

Fanning the Flames of Faith

I saw a homeless man today pushing his shopping cart full of junk. The cart contained everything he owned. His scraggly beard was as dirty as his matted, stringy hair. It was obvious he hadn't bathed in quite a while. The rags he wore hung loosely from his gaunt frame. What I remembered the most, however, was his eyes. Deep, dark, empty eyes that had lost all hope. Adversity had overcome his ability to believe in his dreams. Sometimes hope seems to hide in adversity's shadow. Adversity wants to convince us that it can destroy us. It taunts us and tells us there's no use to try. It wants us to give up and accept our circumstances. A young couple enters marriage with great hopes and dreams, anticipating the wonderful future they will build together. They quickly learn that adversity walks alongside their hope. He loses his job, she miscarries their first child, and they are forced to live with their parents in a house shrouded in disharmony. The question, 'Why' hangs in the air. In the beginning, there is always hope. Christopher Columbus left Spain because he had hope. The Pilgrims experienced unimaginable suffering just for the hope of freedom to worship their God. They spent two months on the Mayflower enduring taunting by the crew, sickness, storms, and death before finally landing at Plymouth Rock. They continued, however, and today we are a free nation. The early American settlers traveled in wagon trains, thousands of miles across unfamiliar and dangerous terrain, just for the hope of a better life. Women buried their husbands along the wagon trail, yet they persevered and continued on their long journey west, their hope was their only comfort. Adversity was the constant companion of those heroes who struggled for a better way of life. Yet, hope was always close by, ready to encourage and nourish their battered faith. I once heard a pastor preach a message titled, There is No Such Thing as Hope. His premise was that we must have faith. "Faith is to be sought after with everything in us. Hope is useless and unnecessary. It is faith that moves mountains," he shouted, "not hope." While it is true, faith is the drive that ultimately fuels our endeavors, hope is the spark that ignites faith's flames. How can we be confident that we will obtain our desires without the seed of hope from which to build? Before every great work of art, before a nation is formed, before cathedrals are built, before a new life is born, there is hope. Hope is the seed of every great enterprise. It cannot be, if there is no hope. Adversity challenges every endeavor, every dream, and plan. We invest our finances, our time, and our energy, commitment, and reputation and adversity laughs aloud, calling us foolish. The lump of disappointment in our throat nearly chokes the life out of us as we raise our head up and ask, "Why?" We wipe our tears and look across the horizon; we can see a cloud moving toward us. What can it be? How can we endure anything else? As the cloud grows larger, we can see the blue suit with the huge red "H" on its chest. The red cape of promise flaps as it moves closer. Hope has arrived. Adversity has to step aside while hope wraps its arms around us and soothes us with words of promise. Hope fuels our faith and we can go on once again. Our dreams, desires, and promise are there for the taking. Adversity is there also, all set to destroy. Hope stands by, knowing that we will need it many times before we have achieved our dreams. For those who will let it, hope fans the flames of our faith with the promise of a better tomorrow.

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About the Author

Dr. Sharon Schuetz is an ordained minister and holds a BA in Religious Education and a Phd in Clinical Counseling Psychology. She and her husband, Michael, have been married for 33 years. They have three children and seven grandchildren. Like most writers, she has loved writing since she was a child.