

Hear Hope

1

ISAIAH 9:2-7; MARK 1:1-8; MATTHEW 28:16-20



GOAL

Youth hear the hopeful words that resound throughout Scripture and in Christ: you are not alone. They explore how faith communities have heard hope and remembered they are not alone. They also practice hearing hope in music, in their lives, and in their communities.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, help me to draw on the hope and faith of generations before me as I seek to point the way toward your fulfilled promise in Jesus. Amen.

THIS SESSION

God's people have heard the words of prophets and faithful followers who proclaim hope in God's power and presence. After generations of waiting, the ancient Israelites' prophecies of the coming Messiah were fulfilled through the birth of Jesus—*Immanuel*—which means “God is with us.” In the prophecies shared by Isaiah, the proclamations of John the Baptist, and the Word that is Jesus, we hear the same message: God is with us; we are not alone. No matter how hard life is, no matter what we've done or left undone, no matter how lost we feel, we are not alone. Jesus is our hope.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Isaiah 9:2-7, the prophet proclaims God's promise of a great light coming to dispel the deep darkness in which God's people live. The people hear of a child, a son, born as God's gift to God's people, who will bring peace, justice, and righteousness. Although Isaiah's hearers do not see this child, they hope in God's promise.

Mark 1:1-8 describes John the Baptizer, a man sent by God to prepare for the promised one who is to come.

Matthew 28:16-20 describes Jesus' final message to his disciples before he departs from them. He leaves them with the promise that he will be with them forever. In their lives and ministry, they will never be alone.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

For younger youth, hope may be grounded in the faith they inherit or have been taught by their families or other adults. Older youth want to evaluate and embrace these words and faith for themselves. Youth will encounter Scripture and music that speak of faith and hope and will be given opportunity to embrace God's promises and abiding presence.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Tape three newsprint sheets together to make a graffiti wall to use throughout this practice. Write these phrases on the graffiti wall with one colored marker: Hope is the rope. / O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. / Emmanuel = God with us. / God is with you, always. / Rope—*Tikvah*—Hope. Other colors will be used for subsequent sessions.
- If you are using this practice during Advent, you may choose to open each session with an Advent candle lighting ritual. You will need an Advent wreath with candles, copies of Resource Page 2, and words to the hymn “Live into Hope” found in many hymnals, including *Glory to God* (#772).

GETTING STARTED

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- Prepared newsprint
 - Recorded music

INTRODUCING THE THEME X C M

Before youth arrive, post the prepared graffiti wall. Play recordings of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” as they arrive. Have the recordings on a loop to play throughout the start of the session.

Welcome the young people as they arrive and check in briefly with each person.

Explain that, during the next four sessions, you will be talking about the Christian practice of *Hope*. Call their attention to the graffiti wall where you have written phrases for this session. Read the phrases aloud and encourage them to pay attention to activities you engage in during the session that will reveal the significance of these phrases.

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- Copies of Resource Page 1
 - If using during Advent: copies of Resource Page 2, Advent wreath and candles (optional)

 After the activity, collect the resource pages to be used in the following sessions.

OPENING RITUAL

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and lead the “Opening Litany.” Briefly explain Parker Palmer’s imagery of farmers using a rope to guide them safely from home to barn and back again. This imagery is summarized in the phrase “Hope is the rope.”

If you choose to include an Advent candle lighting ritual, do it here. Distribute copies of Resource Page 2. Light the first Advent candle and invite a volunteer to read the part of leader for Advent 1. Keep the candle lit throughout the session.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Index cards and pens

HOPE CT C

Distribute index cards and pens. Have participants write the word *HOPE* in capital letters down the left side of their card. They will write one word or phrase related to the word *hope* that begins with one of the letters in the word. (They may not use the word *hope* for the *H* on their cards.) After this first round, they will pass index cards to another person, who writes another word or phrase related to hope on the card using one of the available letters. Continue passing cards and writing until each letter is used.

Each youth will read aloud the card they hold after the final round. Discuss their ideas and understanding of hope.

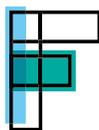
STORIES ACROSS GENERATIONS C

Have youth think about a family story that their parent or caregiver has told about a grandparent or another family member. The story can be funny, serious, true, or made up. Be ready to share a story from your family as an example.

Form pairs or trios and have the young people tell one another their family stories. Gather the group and discuss:

-  What is something new you learned about another person in the group?
-  What similarities did you hear in the family stories that were shared?

Explain that families are not the only places where stories are shared across generations. The Bible includes reports and stories about God’s people across generations. We learn about how people understood God. We learn about their hopes and struggles. A challenge for us is finding where and how we fit into these generations of stories. In this session, we will think about what we believe from the perspective of the words of hope people recorded in the Bible.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

OUR BIBLICAL FOREBEARS’ MESSAGES X C

Summarize or read aloud the information from the sidebar quotation. Tell youth that they each will read different passages in the Bible to look for the hope expressed there.

Distribute Bibles and assign everyone one of three passages: Isaiah 9:2–7, Mark 1:1–8, or Matthew 28:16–20. Have them first read the text alone and determine the message of hope expressed in the passage. Invite volunteers to read their passage aloud and share its message of hope. Discuss:

- ➔ What message of hope do you find in these words?
- ➔ Why do we continue to read and hear these words in church today?

JOHN THE BAPTIST’S MESSAGE QC AT C

Before reading the text aloud, invite the youth to sit comfortably and close their eyes. Describe this scene for youth to imagine:

You are sitting in the wilderness, beside a lake. There are no buildings or roads, and you are far away from any town or city. There are people around you, all looking toward the lake. Imagine one person is reading aloud from the Bible.

Imagine that you are part of the crowds who have come out to hear what John the Baptist has to say. Read aloud Mark 1:1–8.

Following the reading, ask:

- ➔ What do you think the people were hoping for when they came out to the wilderness to hear John the Baptist?
- ➔ What hope did John proclaim in his message of the one coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit?
- ➔ Readers today assume that Jesus is the one whom John said was coming. What hope do we find in believing that Jesus came as John said he would?

JESUS’ PARTING MESSAGE C

Distribute Bibles to each person and locate Matthew 28:16–20. Explain that this text tells about an event that happened after Jesus’ resurrection. Have four volunteers take turns reading one verse each. Focus specifically on Jesus’ final words, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (v. 20b). Discuss:

- ➔ How could this final line have been a hopeful message for the disciples?
- ➔ In what ways is it possible for Jesus to remain with his disciples forever, as he promised them?
- ➔ How does this message give hope to today’s disciples?

Bibles



For Jews, the words of comfort [in Isaiah] spoke accurately of Israel’s restoration after the painful exile. Later, Christians believed these same prophetic words of comfort and promise found such perfect fulfillment in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the book was occasionally called “the Gospel within the Old Testament.”¹

Bible

Bibles

1. Gerald T. Sheppard, “Isaiah 1–39,” *Harper’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 542.



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

Internet-connected device

FREEDOM SONGS

X T M AT

Summarize this information: In the civil rights movement, music played a crucial role in helping activists and communities hear hope and remember that God was with them. Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights leader, and others often sang songs such as “This Little Light of Mine” and “We Shall Overcome.” These songs helped people know they were not alone as they struggled for freedom and justice. Music gave hope to the civil rights movement and helped people remember that God was with them, even when they faced hatred and violence.

Music has played a crucial role in other struggles for freedom. In the anti-apartheid movement, “Freedom Songs,” such as “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” (God Bless Africa), originally composed as a Christian hymn, served as songs of liberation and hope as people struggled for an end to apartheid.

Christians continue to hear hope through music. In worship, we sing hymns and songs that remind us of God’s promises and presence with us. We sing songs to hear the hope that is proclaimed through the prophets and that has been fulfilled through Christ.

In this section, practice hearing hope by listening to and reflecting on different hymns and songs.

Watch a YouTube video of one of these freedom songs and discuss how they might give hope.

- “This Little Light of Mine” (bit.ly/FMThisLittleLight, 3:07)
- “Oh Freedom!” (bit.ly/FMOhFreedom, 3:04)
- “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” (God Bless Africa) (bit.ly/FMGodBlessAfrica, 6:53)

Discuss where youth feel hope in the songs and what songs give them hope today.

Hymnals
 Internet-connected device

ADVENT SONGS

X T M AT C

During Advent, the Sundays leading up to Christmas, churches sing songs about waiting with hope and trusting in God’s promises. If your congregation has hymnals, distribute copies to each youth. Invite them to locate “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (*GtG*, #88) and “Comfort, Comfort, O My People” (*GtG*, #87), two hymns commonly sung in this season. Play the two hymns and have youth read the corresponding texts.

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (bit.ly/FMOCome, 3:45)

“Comfort, Comfort, O My People” (bit.ly/FMComfort, 2:25)

Discuss where youth feel hope in the songs and what songs give them hope today.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

T M C

Internet-connected device

Show the YouTube video “You Will Be Found (from Broadway musical Dear Evan Hansen) | One Voice Children’s Choir” (bit.ly/FMYouWillBeFound, 5:02). Ask:

- ➔ What part of the song resonated with you?
- ➔ Have you had times in life when you felt the “dark crashing in”? How did you get through those hard times?
- ➔ Who are the people in your life who make you feel less alone?
- ➔ Compare Jesus’ parting words to his disciples (“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”) with *Dear Evan Hansen’s* recurring chorus (“You will be found”).
- ➔ In those times when you’ve been “broken on the ground,” what might it feel like to hear Jesus say to you, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”?
- ➔ How can this message from Jesus help you to “reach up” and “rise again”?

Read aloud Matthew 28:20b.

GOD IS WITH YOU, ALWAYS

X C

Tell youth the author of the Foundational Essay for this practice tells a story about a spiritual practice she shares with her young children. Since they were babies, she always tells her children, “God is with you, always.” Whenever they part, she yells to them, “God is with you . . .” And they respond, “. . . always.”

Lead the youth in a repeating chant:

Leader: God is with you.

Youth: Always!

Leader: God is with you.

Youth: Always.

Leader: Always.

Youth: God is with me.

Leader: Always.

Youth: God is with me.



FOLLOWING JESUS

Black markers

GRAFFITI WALL



In each session, you will write phrases in a different color on the graffiti wall before youth arrive. Provide black markers each session for youth to add to the wall or more markers of the same color for the session. Look over the graffiti wall and identify how the phrases on the wall connect with this lesson. Ask if there are words or phrases that they would like to add to the wall. Provide markers for them to add their suggestions.

CLOSING PRAYER

As the youth go out to the world, ask them to look for places or experiences where they know they are not alone.

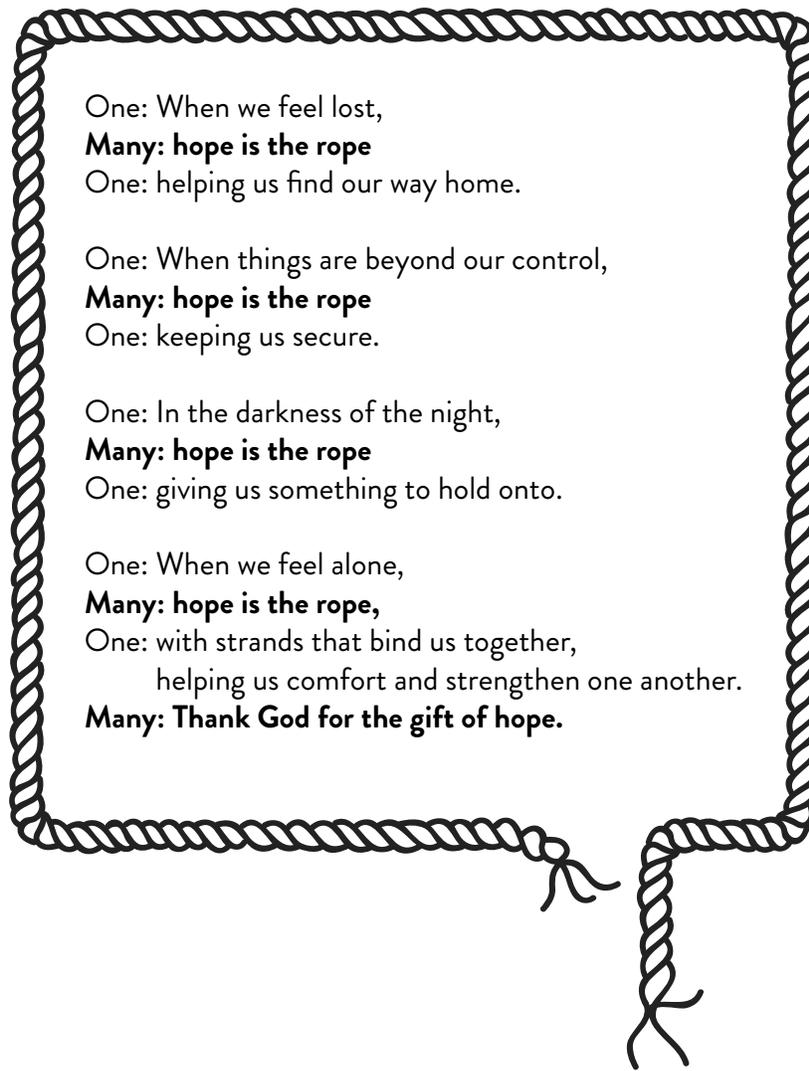
Form a circle for a closing prayer. Invite youth to name something that gives them hope. The leader responds to each statement, saying, “I have hope.” Conclude the group prayer with all saying together, “Hope is the rope!”

Opening Litany

Hope Is the Rope

In the Great Plains, winter blizzards often came without warning. Many farmers died trying to make their way from their barns to their homes through white-out blizzards. To prevent this fate, many farmers tied ropes from their houses to their barns. This rope became a lifeline for the farmers. It was something outside of themselves that they could hold onto when they felt lost, alone, and uncertain of the next step forward. It helped them to return home.²

The biblical tradition speaks of hope in practical and concrete terms. One of the Hebrew words for *hope* is *tikvah*, which in the noun form literally means “rope” or a “strong cord.” Like the rope that helped the farmers to find their way home, hope is something outside of ourselves that tethers us to God and helps us to keep going, even when we can’t see the way forward. This hope is not dependent on our inner resilience or external circumstances; rather, this hope is based on trust in God and God’s promises. Christian hope is trusting in God’s promises and waiting in faith.



2. Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

Advent Candle Lighting Ritual

Advent 1

Leader: Where do we hear of hope?

Left side: Those who place their hope in the Lord

Right side: will renew their strength and mount up with wings like eagles.

Leader: Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord,

Left side: plans for your welfare and not for harm,

Right side: to give you a future with hope.

Leader: On this first Sunday of Advent, let us light a candle to hear hope.

Sing “Live into Hope” (GtG, #772, v. 1).

Advent 2

Leader: Where do we see hope?

Left side: In light that shines in darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Right side: In the light of one candle that illumines a face or ignites a thousand other candles.

Leader: Where do we see hope?

Left side: In the human fragility of a baby, full of promise.

Right side: For unto us a child is born, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God.

Leader: On this second Sunday of Advent, let us light a candle to see hope.

Sing “Live into Hope” (GtG, #772, v. 2).

Advent 3

Leader: How can we share hope?

Left side: When others are weary and broken, we strengthen them.

Right side: The candle that takes its light from another has light to share.

Leader: How can we share hope?

Left side: When we are weary and tired, we lean on the hope others provide.

Right side: Jesus says, “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Leader: On this third Sunday of Advent, let us light a candle to share hope.

Sing “Live into Hope” (GtG, #772, v. 3).

Advent 4

Leader: Where do we proclaim hope?

Left side: On hillsides and valleys, in villages and cities.

Right side: Go tell it everywhere.

Leader: How do we proclaim hope?

Left side: In lament and in song. In sighs too deep for words and jubilant exclamation.

Right side: With the Spirit of the Lord upon us, bringing good news to all.

Leader: On this fourth Sunday of Advent, let us light a candle to proclaim hope.

Sing “Live into Hope” (GtG, #772, v. 4).



Keep this sheet for future sessions.