

FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Pastor of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



THERE'S ALWAYS HOPE

One of the privileges of my role is that it gives me the opportunity to speak to people about what's happening in their lives. People often share with me their hopes and dreams, their anxieties and questions and sometimes their foibles and idiosyncrasies. To be able to hear about someone's deepest thoughts is a real honour and my constant desire is that I never compromise or abuse the trust people put in me.

Recently I've had the opportunity to discuss with a couple of twenty-somethings their future plans and to be honest I was somewhat taken aback by their apparent disinterest and lack of vision for their lives. Now I know I can look back to the time when I was their age (yes, I can remember that far back) and I to be honest my "career map" wasn't all planned out. I had some idea where I was intending to go in my life and having married when I was just 20, I'd figured out that doing nothing wasn't an option if my wife and I were going to have a fulfilling life. As it happened even if I had some thoughts about my future direction subsequent events totally changed the course of my working life – but that's another story.

So it wasn't the usual malaise of "whatever" that often affects the lives of the young that concerned me about the conversation we were having. It was much deeper than that.

When we have the faith to believe that God truly loves us we'll have unquestioning hope for the future.

Basically the argument went along the lines of: "There's no point in thinking about what will happen in the future because what future is there for any of us?"

That shocked me. I grew up during and in the aftermath of the Cold War when people expected the nuclear bomb trigger to be pressed at any moment and there wasn't much optimism about the world's short term let alone long term future. Thankfully American and Russian leaders didn't press the button, although we now understand there were some very close calls, but in the conversation that ensued with my young friends they talked about:

- The lack of opportunities in the job market even for those that have excellent degrees from good universities
- The economic recession and the need for future generations to pay back the trillions handed out to banks for the flawed judgments they've made

- World-wide political instability and the constant danger of terrorism
- The threat of global warming plus the erosion of the natural environment through deforestation, rising sea levels and climate change.

Together with our children and grand-children we all have to face significant challenges which are not easy to resolve and there are no painless options or quick fixes.

Many of us "hope" life will turn out well for us but the Biblical definition of hope is not that kind of wishful thinking or trusting to luck. Hope according to the Bible is enduring; it's never-ending; it lasts forever and it's about confidence in a God who keeps His word.

The apostle Paul says that there are three qualities that will remain: "**faith, hope and love**" with the greatest being love. But that doesn't mean faith and hope are second best – they are still eternal – and for me the fact that they are linked is significant. When we have the faith to believe that God truly loves us we'll have unquestioning hope for the future.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah makes this claim on behalf of God, "**For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.**"

Now this passage was specifically written for Jewish people whose land had been invaded with many of the people captured and taken away to what is now modern day Iraq to become slaves. Yet according to Jeremiah God was promising them that, even in the midst of these incredibly difficult times, He was still with them and would bring them through it. Even though many would never return to their homeland, there was still a purpose and a future for them.

Some may think these encouraging words are merely wishful platitudes or even political spin from a spiritual leader. But I believe it was significantly more than that. Life is not always as bleak as it seems and when the chips are down often that's when we find the true nature of our character and with God's help can rise above our circumstances and whatever life throws at us.

And with the confidence of knowing that God promises He will never leave us or abandon us, **there is always hope.**

To find out more about the Christian faith and resources available plus information on local Churches together with contact details, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.