

Sermon Outline for Heck Jones Offering Speakers:

Scripture: Watchword: Relentless Hope

2022 Scripture "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." (Romans 12:9-16 NIV)

Background of Passage:

There is so much in this passage that we could delve into, but I am going to focus on verse 12 as we think about "Relentless Hope." Paul had been a Christian for about ten years when he wrote this book to the believers in Rome while he was in Corinth. He shares that though he has not met them yet, he is praying for them and hopes to be able to visit them soon. The book of Romans is one of the most read and reread books of the Bible; We use the "Romans Road" as a tool to present the gospel many times and we often have new believers start their study of what it means to be a Christian by reading it. Paul spends eleven chapters laying out the gospel and the doctrine of God's love for us while we were sinners. In the beginning of chapter 12, he explains how we are to continue to grow in our faith as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds and how we use our gifts to serve the church. By the time we get to our passage today, he jumps into some very specific instructions as to how our transformed lives should be lived. Some people often refer to this as the time that ministers stop teaching or preaching and "start meddling." This illustrates for Christians the absolute importance of both what we believe and how we live out those beliefs.

Focus Verse: Romans 12:12 reads: Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

When the Committee tasked with the responsibility of choosing the theme and resources for our 2022 Focus began to meet, they knew they were to try to model the national focus of Relentless, but also to develop a final understanding since this is the third and last year for that theme. As we often look back and marvel at how God directs us, we now know that we have been called upon to be relentless in many new ways in the past two and half years as we have dealt with covid pandemic, new strains and after effects; with political, cultural, and economic changes. With God's direction, the committee came to a unanimous decision that we needed to have Relentless Hope for 2022.

How do we have relentless hope? Paul's directions are clear-- We do this through renewing our minds to the truth of God's word, serving and blessing the body of Christ through our gifts and above all by loving and being devoted to one another. Romans 12 is a call to live a life of peace, faithfully serving the Lord in all things and overcoming the evil of the world by faith. This in turn gives us joyful hope that allows us to endure and be patient in affliction by being faithful in prayer.

Outline Points: **Relentless HOPE**

- The Need for Hope
- The Source of Hope
- The Work of Hope
- WMU's goal is to Present, Promote and Practice Hope

The Need for Hope

WMU has the same mission statement as Jesus gave the disciples in His last words—the Great Commission—Matthew 28:19-20 to go and tell the gospel. We are a missions organization whose purpose is to challenge, prepare, and equip Christian believers to be radically involved in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Paul tells us that we all need hope—that we are all sinners and fallen short and that without hope the wages of this sin is death. Even after placing our faith in Christ's sacrifice to give us salvation, Christians still need to have hope. It motivates us to move forward because life is a never-ending flow of hardships and trials. When we have hope, we can navigate those turbulent waters without despair. We can have joy and peace despite our circumstances because we know we have a God that works all things for our good. As Desmond Tutu said, "hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."

The Source of Hope

The Bible mentions the word hope about 129 times—it is one of the top 3—**faith, hope, love.** The dictionary definition of hope is "a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen." This definition is based on doubt and uncertainty, but Biblical hope is knowing for a fact that the desired outcome will happen. It is a cherished anticipation—not a wishful thinking, but a confident expectation. While the Old Testament Hebrew concept of hope was more of an enduring hope that was waiting continually, the New Testament hope is the reasonable expectation of what is a guarantee because of Christ—looking towards the future with assurance. John Piper puts it this way: "Christian hope is a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will come to pass."

We also know that Biblical hope takes its foundation from faith. We cannot have one without the other. Faith is grounded in the reality of the past; hope is looking to the reality of the future. Hope is looking expectantly towards the future based on our faith in God in the present and His faithfulness in the past.

Hope requires trust in God; we do not see what we are waiting for, nor do we know when it will come. But through our trust in God, we are confident it will come, and we wait for it patiently.

The Work of Hope.

Perseverance and patience in our suffering and affliction brings hope—Romans 5:3-4 says, “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” Trials develop our endurance and teach us to trust God despite our sufferings. That perseverance builds our character and enables us to see beyond our current circumstances to the future God promised, which produces hope.

Hope also bring us joy and peace. Hope produces joy because you know a favorable event will happen, and your wait is not in vain. We have a living hope in Christ and we know that He is coming soon to make all things new—as Christians we are told to expect His return with joy. We have hope for a resurrection of life to spend in eternity with Him in heaven.

Hope also works within us to make us bold. Paul’s description of transformation—to arise out of and to go beyond our ordinary selves. Together, we can live out our hope for a better world.

In The Power of Hope by Dutch Sheets, he tells this story—There was a rooster who had been through a hurricane or a tornado and the people had come out to survey the damage. The chicken coop was demolished but coming struggling out from underneath the blown off roof, was a very bedraggled rooster, who was determined to crow. This is a picture of how hope is working inside of us and even though we might get knocked over and knocked over, we continue to rise. It says that every time a rooster crows it is declaring the scripture, “God’s mercies are new every morning.”

WMU’s goal is to Present, Promote and Practice Hope

OPTIONS: Show powerpoint or videos of WMU—“umbrella” list of 3 areas –Education, Leadership, Compassion missions supported by Heck Jones, videos listed on WMU NC Heck Jones resource page, national WMU video with Sandy Wisdom Martin about the Biblical basis of missions, share personal testimony of how being involved in WMU has changed you, etc.

You may have noticed that the graphic on this prayer guide is that of a mustard plant. This photo was taken by a former missionary who served in Chile. This was her version of Relentless Hope—the parable that Jesus told in Mark 4: 30-32. The mustard seed was the smallest seed, but it grew into one of the largest plants—so large that birds and other animals would make nests and homes there. In this parable, Jesus teaches that although the Kingdom of God started small, with Jesus and the disciples, it would grow and spread across the world to unlimited numbers of followers.

That is our goal and desire for each of our ministries of WMU. As we seek to partner with our churches across the state, we try to fulfill our purpose in three areas—education, leadership, and compassion. We believe that the gospel grows as we love God with all our heart, mind, and strength and then love our neighbors as ourselves. Our prayer guide lists for you some of the areas that we have touched others this past year. Our education curriculum for all ages provides a Biblical discipleship to come to know Christ first—especially in our Mission Friends for preschoolers, and Missions Journey Children and Missions Journey Students as they hear from missionaries serving across the United States and the world through video and then in small groups with their leaders. Our adult Missions Mosaic also features ongoing discipleship in Bible

study, prayer, and practical helps for witnessing. Since our founding by Fannie Heck and Sallie Bailey Jones we have continued to make sure that people learned about the need for missionaries and the work that missionaries were doing. We believe that as we are educated about the needs of those around us and the opportunities, God's Spirit can speak and direct us—to show us how to use our resources and gifts to meet those needs. As we pray for others and give financially, we are extending the reach of the kingdom and multiplying our efforts. By helping to train and prepare leaders we are following God's earliest command in the Old Testament to teach our families and children and Jesus' last words to His disciples—to teach others to observe and obey all that He had commanded them to do. We do this with the relentless hope that He has promised to be with us. WMU provides ongoing and a monthly focus on specific needs, giving all ages an opportunity to develop and practice their gifts and talents in a hands-on, impactful way that we hope will become a missions lifestyle—that as we go we will be making disciples. Our compassion ministries seek to show our neighbors that we care for them and love them as Jesus does..

I can tell you stories that never end of the effects of missions education for the calling of many serving in full time ministries, of coming to know Christ in camps, of how Scripture memory has guided the decisions of young people, of how knowing their gifts and being equipped to use them has given purpose to families and encouraged them during these times of limited social interaction, or of lives changed by the mentoring of our Christian Women's Job Corps, Military Wives retreats, hats for cancer patients, and on and on. Since we obviously can't do that today, let me highlight just a few.

One of our ongoing compassion ministries include Pure Water Pure Love as we make sure each missionary receives water filters for their family's housing across the globe as well as helping to drill wells or provide filters and other resources for the communities where they are serving. Repeatedly as I meet international missionaries who are on a home visit, their first words to me are—"oh, thank you for your prayers and please let your groups know that the water filters we received have kept us healthy and provided us the ability to continue to serve." Just this year WMU gave away almost \$200,000 in water filters and repairs to pipes and wells, 1,372 filters to missionary families, and drilled new wells in Haiti, Nigeria, Liberia, Kenya, and Uganda. We also gave away Heart Fund resources to western North Carolina damaged by the tornadoes as well as New Orleans and other areas damaged by wild fires and hurricanes.

Throughout the past two years we have found ways to minister to health care workers, teachers, truck drivers, and senior adults through care packages, prayer walks, and food distribution in every association. We received a message from a mother in Texas who said she was so grateful for the care packages her truck driver son received as he drove through North Carolina since he was a diabetic and she had prayed that he could find water and food when so many restaurants and areas were closed for service throughout the pandemic. He had shared with her a picture of the card enclosed in the package he had received at a local weigh station and that he had kept the prayer verses and cards on his dashboard for encouragement.

Our Red Box ministry to women's prisons at Christmas time, doubled this past year as a new prison facility was opened in Anson. WMU NC rose to the challenge and made sure that every inmate received these boxes of gifts with a copy of the book of John. We have also been allowed

to open Red Box libraries in every facility so that the women and workers have access to Christian Bible studies and materials. You can find more information about this on our web site, but I was privileged to meet a woman just last week who had received a red box while she served her 7 year sentence who is now working and attending a local church. She told me that the red box was the only gift she received each of those 7 years and that this year she had been able to collect items with her church to give back to someone else.

I am honored to represent WMU NC because I know that throughout their history, WMU has followed the Great Commission and has promoted, presented, and practiced relentless hope. We have learned about missions, given to missions, prayed for missions, and supported the work of our churches while also serving in missions in our own homes and places where God has planted us. Our small mustard seeds have continued to grow into vines, shrubs, and trees that are filled with bright yellow lights, with pungent flavors that draw others to want to know more about Christ, and serve as a sweet smelling sacrifice of our lives offered in service for God's glory and honor. Will you continue to join with me to offer this relentless hope that comes only through Christ? WMU NC appreciates your support through prayers and your giving to the Heck Jones offerings for our continued outreach to educate, grow leaders, and show compassion. As we work to promote our Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong offerings we are able to continue to send full time missionaries so that the hope of the gospel is proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

I had the privilege to serve with 10 WMU women in Vermont in September to encourage and train ministers' wives at the Northeastern Bible College and church planters' wives serving in the second most unchurched area in the U.S. I wanted to leave you with a message that a friend sent me to say that she was praying for our mission trip and the follow-up to it—she wrote, "Don't pull up your sprouts of hope, continue to proclaim and pray our promises from God to water these sprouts of hope that can grow into trees. Thank Him for the promises that are on their way. "

Thank you for allowing me to join with Paul, Fannie Heck, Sallie Bailey Jones, Annie Armstrong, and others to be relentless to make disciples of Jesus who live on mission and share this hope—Romans 12: 9-12 says, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. "