

Uncommon Hope in the Midst of Common Ground

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In a matter of weeks, the world, once divided on a thousand fronts (party lines, economic lines, national borders, and imaginary borders), has found a great amount of common ground. I revel in the fact that we recognize that we are all in this together. Yet I fear that we will forget that in the midst of common ground, we also have an uncommon hope. I keep forgetting that while we are in this together, my neighbors most likely do not have a lasting and living hope that can weather this storm and bring them to safe harbor eternally. While we can and should laugh together about silly songs and toilet paper memes, we cannot stay there. We must point them from our common ground to our uncommon hope.

Now, more than ever before, as our culture bends to an unseen virus, we have grounds to talk about unseen, but powerfully shaping realities. But before we can offer our unseen hope, we must be shaped by it ourselves. We must remember our living hope.

The apostle Peter who had known Christ as a living man was devastated to watch him die (even if it was likely from afar). He was astonished to see him alive once again, never more to die again. It seems he had this Resurrected Jesus in mind when he wrote to a flagging church that was weighed down by suffering and trials. After his brief introduction to the elect exiles of the dispersion, he immediately reminds them of their living hope.

*Peter 1:3
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

I have been convicted about the short sentences that I have been exchanging with our walking neighbors (at an appropriate social distance, of course). I have done an excellent job recognizing common ground by saying things like "This is crazy, isn't it? Let me know if you guys need anything!" or asking "Are y'all staying sane over there?" However, I want to think proactively about questions or prompts that could lead to deeper conversations or further follow up.

While this may sound formulaic and unnatural to some, intentionality and preparation are tools we use in nearly every other area of life. After all, we are not opposed to thinking intentionally about Instagram posts or tweets. A similar preparation for business meetings or sales pitches is celebrated, not ridiculed. How much more thoughtful should we be when dealing with far more lasting matters: human souls that will live eternally.

These are my best attempts at hinge sentences that might lead to a dialogue about hope.

- "My family and I are using some of this extra time to pray more often. How can we pray for you?"
- "How are you processing all of this right now? What is helping you cope with all this upheaval?"
- "I did not grow up in a religious household, but God intervened in my life in college and brought me into a relationship with him. That relationship shapes all of my life and gives me a lasting hope. I would love to share more of my story with you if you ever want to hear it. I would also love to hear more of your spiritual journey."

Whatever your style, it is the privilege and calling of all believers to move into common ground offering an uncommon hope.

