Hope is the strength to keep going.

Years ago, I often heard about teachers who longed for their retirement to escape the stress of their work, only to die soon afterwards. Rumour had it that they initially enjoyed their retirement, but boredom and a sense of hopelessness set in before they passed away.

It was during the Christmas week, when Pam and I found Josh, our otherwise healthy 17-year-old son through guardianship, lifeless after his fourth epileptic seizure.
He was cold and pale, and we were soon told he could not recover. Young people from our church and his Christian school responded by calling for prayer. That night, about 60 people of all ages, with varying degrees of faith, gathered to cry out to God for Josh's life. A few days later, while he was still in a coma, the specialist in charge told us firmly that Josh would live, but that a normal life would be a miracle. They could not say whether he would speak or walk again. Despite the busy season, the young people organised another prayer meeting. That evening, back in intensive care, Josh opened his eyes, and daily miracles began. Since then, he has led a normal life in Christchurch, working full-time, marrying and becoming a father to two lovely girls.
I share this distressing experience as one refrain kept returning to me: 'We are not a people without hope', even when everything seemed hopeless. Sometimes miracles occur and at other times not, but with faith in Christ we are still 'not a people without hope'. The Bible is full of teaching about 'hope'. Do you have hope?

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you **hope** and a future' (Jeremiah 29:11). The context to this verse points to the 70 year confinement the Jews experienced in Babylon. The people from Jerusalem wanted desperately to return to their home country, only to feel discouraged that it never seemed to be on the horizon. These words from Jeremiah gave them encouragement and in time that happened. Can you relate to their discouragement in what you are experiencing at present?

Remember hope is the strength to keep going. So, the question is, how do we get that hope?

1. Do not let your circumstances dictate your outlook. I know it's hard but we need to be resolute.
2. Put your faith and trust in Christ rather than yourself by surrendering everything to him. Isaiah 40:31 'but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
3. Read and trust his promises found in the Bible. The Psalms in the OT is a good place to start as it is full of human drama. You must read it first to find them. Convert them into prayer.
4. Talking to a wise friend or Christian counsellor I have usually found immensely helpful.
5. Belonging to a positive group, preferably a Christian one, encourages hope.

Romans 15:13 says 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may *overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit'***.** Trust is so important.

What does it mean to overflow with hope? Think of a glass being filled with water until it is so full that the water begins to spill over. That is the picture Paul is giving us. God doesn't simply want us to have enough hope to get through another day. He wants our lives to be so filled with hope that it overflows into the lives of other people. For example, this may happen through the encouragement we give to others when they are discouraged, or the confidence we express when others are fearful. Then it could be the way we speak about God's goodness and faithfulness.

God doesn't intend for us to grow older with diminishing hope. He wants us to grow older with an increasing confidence in Him. Our circumstances may change, our strength may diminish, and our opportunities may become fewer, but the Holy Spirit can continue to fill us with hope until it overflows into the lives of others. God bless.