

Hope Always Wins by Jon K. Ralston

Many years ago, I took a tour of a cave and learned a lesson that has stuck with me ever since. At one point, deep into the cave, the young lady who was guiding us turned off all the lights so that we could experience what true darkness was. After a short pause, she turned on a very small light that was not much brighter than a birthday candle. As we looked at that small light, we realized that even that tiny glow was enough to illuminate the faces of the other people on our tour, despite the vastness of that cavern. Now, if I turned to face the cave wall, I could ignore the light but, as long as I focused on the source I would always see it and witness its illuminating effect. In other words, I learned that no matter how dark the darkness is, light ALWAYS wins, as long as I look toward it.

Two years ago, after working for the same organization for twenty five years, I found myself out of work, a victim of budget cutting measures in a tough economy. Shortly thereafter, my wife also lost her professional-level job so, for the first time, we had no predictable income, no health insurance and low prospects of replacing the jobs and benefits we had anytime soon. After the initial shock wore off, I realized that we were just one of millions of American families facing similar tough times and that the only way out was to focus on the Source of the solution, not the darkness around us.

We prayed, we talked with others for guidance and advice and went about the work of finding work. Week after week of diligent effort was focused on securing professional positions again, but it was clear that was not going to happen right away. We used any and all available

funds to pay bills and maintain the house and finally took part-time, short-term and even commission based work, just to generate income. In time, we secured more stable work but like so many others who are unemployed or underemployed, our income was about 70% less than it had been, still with no medical insurance.

In the meantime, I was able to do some other important and rewarding things. For the previous 25 years my job required that I work 3 or 4 nights a week and at least 3 weekends a month so I was not able to spend much time with my family. Likewise, I did as much at church as I could but was severely limited on my participation beyond one-time or short-term commitments. This was counter to my goals since my father had been an appointee for years and I had always wanted to carry his mantle of ministry, but my job prevented it so many times.

One day, when reading my Evangelist's Blessing I found a line that says, "There shall come an opportunity for greater responsibility in God's service—do not let the things of this world entice you away from that which He will have you to do...Make the choice that will bring you the peace of mind that He will grant to all who do His will." Once out of work, I suddenly had the time to do more with my daughter, with my church and with other meaningful projects when I quit worrying about the job I no longer had. I began working with our Jr. and Sr. High youth group and ultimately served as pastor of our congregation. And, I found that peace that was promised.

We've now done what millions of others have done: we've cut back on almost everything and found we can do without a lot of things that we used to think were very important. We don't

eat out or go to movies, clothing comes from second hand stores, we buy store brand groceries, etc. But, we've also been sustained by an occasional gift from a friend or family member, usually at a most critical time.

Not long ago we had to have one of our cars towed to a shop for emergency service. Luckily we had renewed our auto club membership so there were no towing costs but the repair amounted to almost \$200.00. We had just enough cash in the bank to cover it as long as we didn't spend anything else until the next paychecks were deposited, but other bills would have to be put on hold. The next day, someone handed me an envelope with a check in it for \$200.00 saying, "I was led this morning that you needed this right now." I was amazed and shared how we had just had to spend that amount on emergency services.

But, there's more to this story. After we picked up the car, we found it was still not working properly so it was towed, again, to the same repair shop. This time, the mechanic found the real cause of the problem and repaired it. But, he felt bad about missing it the first time so he credited back the entire \$200.00 from the first visit toward the new parts and labor for this job. Our final total for the repair was \$281.00. And amazingly, my wife picked up a one-time contract computer installation job that paid her \$81.00!

My father loved to preach on the Great Commission in Matthew 28. I can still hear his voice when he'd quote that passage as he would stress the phrase, "...and lo, I am with you always..." The Lord has been with me and my family and sustained us through some turbulent

times in the past couple of years. Sometimes it's just a sense of calm, sometimes it's dramatic, and sometimes it's finding a way to provide \$281.00 exactly when we need it.

In light of all of this, I can't worry about our future because I know the Lord will show us the way to go and will continue to bless us, if we are faithful. Darkness is not where I choose to spend my time—I seek “the buoyant freedom from despair” we sing about in “*The Weight of Past and Fruitless Guilt*.” I seek the joy, hope love and peace of Christ and know that hope is foundational in my journey. And I know that, as long as I focus on my source of strength rather than the troubled waters below me, I will be upheld in His love. Just as light beats out darkness if you focus on it, in a world of fear and despair, hope ALWAYS wins, if you embrace it.