A GIFT FOR HARD SEASONS

16 Sayings to Bring You Hope in Hard Times

Words that have carried pastors and their people through grief, weariness, and long nights.



Hope for the Triangle

HOPEFORTHETRIANGLE.ORG

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The holidays don't put hard things on pause.

If this season finds you grieving, worn out, or just not feeling the cheer everyone else seems to have, you're not alone.

We asked pastors from churches across the Triangle what words have carried them and their people through hard times. Some come from Scripture, others from poets, writers, and theologians. All of them are honest about how hard this life can be.



Read them slowly. Keep the one that speaks to you, and pass it along to someone who needs it.

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01

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

LAMENTATIONS 3:21–23 — NRSVue

> Lamentations is a book of grief, written after Jerusalem fell. This line sits right in the middle of it, with sorrow on every side. The writer hasn’t gotten over anything yet. They’re remembering that God’s love showed up again today, and they choose to hope because of it.

02

“All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

JULIAN OF NORWICH — *Revelations of Divine Love*

> Julian was an anchoress in 14th-century England who lived through waves of the plague. She heard these words in a vision of Christ and wrote them down while fear filled the streets around her. Six hundred years later, people still repeat them on nights when they can’t see how things will work out.

03

“May all your days be lovely. But if they aren’t, have a beautiful, terrible day!”

KATE BOWLER

> Kate Bowler teaches at Duke Divinity School, right here in Durham. She was diagnosed with stage IV cancer at 35, and she has written honestly ever since about faith without easy answers. Her well-wish leaves room for the days that don’t go well. A hard day can still hold something good, and you don’t have to pretend it’s only one or the other.

04

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me.”

PSALM 23:4 — NRSVue

> Most of us know this psalm from funerals. The writer says it from inside the valley, with no way around in sight. What carries them through is the one walking beside them.

05

"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

> King said this after years of setbacks: jail cells, a bombed home, campaigns that stalled. He let himself feel the disappointment. He refused to let it have the final word about the future.

06

Hope is a song in a weary throat.
Give me a song of hope
And a world where I can sing it.

REV. DR. PAULI MURRAY — "Dark Testament," in *Dark Testament and Other Poems* (1970)

> Pauli Murray grew up in Durham. She became a civil rights lawyer whose work helped shape Brown v. Board of Education and Ruth Bader Ginsburg's fight against sex discrimination. In 1977 she became the first Black woman ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church. Her hope is sung by someone tired, and it asks for a world where everyone gets to sing.

07

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

ISAIAH 9:2 — NRSVue

> Many churches read this passage on Christmas Eve. Isaiah first spoke it to people living under the threat of war. The light comes to people who are still sitting in the dark.



08

‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul.

EMILY DICKINSON — c. 1861

> Dickinson wrote this around the time the Civil War began. Her hope is small and stubborn, a bird that keeps singing through the storm and never asks for anything in return.

09

“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU

> Tutu lived through the worst of apartheid in South Africa, then chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that tried to heal the country. He was also famous for his laugh. His hope came from looking straight at the darkness and still seeing light.

10

“Hope is subversive precisely because it dares to admit that all is not as it should be.”

SARAH BESSEY — *Out of Sorts: Making Peace with an Evolving Faith*

> Sarah Bessey writes for people whose faith has been shaken up. Real hope starts by telling the truth that something is wrong and it isn’t supposed to be this way. You can hope for better without pretending everything is fine.

11

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

ROMANS 8:38–39 — NRSVue

> The Apostle Paul wrote this to a small church living under the power of Rome. He names every force he can think of, death included. None of them can come between you and the love of God.

12

"Hope is a function of struggle."

BRENÉ BROWN

> Brené Brown is a researcher at the University of Houston and an Episcopalian. Drawing on psychologist C. R. Snyder's work, she describes hope as something we learn in hard seasons. Each time we get through, hope gets a little stronger.

13

“I cannot be an optimist, but I am a prisoner of hope.”

DR. CORNEL WEST — Attributed

> Cornel West borrows his phrase from the prophet Zechariah: “Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope” (Zechariah 9:12). Optimism looks at the evidence and expects things to turn out fine. Hope holds on when the evidence looks bad.



14

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

JOHN 1:5 — NRSVue

> John opens his gospel with light coming into the world. He’s honest that the darkness is still around. The light keeps shining anyway, and the darkness has never been able to put it out.

15

“Hope is believing in spite of the evidence, then watching the evidence change.”

REV. JIM WALLIS

> Jim Wallis founded Sojourners and has spent more than 50 years working for racial and economic justice. For him, hope is a choice that faith makes possible. People choose it first, act on it, and sometimes get to watch the world move.

16

“What have you learned in the dark that you could never have learned in the light?”

REV. BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR — *Learning to Walk in the Dark*

> Barbara Brown Taylor is an Episcopal priest and writer. She asks us to stop treating every dark season as something to escape as fast as we can. Some things about God, and about ourselves, only show up there.



You don’t have to carry this alone

If the holidays feel heavy this year, a few churches in the Triangle area are holding quiet services for anyone who is grieving, lonely, or worn down. You’re welcome to come as you are.

DEC
16
WEDNESDAY

A SERVICE OF HOPE FOR THE GRIEVING

Lord of Life Lutheran

Garner · 6:30 pm

More info →

DEC
23
WEDNESDAY

BLUE CHRISTMAS

Christ the King Lutheran

Cary · 6:30 pm in the Chapel
Candles for loved ones and Holy Communion

More info →

LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO BELONG?

Find a church community near you, wherever you are in the Triangle.

hopeforthetriangle.org

Know someone who needs this? Pass it along.

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