

Let the Light In

Finding Hope Amid Darkness



Lainey Fenn (left) and
Kyra Hatton (right)

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Imagine a bingo card filled with every possible challenge one can face in life. Now, imagine someone marking each square with a chip.

For junior Kyra Hatton, this was her first two years at Pepperdine.

"I [was] kind of at a point where I was like, 'I'm just gonna go into my room and I'm gonna just hide, and I'll just be sad and hopeless alone in my bedroom forever,'" Hatton said.

In her first year of college, Hatton said she went through a traumatic event that made her lose trust in everything, and she fell into the hardest years of her life.

"Trust is a hope that someone will take care of you and be there for you and care for you," Hatton said. "Once trust is broken, in a lot of ways, hope is broken as well."

Thema Bryant-Davis, a psychology professor at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology, said hope is the capacity one has to move forward despite being in difficult circumstances. When one loses hope, it is easy to lose sight of progress.

Hatton would eventually find her hope again — with the help of a quote from St. Augustine: "Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain as they are."

Members of the Pepperdine community spoke on how they experienced hardship and came out on the other side. With a combination of therapy, faith, community and giving themselves grace, they said they have found hope.

A changing of the road

Bryant-Davis is a trauma psychologist, serves as the Culture and Trauma Research Laboratory director at Pepperdine and is the past president of the American Psychological Association.

When Bryant-Davis was a student at Duke University more than 30 years ago, someone sexually assaulted her. The trauma she experienced from her assault debilitated her, and she said

she felt an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and despair.

"One of the things that trauma does is it makes it difficult for you to concentrate, difficult for you to focus," Bryant-Davis said. "It's overwhelming to your nervous system."

The aftereffects of the assault permeated through every aspect of Bryant-Davis' life. She said it was hard for her to focus on school, trust the people around her and cling to hope.

Bryant-Davis sought out therapy and support from other survivors of sexual assault. Through this her hope was restored, she said.

"For trauma survivors, it [therapy] is a hope that there can be more for me than the pain and suffering that I have experienced," Bryant-Davis said.

It is important for trauma survivors to understand that though trauma affects them, it does not define them, Bryant-Davis said.

"Even though this [felt] like an end of a road, it's [actually] a changing of my road," Bryant-Davis said.

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Kyra Hatton, Pepperdine Junior

Therapy is an embodiment of hope

Holding onto hope is a way for people to protect their mental health, as feeling hopeless can lead to depression, Bryant-Davis said. Therapy is reliant on people embodying hope, she said.

"[Therapy] is forward-thinking, it is perspective-taking," Bryant-Davis



said. “The idea of healing and restoration is built on the conceptualization of hope.”

Hatton said therapy helped her process her feelings in order to better understand how to move forward.

“When you are not aware of why you feel the way you feel and you don’t know what to do with it, that becomes a blockage for fully processing things and moving on and having that hope,” Hatton said.

One psychological practice that can help in building a sense of hope is visualization, the act of picturing what one wants in the present moment. Visualization requires one to assess what their desired improvement looks like, sounds like and feels like.

Another practice in attaining hope is to create possible goals so one can feel empowered to move toward progress. Oftentimes when setting goals, people tend to jump from one extreme

to the other, Bryant-Davis said.

“We build our capacity to hope as we see our hopes fulfilled,” Bryant-Davis said. “In order for my hope to be fulfilled, I have to set [goals] that are possible, within my reach.”

Though feelings of hopelessness and despair can be all-consuming, Bryant-Davis said it is vital to offer oneself grace and compassion — there’s no need to make the world harder, she said.

Hope amid social injustice

When looking at the state of the world, sources said it can be easy to lose sight of hope.

“How can you be hopeful when it almost seems like everywhere you turn, there’s an injustice occurring,” Hatton said.

Senior Lainey Fenn said it’s hard to have hope when every waking moment

one faces what is going on in the world.

Chad Duffy, professor of English and Social Action and Justice program director, said advocacy, though important, can be discouraging in a world where suffering is inevitable. When certain communities have faced and continue to face injustice, it can feel like there is no end in sight.

To combat this, resilience is necessary when there are systems in place that work against specific communities — whether it be according to race, gender, ability, etc. Duffy said resilience is a community’s ability to survive and thrive in these hostile spaces.

Bryant-Davis said people must also cling to what she calls “radical hope.”

“Radical hope is that belief in what is possible for a collective, for a community, especially when those communities have been disenfranchised or marginalized or neglected,” Bryant-Davis said.

For those with marginalized identities, Bryant-Davis said having hope is believing they are worthy of having full lives. That belief encourages a community to continue to advocate for progress.

In advocacy, Bryant-Davis said there is a need for sustained hope and knowing that it takes time for the desired progress to be made.

Duffy said knowing that one is not alone is the key to survival.

“When we see people across race, across generation, across gender, [across] economic status, showing up for equity, then that can give us a sense of encouragement — that there are more people who want things to be just and fair than people who want to control and marginalize,” Bryant-Davis said.

Duffy said as a person of faith, he feels called to create change in this world. In his reading of scripture, Duffy said he views Jesus as a social activist. He follows Jesus’ example as he fights for the communities he advocates for, specifically the community of people with disabilities.

Faith as a foundation of hope

For many, faith in God is their biggest source of hope.

The fact that Hatton is here to live another day, despite everything she has gone through, is a clear example

of God’s presence in her life, she said.

Hatton turned to Isaiah 61 “The Year of the Lord’s Favor” in her despair, and found hope. Reading about God taking those decimated cities and bringing life to them, helped Hatton realize that God can make something beautiful out of her brokenness.

“[The Scripture] acknowledges that stuff can totally go awry, stuff can be really bad, but it’s that opportunity that God’s coming into your life and then rebuilding, and the opportunity for God’s favor after that kind of period of desolation,” Hatton said. “That’s huge for me.”

Senior Marshall Craig said having hope in situations he has no control over is easier than when he does have control because he can give it to God.

In January 2023, Craig’s father was diagnosed with glioblastoma, an incurable brain cancer, he said. After undergoing radiation and chemotherapy, Craig’s father, though not 100% back to his normal self, can still do the things he loves.

“He is doing as good as you can possibly do with one of the worst things you can possibly have,” Craig said.

Craig’s father has been an example of hope for him in this period. His father has said he felt God’s presence and God’s love throughout this hardship, Craig said.

With his father’s illness being terminal, Craig said the uncertainty of how

much time his father has left on Earth has been challenging to grasp.

“Nothing in life is ever certain,” Craig said. “It’s reminded me of that fact in a more real and visible, tangible way.”

One verse that has allowed Craig to hold onto hope is Luke 12:25 (NIV), which states, “Who of you can add a single hour to your life by worrying?”

Craig believes that through prayer and remaining close to God, blessings will overflow. This is what fuels his hope, he said.

“The promise is that He will be with us,” Craig said. “I’m not living for this life, I’m living for something much bigger.”

This promise is what helps Fenn remain hopeful in life’s hardships as well. It was through her suffering that she said she found hope in God.

“Knowing that there’s something better planned for me, and even if I can’t see it, even if I’m struggling, there’s a purpose to it,” Fenn said. “That’s what [hope] means to me.”

In her sophomore and junior years of college, Fenn’s family underwent hardship, with her mom’s alcohol addiction relapsing and her sister’s cancer scare. Despite the struggle, these situations opened up the wounds of her strained family and brought them closer, Fenn said.

“In the moment He [God] was like, ‘Don’t think, just walk with me. I will fix it,’” Fenn said.

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Thema Bryant-Davis, Trauma Psychologist

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Lainey Fenn, Pepperdine Senior



Finding hope in community

Amid trials and tribulations, personally or globally, Bryant-Davis said it is important to lean on one’s community.

Bryant-Davis said looking at people who have faced similar obstacles and seeing how they have overcome them can bring people a sense of hope.

“There’s even a Scripture that says, ‘We overcome by the word of our testimony,’” Bryant-Davis said. “So when we hear stories of overcoming, it increases our hope in terms of what’s possible.”

For Hatton, seeing her friends come out of hardships brings her hope. She said she feels lucky to have people who have gone through similar hardships as her and can seek guidance and support from them.

Bryant-Davis said being around people who uplift and “speak life to you”

can help nurture one’s hope.

During the beginning stages of Craig’s father’s diagnosis, Craig was unsure if he should unenroll in school to be with his family. Through conversations with loved ones, he devised a plan where he could both continue school and make time for his family.

“I’ve really been grateful for the love that I’ve been shown through my church community and just seeing the bigger picture of my family [being] bigger than just my physical family,” Craig said.

Glimmers of hope

Oftentimes, when in a state of hopelessness, one’s desired state can feel bigger than what they think they’re capable of achieving, Hatton said. In these moments, Hatton tries to focus on the little glimpses of goodness in her life.

The simple joys in life, like flowers blooming, snails on the road and hints of sunlight coming through her window, bring Hatton a sense of hope. Hatton said her ability to appreciate the beauty of this world gives her a sense of peace and lets her know that she will be OK.

Fenn said she looks to acts of kindness, no matter how big, for hope. She is a fan of videos on social media where people are compassionate toward strangers, like someone dressed up as a superhero visiting a children’s hospital or a hockey player fist-bumping a kid in the stands.

In the same way, Fenn said she finds hope in her friends showing her love through gifting her a cup of coffee, sweet texts or simply their company.

“[Sometimes it can feel like] ‘OK, it’s too much. I can’t move it. I can’t get past it,’” Hatton said. “But what you can do is let little bits of light in.”

