

EXCERPT



Hope Ain't a Hustle
Persevering by Faith in a Wearying World

February 6, 2024 | \$18, 200 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0574-3

The United States Is in A Cultural Crisis.

There are gaping fissures between the rich and poor, growing tensions between races, disunity among faith groups, increasing resentment between genders, and a vast and expanding gap between liberals and conservatives. Generation, gender, socioeconomics, ethnicity, faith, and politics massively divide the American population.

It can be argued that from the time sin entered the human predicament in Genesis 3, humanity has lived in a conflict-ridden cultural context. It is true that there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Yet, in every age the conflicts in our culture take a particular shape. Today's climate is a culture of contempt that can cause Christians to forsake their hope for the experience of shalom across dividing lines.

Our current culture of contempt, with its deep divides in the American church, makes it difficult to hold on to hope. What we are called to grasp that is woven into the fabric of the Christian faith is hope. Not hope as an idea or a wish but hope as a confident trust in God and his promises. This hope drives us to a disposition toward others that begins with respect.

In January 2020 our Institute for Cross-Cultural Mission held a Clergy Story Table event in Washington, DC. I facilitated our conversation on the issue of racial justice and the Church. We brought together a local, diverse group of ten pastors for this purpose. They were ethnically diverse, including African American, Korean American, Venezuelan, and Anglo American. And they were theologically diverse, including Baptist, Mennonite, Methodist, and Presbyterian.

Our conversation was honest and sometimes raw. One sentiment shared, particularly by two of the African American pastors, was that they believed the visions of Revelation 5:9-10 and 7:9-12 will come to pass one day, but they do not expect to experience the reality of it in their local churches today.

"I don't trust that white people are serious about reconciliation and justice issues. They're not willing to pursue it unless they are in control." The temptation in this current moment, particularly for ethnic minorities, is to stay in and focus on their ethnic ecclesial spaces. A pastor friend recently told me, "I just feel like going back into all-Black everything." I understand and know this frustration personally. The focus on race, justice, and even reconciliation in Christian circles brings with it accusations of bowing to Critical Race Theory, Marxist ideology, or "Wokeness." The polarization is deep.

What does a robust embrace of Christian hope look like in practice? In her book *Unfettered Hope*, Marva Dawn writes, "We use the English noun and verb *hope* in many ways—to signify what we anticipate or expect, what we would recommend if we could control things, what we most earnestly desire or wish for if we could have our own way, or what we truly believe in or in what or whom we have confidence."

The pastors who told me that they do not expect to experience or see the kind of reunion of humanity across these deep differences are expressing a lack of hope. Holding on to this kind of aspiration can feel like an exercise in futility. It can feel like a hustle. And who wants to be on the wrong end of a hustle?

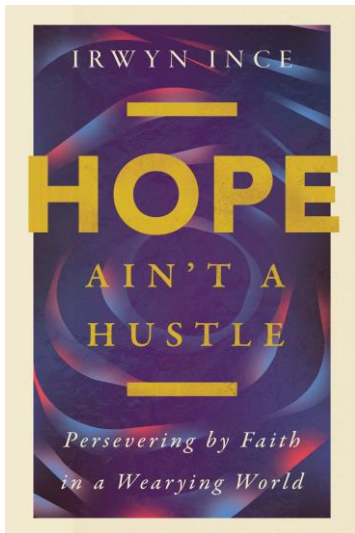


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But God is not a hustler. And the hope he calls us to cannot be built on naïve expectations that people will start to see things the way we see them. Our longing cannot be built on arrogant assumptions that we are completely right in the positions we take. It cannot even be built on an expectation of steady improvement. If the arc of the moral universe does indeed bend toward justice, that arc will never be smooth and straight from a human perspective. It will have twists and turns, ups and downs, starts and stops. Our hope, if it is to be enduring, must be rooted in the glory of Jesus Christ.

This book is about a hope rooted in the glory of Jesus Christ. This hope is enabling for how we live and is embodied in our daily decisions. It's about an enduring hope that's able to carry us through the aspects of life that make it seem as though we are being hustled.

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament is the primary biblical guide for our journey. The recipients of that extended pastoral exhortation were hoping for an end to their suffering for following Jesus Christ. They earnestly desired relief. In an attempt to take control and secure that relief, they were willing to compromise their faith.

Their pastor told them that they had need of endurance (Hebrews 10:36). He didn't just point them to some kind of wishful thinking. He pointed them toward the present reality of Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest, seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. Because of this, they weren't waiting around for the "sweet by and by" to arrive. They were called to a life that now demonstrated the longing and ambition they had been brought into. That life was a life of striving for peace with everyone and striving for holiness (Hebrews 12:14). It meant not allowing a "root of bitterness" to grow up among them in their relationships with others (Hebrews 12:15).

Are you experiencing a fatigue of hope? Are you wearied by our culture of contempt? Are you exhausted by being in a continual state of outrage?

I invite you to walk with me in this exploration of Christian hope as the ultimate antidote for our fatigue, weariness, and exhaustion engendered by our current climate.

This hope is not a hustle. In the pages that follow we will discover that living in a broken and imperfect world means that threats to our deepest longings for peace are the norm. Jesus tells his disciples in John 16:33 that in him they have peace, and in the world they have tribulation. What are they to do in the face of the norm of trouble? Take heart, he says, "because I have overcome the world."

-Adapted from the introduction



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As Christians, we often respond to the brokenness of life as if we do not actually have hope—as if the promises of God are not really certain. But Pastor Irwyn Ince assures us that not only do we have hope, but that hope cannot disappoint us because it is validated by God himself. *Hope Ain't a Hustle* is a clear and accessible exploration of the epistle to the Hebrews, urging us to place our confidence in the finished work of our great high priest, Jesus Christ, and showing how that confidence changes the way we live in the here and now.

New from the Author of *The Beautiful Community*

Irwyn Ince is the coordinator of Mission to North America, part of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Formerly, he was a pastor at Grace DC Presbyterian Church. He is also the author of *The Beautiful Community*. In 2018, Ince was unanimously elected as the forty-sixth Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) General Assembly moderator—the first African American to hold the position.

Ince was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and graduated from City College of New York in Harlem with a bachelor of engineering in electrical engineering. He began his professional career as a systems engineer and project engineering manager in the Washington-Baltimore Metropolitan area. In this role he designed and implemented radio communications systems for state and local government clients.

Sensing a call to ministry Ince pursued a masters degree with Reformed Theological Seminary on a part-time basis while continuing his engineering career. Following his graduation in 2006 Ince helped plant City of Hope Presbyterian Church in Columbia, Maryland. During those years he maintained his connection to the seminary by serving as a teaching assistant in Greek and Hebrew courses.

In 2016 Ince received the doctor of ministry degree from Covenant Theological Seminary. His dissertation was on Identity Formation in Diverse Churches. He firmly believes that the ministry of reconciliation demonstrated in the local church by the gathering of people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities is the natural outworking of a rich covenantal theological commitment

When he's not spending time with his family or preaching and teaching in the church, you can find him coaching classes at a local CrossFit gym in DC. He and his wife, Kim, have been married for thirty-two years and have four children and two grandchildren.



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