

growing further

Christmas Is... Hope

"Christmas Is..." Week 3

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"A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time"

Titus 1:2 (NIV)

Biblical hope has been defined as "an eager expectation that what was promised will happen because it is God who has promised it." There is no lasting hope offered in this world because everything in this world is temporary. Hope that lasts is anchored in eternal things. The hope of eternal life, in a place where there is no sorrow, no sickness, no unfaithfulness, and no sin, is the basis upon which all meaningful hope exists. We can eagerly expect to live and prosper for eternity under the knowledge that God, who cannot lie, has guaranteed it. It is the only certain hope we have on this broken planet. Because of this hope, we can endure and even prosper in a world that many times seems hopeless.

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

As a small group leader, the most important thing you can do for your people is to make sure that the people in your group have the knowledge of how to have eternal life and an assurance that nothing can change that fact. It is what all other hope we have is based on. Knowing this, spend some time having your group answer the following questions.

1. Do you know for sure you are going to heaven when you die? How do you know? What must a person understand and believe in order to have this hope? What does having this hope do for you as you go through life?

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 6:37-40 (NIV)

"But you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

John 10:26-30 (NIV)

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2. In the John 6 passage above, who do you think Jesus is talking about? Jesus said that God's will was that of all the people God gave to Him, he would lose none of them but raise them up on the last day. What do you think this means? Based on verse 40, what is God's will? How should this give us hope?

3. In the John 10 passage above, who do you think Jesus' "sheep" are? What does He say He gives to His sheep? What does He say will never happen to these sheep? What do you think He means by this? Whose hand(s) does he say the sheep are in? According to verse 29, why is it impossible for someone to be snatched out of the Father's hand? Some people believe you could snatch yourself from God's hand, but according to verse 29, what would you have to be in order to snatch yourself from God's hand? Do you think this is even possible? Why? Do these passages give you hope? How?

" Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."
Hebrews 10:23 (NIV)

4. In this verse, what reason is given for us to never swerve from our hope? How is this different from things that non-Christians hope for? What are some things you have hoped for in the past and then been disappointed because they did not happen? What was the reason that the thing you hoped for did not come to fruition? Do you think that the same thing could happen when you place your hope in something God has said? Why or why not?

"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."
Romans 15:13 (NIV)

5. According to this verse, what must you do to have the joy and peace God can give through hope? What can you do to develop this type of trust in God? If there are people you trust, what causes you to have trust in them? How can you apply the same thing to God? What role do you think the Holy Spirit plays in all of this?

" We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."
1 Thessalonians 1:3 (NIV)

6. In this verse, Paul commends the Thessalonians for their work, labor, and endurance. He attributes their endurance to the hope that they had in Jesus. Endurance is the ability to continue doing what is right even when we do not immediately see a positive result from what we are doing, or even when we are opposed in what we are doing. How does hope help us to endure? There are three characteristics in this verse that caused the Thessalonians to be faithful in their service to Christ: faith, hope, and love. How do you think these three characteristics work together? You can have all three of these in people – why is having them in God better?

MAKING IT PRACTICAL (OPTIONAL)

Below are some practical exercises that your group could incorporate as a means of developing hope in their lives.

Level 1 Challenge: The hope we have as a Christian is based on the character and nature of God. Do a study of God's characteristics to learn why He is the best place to put your hope.

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Level 2 Challenge: Although hope in God is the only safe bet for hope, there are a lot of things that can bring people hope. Plan in the next week to bring hope to someone else by:

- a. Something you say to someone.
- b. Something you do for someone.
- c. Something you give to someone.

Level 3 Challenge: Without the hope of eternal life that comes from trusting Christ as Savior, in the end everyone will die without hope. As a group, think of people who do not know Christ that you could invite to come to church on Christmas, since that is a time when many people will come to church. They will hear the gospel and be given an opportunity to trust Christ.

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE LEADER NOTES

Suggestions for This Week's Study

- Guide your members to realize that, apart from Christ, there is no lasting hope. Make sure they understand that there is nothing they could do to save themselves and nothing they can do to lose their salvation. If you or your group have any questions about this, contact Pastor Mark and he would love to help you with any questions you might have.
- Help your members understand that God is not like people, He will never let you down or go back on anything He has promised, He is the only thing in this world that will not fail you and is worthy of your hope.
- Explain to your members that, if you read and meditate on God's Word, it will bring hope to you as you grow in your relationship to Christ.

Preparing to Lead Your Group

- 1. PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.
- 2. PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Glorify God, Relate to Everyone, Act Like Jesus, Care for Everyone, Express God's Love and make a plan to encourage your members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.
- 3. PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment.

Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

1. Going Further is a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. We've designed it so it can be completed easily within 30-45 minutes. As the discussion leader, you should preview and evaluate the questions based on the needs of your group. Decide in advance what is more important to focus on, should time not allow for the entire lesson.

2. Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group.

3. Personal applications are essential for growth and should be included in every discussion. When discussing how they will apply principles, group members may state very general goals such as “I need to spend more time in prayer.” It is important for you to help people make goals that are very specific and commit to specific plans of action by asking, for example, “How are you going to begin?” An example is to get up 25 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.

4. Your goal as the leader is to bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their needs for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.