Hope. A term people use lightly but feel deeply. Moments of hope can be significant, life-changing events or even just simple smiles from strangers. Pepperdine students said they define hope with words like optimism, faith, joy and aspiration.

"When I think of hope, I always think of my faith," said Parker Waters, senior Psychology major and a nondenominational Christian. "Our hope in Jesus — that’s always kind of where I’ve put my hope and found the most secure hope."

Hope can be a feeling, an experience or a moment. Four Pepperdine students said they all experience hope in different ways. Still, some students said they avoid getting their hopes up for fear of being disappointed.

Experiencing hope

Hope is something that can shape one’s outlook on life. Some people are just naturally referred to as “hopeful” or “optimistic” people, Sociology Professor Charles Hall said.

"It’s not just a concept," Hall said. "It’s a feeling."

Hope can be thought of intellectually, but if it is not something that is felt as an emotion, it will not make as big an impact on your life, Hall said.

"You have to feel hope," Hall said. "You have to really be hopeful, and it’s been hard to do that."

When external, out-of-control circumstances are happening around an individual, Hall said it is important to look for hope in the chaos. For example, the Russia-Ukraine war doesn’t seem to bring any hope. But amid that conflict, he has heard hopeful stories of Ukrainian people bonding more than ever before.

"Sometimes we’re in the middle of a crisis like that, or even if it’s a personal crisis, and the only thing we have is hope," Hall said.

Madi Billingsley, first-year International Studies major and a member of the Church of Christ, said she experienced the most life-changing moments of hope in her life when she served Syrian Refugees. She said women who had lost their homes alongside their friends and family members, but they still had hope.

"I saw people give their lives to Jesus and had more joy and life with the most tragic circumstances than anyone I know back home," Billingsley said.

Some students referred to hope as something that keeps them optimistic or “looking forward” through any circumstance. For Billingsley, hope gives her life and the ability to push forward past any moment.

"Hope is belief in a greater good often while in the midst of pain or suffering," Billingsley said.

Waters thinks of hope as more of an orientation to root and ground herself in, rather than belief in a preferred outcome. When she puts her hope into circumstances, grades or relationships, Waters said she is often let down, but when she puts her hope in her faith, she knows she has a solid foundation to lean on in the good and the bad.

"I’ve tried to put my hope in things of the world, but it just kind of failed," Waters said. "I feel like Jesus — when I think of the word hope — is where my brain goes."

When he was younger, Hall said he too would put his hope into grades — something he sees his students doing now. But Hall learned to not put his hope in things that won’t matter as much in the future.

Hope in specific moments

Everett Baker, first-year Sports Medicine major and nondenominational Christian, said he can place his hope in specific moments he looks forward to.

"Any new experience for me is something that brings me hope," Baker said.

Baker said he often hopes to accomplish an achievement, meet a new friend or travel to a new destination.

"Studying abroad is something that’s brought me a lot of hope because it’s going to bring a bunch of new experiences," Baker said. "I’m going to get to..."