

A man leaves his wife and children for another woman.

A single college student gets pregnant.

A woman gives birth to a child with multiple birth defects.

A husband is left with two young children after his wife dies of breast cancer.

For years a couple struggles with infertility.

An adult son strays from his family and rejects his Christian upbringing.

These are not newspaper headlines; they are stories from people I know. The pain was real and friends and family were helpless to fix the situation. Each one didn't have a storybook ending either. But each of these people would tell you what they learned about God through the situation. They would tell you how He cared for them. They would say that their faith was stretched and strengthened because of the struggle.

I am confident that the times I've grown the most have been when I went through something difficult – when I was at the bottom and felt helpless. What got me through was hope. Not shallow hope (e.g. I hope it stops raining) but the kind of hope that motivates. The kind that protects us from losing sight of what life is supposed to be about. A hope that is rooted in God's Word and holds on to His promises.

As I finished writing *Walking Dusty* this morning, I heard the story of the death of a 28-year-old Marine that was killed in Afghanistan last week. My son will be serving next year, so the reality of this soldier's death hit too close to home for me. Somewhere there is a family grieving the loss of their son and brother. They won't see him again and their lives will never be the same.

What do we do when someone we know is suffering?!? The world offers prescription meds, alcohol, and illegal drugs. It deals short-term fixes like hookups and bar scenes. But let's get real. When you're in a pit of despair, that pit follows you wherever you go. And none of those things takes away the pain that's deep in your heart.

But this is why God allows us to experience our own brokenness: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. He wants to use us to provide hope to those that don't know Him. And **He** is the only one that can heal our broken hearts.

Questions to Consider:

The Greatest Commandment is “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37, 39) What do I hope to do with this love relationship with my Creator? How does God want to use me to show hope to others?

Am I hopeful? For what am I hoping? Is it something that will last?

Am I feeling hopeless? Have I ever felt hopeless?

Have I tried religion or Jesus Christ the living God?

Am I able to tell others about the hope that is within me?

If I have Jesus, does He have all of my heart? Do I seek Him with all of my heart?

Am I willing to let God use me?

Do I believe that God comforts me in all my troubles? (2 Cor. 1:3-4) Do I allow Him to comfort me?

Whatever God has given me, do I use it to bless others for the honor and glory of God?

Dan described Jeff and Katelyn as oozing with hope. Do I ooze hope?

What is life supposed to be about? What motivates me?

What should I do when I know someone is suffering?

When you were hurting, what things have people told you that were meant as support but really just made you feel worse?

This month's memory verse:

Additional verses: 1 Peter 1:3, Jeremiah 29:11-13, 1 Peter 3:15, Colossians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Isaiah 61:1-4

Reminders:

12.11 – The Gathering at SHU at 10am!!! “*Hope is Born - Part II*”

This week we look at an early church story of hope. How it changed and shaped the people and the culture in which they lived in. Hope doesn't change, people & culture change, what does hope today look like?

12.18 – The Gathering at SHU at 10am!!! “*Hope is Born - Part III*”

Come hear some powerful & life changing stories of hope, real and authentic hope. This is the stuff the world is looking for!

12.24 – Christmas Eve (morning) Gathering at SHU at 10am!!! “*Hope is Born*”

Finally, we end our month with a Christmas celebration on Christmas Eve morning. Hope is born! That is the reason millions of people take part in Christmas, but have we missed it? Come take a deeper look with us!