profound purpose that we need to grasp.

"Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!" What do people get for all their hard work under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 (NLT)

All throughout Ecclesiastes, the writer (commonly believed to be King Solomon) is trying to show us how meaningless it is to pursue pleasure, prosperity or position. These are all great things—and of course God wants to bless you—but **it's a mistake to set anything other than Him as our top priority.**

Don't waste your life thinking that anything else will satisfy you. There's not a person alive who will fulfill the love you need at a heart level. There's no task or position that can meet that need. People pursue these things at the cost of their relationships and health, then at the end of their lives they wonder, "What in the world have I done?"

Take it from the wisest man who ever lived besides Jesus: Solomon. He was incredibly wealthy and skilled, yet he didn't find happiness in those things.

Re-evaluate your priorities. **Everything is futile outside of God's love, so make the decision to pursue Him first.** That choice will fill you with more hope for the future than anything else could!