

# HOPE

## IN THE 2020s

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR OUR TIME

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# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction.....                                   | 1  |
| Hope in Honesty and Loyalty .....                   | 7  |
| Lemue R. T. Blackett                                |    |
| Yes; & .....  | 13 |
| Cynthia Vacca Davis                                 |    |
| Embers of Hope Dance from the Fires of Trauma ..... | 19 |
| Rebekah Drumsta                                     |    |
| Hope in a Bigger God.....                           | 27 |
| Trey Ferguson                                       |    |
| Hope Is Not a Feeling—It’s Fuel.....                | 33 |
| Brandon Darrell Lane Flanery                        |    |
| Hope in What We are For.....                        | 41 |
| Matt Kendziera                                      |    |
| Finding Hope in the Small Things.....               | 47 |
| Kate J. Meyer                                       |    |
| Reading Brings Hope .....                           | 53 |
| David Morris  |    |
| The Pessimist’s Dilemma .....                       | 61 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| R. Scott Okamoto                         |    |
| And When That Mockingbird Does Sing..... | 67 |
| Julia Rocchi                             |    |
| Hoping for the Best, For Real.....       | 75 |
| Frank Rogers Jr.                         |    |
| Hope in All That Remains in You .....    | 83 |
| Mick Silva                               |    |
| I'm Putting My Hope in Love.....         | 89 |
| Marla Taviano                            |    |
| Contributors.....                        | 95 |

# Introduction

**The 2020s got off** to a rough start. January 21, 2020, marked the first known case of the virus that causes COVID-19, completely altering our society in the United States and causing millions of people to get sick and one million deaths as of this writing.

George Floyd was killed March 25, 2020, in an act of police brutality that re-ignited conflict over the ongoing racism and inequalities that so many want to pretend are not there.

A rancorous four-year political season culminated on January 6, 2021, in an angry mob of supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump that vandalized the U.S. Capitol building, threatened the safety of political leaders, and caused a number of deaths and countless cases of trauma.

On February 24, 2022, an authoritarian-led Russia invaded Ukraine seemingly because its leader felt threatened at the expansion of pro-democracy countries joining NATO. The relative global peace in the post-WWII era almost seems up for grabs. What's more, if the pandemic hadn't already created a challenge for our economy in

stagnant wages, inflation, and supply chain issues, Russia's war in Ukraine put that challenge at a higher level.

The effects of climate change seem to be more obvious every year, with more summertime forest fires in the West and storms in the East, and that's just in the United States. Psychologists have acknowledged that climate anxiety is real.

School mass shootings, unconscionably, seem a regular occurrence, the suicide rate is up among teens, and there seems to be an ongoing loneliness epidemic. We're often split off from each other in our own news and social media enclaves. Even our churches, often thought to be the glue holding us together, have disappointed so many.

The scope of these problems cannot be underestimated, and they have no doubt heightened our stress levels. Solving today's challenges will take organizing and leadership in our local, national, and global communities. While there's much work to do, any efforts to bring light and improvement begin with the basic unit of hope that can and inevitably must be given voice on the individual level—units of hope especially in spite of hopelessness.

Hope springs eternal, as we like to say, but where do we find that spring? Let's take that analogy further. One of the things about natural springs is that, geologically speaking, underground water can build up pressure simply by the work of gravity, such as water inside a hill or a mountain. Sometimes you only need to pound a steel pipe into the ground at the bottom of that hill or mountain and the pressure will cause water to spout from the pipe, seemingly without end.

## HOPE IN THE 2020s

So too with us humans. We have hope always building up inside us, both individually and collectively. There's a gravitational pull to it, and it's hard to stop it no matter how cynical we sometimes become.

*Hope in the 2020s* is an attempt to tap into that refreshing water for the time we live in. Each of the essay contributors that follow offer an antidote, repellent, Patronus charm, or some method to catapult them into hope.

The 2020s don't seem to be getting any easier, that's for sure. We're perhaps living in a decade that will likely be seen as an historical turning point, but to what we're turning to is anybody's guess, and we're going to need to find hope wherever we can.

David Morris  
Publisher  
Lake Drive Books

**“Me and you, we got more yesterday  
than anybody. We need some kind of  
tomorrow.”**

**Toni Morrison, *Beloved***



# Hope in a Bigger God

Trey Ferguson

**We make God sound** so small sometimes. Petty. Fragile.

Entire systematic theologies articulating exactly who (or what) God is have been constructed, disseminated, and passed down for centuries now. We got the cute lil' acronyms and everything (looking at you, TULIP). I'll be real with you—that kinda god don't sound too good to me. The love of this god even seems sorta like hate from time to time. This god ain't worried about faith. Certainty is rewarded in his kingdom. Hope is folly in the world ruled by this tiny god. What good is hope when we are already certain about the course this god would take us on?

This god has condemned our imagination. Our imagination has been cast into the lake of fire, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Without imagination, there is no hope. There is just the tomorrow we cannot muster up the energy to look forward to. We dread the future this teeny god has authored for us.

Or maybe it's just me. I could be projecting.

It's weird. Technology has done a number on what we are able to envision for ourselves. The smart phone reshaped the western world in the past fifteen years. Twitter gave us access to news headlines faster than ever before. It was dope. At first. But then the news got sort of... well... depressing. On top of that, social media also gave us access to everyone's thoughts. And if we're being honest? A lot of those thoughts stink. Ain't it funny? The same technology that placed entire libraries into the palms of our hands also made everybody's family reunions super uncomfortable. We gotta decide if we're gonna pretend we didn't see Uncle Jimbo go full Archie Bunker on Facebook, or if we're gonna give him a piece of our mind.

*The Jetsons* had us ready for flying cars by now. The cutting edge of technology left us with people wanting to "Make America Great Again" instead.

Indeed, our imagination is shot.

But what if God is really a creator? And what if humans are really created in the image of God? Not the small, petty, fragile god—but the God whose Spirit hovered over the chaos before the beginning began to begin? What if we can find hope in a bigger God? What if this God not only is desperately committed to saving our souls, but also redeeming our imaginations as well? That would require faith in something we have yet to see. That sounds like the type of stuff I'm into.

I get the appeal of asceticism. Monks are onto something. The fact of the matter is I'm too far down the other road by now. A wife and some kids—I can't just pack up and

choose a monastery at this point. So I gotta grind it out here. The idea that we can just leave behind everything we know and live a whole different life, though? That's dope. That takes courage. Chasing wholeness over familiarity sounds good until you're faced with the decision yourself. And since many of us cannot choose the monastic life, we must choose another way.

We must choose to live in hope.

The small, petty, fragile god who has arrested, caged, and condemned our imagination is pleased when we stay stuck. His right worship is the status quo. Progress is heresy. Renewal is rejection. Hope is a slippery slope.

If God is a creator, and that Creator made humanity in God's own image, then this other god is a pretender. And so we must abandon that false god. We must tear down his high places and his altars. We must shame his priests.

James Baldwin once prophetically declared, "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him." Because the God of creation never stops creating. Yes, rest is divine. But so is drawing people out of bondage into the wilderness where new identities and conventions are forged among them.

The hope that shapes tomorrow is tied to a bigger God than the one this nation was built under. This gigantic God has been there the whole time, calling for us just beyond the cages the tiny god has constructed around us. This bigger God has freed our imagination from its cell, begging us to come and join them on the other side of our hopelessness. This God offers us hope as liturgy. Progress

is not contraband in the reign of this God. Joy and rest are the currencies that matter. They appear whenever true worship—love and justice—have been carried out.

Like a midwife, hope stands ready to deliver us into the waiting arms of a God who is far bigger than we've been able to conceptualize while separated from our imaginations. The God who created—before the beginning began to begin—is present. Holding the hand of our imagination. Ready for a reunion. Ready to inspire. Ready to rehumanize. There is no limit to where hope can lead you, for the God who authored it exists beyond the scope of every thought we've ever had.

There is hope in a bigger God still.

Trey Ferguson

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**Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to  
the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the  
impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the  
never haves, then listen close to me...**

**Anything can happen, child.**

**Anything can be.**

**Shel Silverstein**

# Hope Is Not a Feeling—It's Fuel

Brandon Darrell Lane Flanery

**Hope is not a feeling**—it's fuel.

Let me explain...

Once upon a time, I dated a guy who liked to climb mountains.

Problem: I didn't like to climb mountains. And neither did my friends. But magically, upon meeting this man, I, mysteriously, began to like climbing mountains (funny how that works).

Then he made us climb one...

With heavy packs and terrible shoes, four of us lugged up an alpine pass, back down into a valley, and up again to the other side. The mountains we were hiking were called the Sangre de Cristo: the blood of Christ, and they would be our penance. For what you may ask? I have no fucking clue. But it must have been bad, really bad.

Like five-year-old children, my friends and I kept asking the boy who liked mountains, "Are we there yet?"

"Just another five minutes," he'd reply.

Our ankles were swollen, and our backs were bent, but we'd continue. Hope had become our fuel. We were almost there! We could do this! Just take another step!

...till another five minutes ...and another five minutes ... and another ...for two miserable hours.

"What the hell is going on? Have you been lying to us the whole time?"

"Almost! Just another five minutes. I promise I'm not lying this time. It'll be worth it."

"Why should we believe you?"

While hope is fuel, hope deferred is a brick wall.

You start the engine. Hit the accelerator. Build up speed. Thinking a magical journey up a magical mountain awaits you. But instead of magic, you've crashed into a black and yellow bullseye like the dummy you are, broken bones and bleeding heart.

While I don't have any broken bones, my heart has bled plenty of times, and I'm not just talking about a shitty mountain trip.

After coming out of evangelicalism and the closet, I've become somewhat of a cynic. The former made me question all the good and the latter made me brace for all the bad, and all for good reasons...

...Realizing that so much of what I believed has hurt people.

...Beginning to doubt what is true after so many lies.

...Losing a career in ministry after giving so much time and money.

...Betrayed by friends and family who always talked about unconditional love.

After all of it, I ultimately believe my cynicism keeps me safe, a shelter from the storm, while hope is for schmucks caught in a gale.

After an eight-hour hike, storm clouds rolled in, and the sun began to set.

“We need to stop for camp,” we said. “We can continue tomorrow.”

“Five more minutes.”

We pushed through the rain and continued on in the dark. We had come so far. We couldn’t give up now. At some point late into the night, we made it to our destination.

The boy who liked to climb mountains began to try and start a fire so we could cook our food. We were starving and cold. Hot beans sounded so nice.

While my friends pitched the tent, I gave the boy whatever dry moss and sticks I could find for kindling.

Eventually, we made a fire and gathered around to keep warm.

No one spoke. We just ate and crawled into bed. The boy and I had to share a sleeping bag because the other one got wet.

My friends and I had no idea what we were doing or what we were getting ourselves into. All we knew was that we were mad. Really mad.

Then morning came...

As the sun crept over the mountains, its rays warmed us awake. The boy who likes mountains shook me up, and he grabbed his fishing pole.



As I hemmed and hawed, stretching my back and wiping away crust from my eyes, I took in the scene...

...A turquoise alpine lake.

...A singing brook weaving through the trees.

...A tall granite cliff.

...A sprawling colorful valley.

...Greens and grays.

...Blue skies above.

...Yellow wildflowers below.

I sucked in the crisp mountain air.

"I told you it would be worth it," the boy who likes mountains said.

And in that moment, I liked them too.

Hope is fuel; it got us up the mountain.

And cynicism is shelter; it hides me from the storm.

But something is wiggling inside me lately: If I never hope, I still lose.

Sure, those who hope may be conned, but at least for a moment they're happy.

Sure, those who trust may get robbed, but at least at one point they had possessions.

Sure, we may get suckered up the mountain, but at least we saw an alpine lake.

While hope deferred and betrayal suck, shaking our foundation, at least we had an up before we had a down.

I guess what I'm saying is, I'm starting to learn we all get hurt, regardless of if we hide in the house or climb the Blood of Christ. But wouldn't it be nice to hope for at least a little? Wouldn't it be nice to get excited about what's beyond the bend?

Which makes me realize hope is not just fuel, it's also an act, a courageous, idiotic act: a choice ...a lie even ...a performance, a performance that makes us smile, makes us laugh, makes us cry, makes us feel.

At the end of the day, I think feeling—both the good and the bad—is better than lying down before we ever rise.

And who knows, maybe this time, we'll actually rise.

Which brings me to my final point.

Yes, hope is fuel; yes, hope is an act; but most of all, I am learning that hope is doubt, doubt that maybe this time it won't go so wrong; that maybe this time it might not be so bad. Maybe, just maybe, this time our destination is around the next bend.

“Just five more minutes.”

Brandon Darrell Lane Flanery  
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*Stumbling: A Sassy Memoir about  
Coming Out of Evangelicalism*

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