



Hope White

A Story of Mission and Possibility

A Travel Free Learning Article

by

Ken Kessler

Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership

Voice: 804.338.5058, E-mail: KKessler@TheColumbiaPartnership.org

Web Site: www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org

Do you remember the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs? The movie that Walt Disney made was a favorite of my boys when they were small children. Do you remember the characters?

- **Snow White:** the innocent, beautiful princess who is banished to the woods by her evil stepmother, the Queen.
- **The Wicked Queen:** the jealous and envious stepmother who is always concerned about her beauty.
- **The Dwarfs:** Happy, Bashful, Grumpy, Dopey, Sleepy, Doc, and Sneezy are Snow White's companions in the woods as she survives the evil shenanigans of the Wicked Queen.
- **Prince Charming:** the young prince who plants the kiss that awakens Snow White for her deathly stupor, and with whom she lives happily after.

It's a cute story that warms our hearts and makes us feel good all over. It has been adapted and changed from the original story by Brothers Grimm by the Disney culture.

This week in our Advent celebration, we focused on the theme of hope in our worship. Many churches have a difficult time with hope in these challenging days. So I have envisioned a church that lives out the theme of hope. With apologies to Brothers Grimm and its Walt Disney adaptation, here is the story I see.

Once upon a time, there was a church in the land called Hope White. Hope White was a church of amazing people who had given their life to a vision of living out the Great Commandment and fulfilling the Great Commission the Lord had given them. They were birthed as a church in the midst of a strange and evil time. The Evil One took great pride in finding ways to discourage the people of Hope White. He had been creating discouragement in other churches of the region by planting seeds of doubt and conflict into the midst of their journeys. Churches all over the land had succumbed to these seeds of confusion and were being tossed to and fro by the challenging times.

But Hope White was different. Hope was a beautiful expression of the Kingdom and had her members excited about the journey of discipleship, and was seeing new people be ministered to and coming to know the Lord daily. Every time the Evil One looked upon the land, he was proud of his work except for that one church, Hope White. He stated, "I must find a way to banish and even kill the spirit of that church. When people see her, they see hope and opportunity for this journey. I have to get rid of her."

The only thing the Evil One could think to do was to change the culture around them. He redoubled his efforts to cultivate a community of uncertainty and pain around the church people. People of the community and the church began to feel more pain than normal. Factories and businesses closed, people began to move out of the community, people in the community began to feel despair, marriages and relationships began to crumble, use of alcohol and mind-altering drugs went up, crime went way up, and life just became very different. The Evil One thought, "How will Hope White fare now?"

Hope White continued to find ways to create joy and reclaim hope for their community. While Hope White lost some key members with all these changes, she picked up some new friends who came whistling in the neighborhood. They did not think highly of themselves and were overcome by the darkness and evil of their time. In many ways, their spirits were dwarfed and held out little hope for their lives. But Hope White began to help them discover what God could do through them. Meet her new friends, The Seven Dwarfs:

1. **Bashful:** She was very isolated and needed to have some really good relationships with people. She had grown tired of the darkness of her community and did not know where to turn. Hope White members visited with Bashful and became her friends, and Hope White helped her change her name to Connected! Now she is helping others find their place in the Kingdom and helping change lives.
2. **Grumpy:** He had been in church all his life. Somehow, he knew that the best things that could happen happened back in the good old days when the community was bright and cheery. Grumpy was constantly complaining to the leaders of Hope White that they needed to get back to the good old days. Those were the best days of the church. I think his favorite words were, "let's return to the good old days." But Hope White never gave up on Grumpy. They listened to him and loved him through his grumpiness. Before you knew it, God changed Grumpy. He discovered the power of grace again. They wanted to give him a new name, but they kept it Grumpy because there is better rejoicing that happens when you see someone called Grumpy being filled with joy and the Spirit.
3. **Happy:** She laughed through everything. She did not take many things seriously. While she did not take many things seriously, the members of Hope White discovered someone who had been worn down by all the changes that happened around here. She had lost her job, her home had been robbed, and her husband and children neglected her. Her laughter was really an attempt to avoid the deep sorrow and pain she had. The members of Hope White saw through the pain and invited her to see Jesus in a new way. And her outlook changed completely. The laughter came back to her soul, and she was truly the Happy that everyone had come to expect. And she learned to share that laughter with people around her, including in her community. Her name truly became Happy, and everyone looked forward to spending time with her.
4. **Sleepy:** He was just tired. He was tired of fighting, tired of working hard, tired of his money not being able to pay all the bills, tired of life. But Hope White helped him regain his energy. Instead of being fatigued, Sleepy's life was changed to one of energy and focus. The community began to see a whole new person who was like the Energizer bunny, running around taking care of the needs of the people of the community. He became a difference maker for the community.
5. **Dopey:** He was always considered the dummy of the community. Dopey thought so little of himself that he did not think he had anything to offer to Hope White, but he soon learned that God had other plans. Dopey had great helping skills and could operate machinery with ease and perfection. He began a ministry to fix up homes and businesses and changed the lives of many people in the community.
6. **Sneezy:** She was always sick. Wherever she went, she had a Kleenex in her hand. Allergies would take hold in the spring and fall, and she was constantly in bed during the winter. Even during the summer the heat would get to her. Hope White, though, helped her regain focus. While they could not get rid of all the allergies, they helped her realize that others in the community suffered from similar things, and God had gifted Sneezy with the gifts of compassion and mercy. She found out ways she could use that compassion to impact people just like herself. The community is changing with her work to help people to get to the doctor and avail themselves of health procedures. She is even becoming the Parish Nurse.

7. **Doc:** When Doc came to the church, he struggled with his ego and need to be better than everyone else. He felt anyone with the name Doc deserves to be respected and heard. He would speak up in meetings and expect people to jump at his commands. Hope White also loved him and helped him see his value was not in his knowledge and expertise, but in his relationship to God who had given him the abilities to gain that knowledge. Humility became a part of his life, and he learned to live the servant's life as Jesus taught. Now people compare him to Dr. Luke in the Gospels. He is knowledgeable and optimistic about what God can do and always serving with a caring heart.

The members of Hope White walked alongside these people as they changed. And they became giants in the community, not dwarfs.

The Evil One could not believe the positive things happening in the community. What was going on? After all the things he had planted in the churches and in the community, his plans were not working. He made one last ditch effort to blast Hope White, but the Lord Himself intervened and placed a kiss of protection and love upon this body of believers. The Evil One does not win this one. Hope White and her members carry the message of Jesus Christ and His love all across Virginia and even to the world. And they lived joyfully ever after.

It's just a clever story of a church that was making a big difference. In my ministry relationships, I run upon churches and leaders in our conversations and relationships that are beat down, depressed, discouraged, tired, but I also find churches are responding creatively to the Lord's leadership in their lives.

Here are some coaching questions that might come out of this story?

- So with whom do you identify in this story?
- How is your church a Hope White? How does the Evil One keep you from being hopeful?
- How do you discover the needs of the people in your community and your church?
- Who are the dwarfs in your community? What are you doing the minister to them?
- Who are the Hope White communities from which your church can learn?
- How does your church live out hope in your community?
- What keeps you as a leader from living out hope?
- What keeps your congregation from living out the theme of hope?
- What is one intentional step that you and your congregation can take to bring hope into your community?

Important Things to Know



Ken Kessler is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership. He is also on staff with the Virginia Baptist Mission Board. The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. **Travel Free Learning** is a knowledge sharing emphasis. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.

Subscribe to the Travel Free Learning Articles: Text "TCP" to 22828