

Watch Movie Clip of George and Mary walking home after the dance.

What are your hopes and dreams for life? In the movie clip we watched, George Bailey shared his hopes and dreams. He wanted to leave town, to make something big for himself, to see the world. Mary, we discover later in the movie, simply hoped to spend life with George, right there in their hometown. What are your hopes and dreams for life?

Today we are beginning a new sermon series. It is called, *What Makes a Wonderful Life*. We are going to be looking at scripture and reflecting upon this classic movie, "It's A Wonderful Life," as we explore this theme. Today, we are looking at what is the role of hope.

Hope plays an important part in the building of a life that is wonderful. It is the fuel that can drive us forward. It is like a rubber band that pulls us into our future.

But simply having hope is no guarantee that what we hope for will come to pass. We know that, because we have lived that. The movie reminds us of that as well. George Bailey hopes to leave town, to learn and grow and to make something of himself. As his life unfolds he is never able to leave town. He is not able to get the education he desires. And every time he had plans to bust out of the city, something tragic happens and his plans change and he can't quite make it out of the town.

Even though George's hopes and dreams don't always come true, he learns to live a good life, a wonderful life. And I believe that we can too. Our scripture for today reminds us how to live, so that hope can have a chance to shape our world for the better. *The first thing our scripture reminds me of, is how important it is to trust God. To you O Lord, I lift up my soul. In you, O my God, I trust.*

A wonderful life, filled with hope, means that we are going to work at placing our trust in God. The main attitude to pursue, in the hopes that we build, is one of being in a partnership with God.

So often, when we are hoping and making dreams, it is easy to exclude God from those hopes and dreams. It is not that most of us are intentional about leaving God out of our plans. But it is easy to allow God to be excluded from our hopes and dreams because of all that we have going on in life. We let work get in the way. Or we let our worries about life or family members get in the way. There are so many things that we can allow to simply edge out God. What about you? Have you allowed life to edge out God?

What the psalmist is inviting us to do is to place our trust in God, to build a partnership with God, for how we live each day.

*The second thing this scripture reminds me of is how important it is build practices into our life that help us recognize the presence of God. Make me to know your ways O Lord, teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me . . .*

We have talked often of practices that are helpful for us to build into our lives. John Wesley divided up these practices into two main areas: Those practices that we do to increase the practice of our love for God. Wesley called them works of piety. Things like . . .

- ✚ Reading the Bible Every Day.
- ✚ Engaging in group study, being a part of a small group.
- ✚ Praying every day.
- ✚ Attending to Worship at least weekly.

The second main area was how we lived out our faith in the world. Wesley called these works of mercy. It involved things like . . .

- ✚ Doing good to others, visiting hospitals, elderly, lonely.
- ✚ Engaging in practices of mission to make the world a better place.

What about you? What of these practices do you need to build more intentionally into your life?

Hope plays an important role in allowing us to live a wonderful life. But for me, it is hope that is grounded in the faith of a loving, caring God. That is the kind of hope that is worthwhile building.

Maybe you have heard that old story about the farmer's donkey that fell into a deep well. The farmer looked at his donkey down there so deep. He knew that he couldn't get him out alone. But he also knew that if he didn't get him out the well would go bad.

Then he got an idea. He decided that since his well would go bad with a dead donkey down there and he would have to dig a new well, he started digging and throwing the dirt down on his donkey, to bury him in the bottom of the well.

At first the donkey made such a noise down in the bottom of the well. But after a time as more and more dirt came piling on, the noise quit. Finally, to the farmer's great surprise, the donkey stepped out of the well, when there was enough dirt thrown in.

What happened is when the farmer threw dirt in, it landed on the donkey, he would shake the dirt off, and step on it. And that is how he made it out of the well, dirt would land, he would shake it off and step on it. Instead of letting the dirt overwhelm him and kill him, he used it to help free him.

Sometimes we look at the future and it scares us. Sometimes we look at the future and it appears overwhelming and we are even tempted to give up or run away. But building a wonderful life, fueled by hope

means that when the dirt comes down upon us, we will learn to shake it off and trust God.

In these days, may we learn to build a life, fueled by hope through trust in God.

Amen.