

Hear Hope

ISAIAH 9:1-2, 6; MATTHEW 28:16-20

GOAL

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

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for conversation starter videos.

PRAYER

Be with me, O God, as I embark on the spiritual practice of *hope*. Ground me in your promise to be present. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Hope is active waiting. We wait with expectation, trusting that God will fulfill God's promises. After generations of waiting, the ancient Israelite prophecies of the coming Messiah were fulfilled through the birth of Jesus—*Emmanuel*—which means “God is with us.” In the stories shared among the ancient Israelites and in the words of Jesus, we hear the same message: God is with us; we are not alone. Waiting can be difficult, but it's made better when we do it with others.

THE BIBLE STORY

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed words of comfort to God's people that gave them hope following judgment, exile, and a perceived loss of God's favor. In Isaiah 9:1-2, 6, the prophet announces God's promise of a great light coming to dispel the deep darkness in which God's people live. Although Isaiah's hearers do not see this child, they hope in hearing God's promise.

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.

SESSION PREPARATION

- The first session does not assume that all participants have read the *Adult Reflection Guide*, the basis for this study. Subsequent sessions do.
- Make copies of Resource Page 1 (p. 8) to be used each session.
- If you are using this practice during Advent, you may open each session with an Advent candle lighting ritual. Make copies of Resource Page 2 (p. 9) for this ritual.

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Hope Is a Rope” (p. 5): Obtain the *Hope* infographic poster.
- “The Prophets' Hope” (p. 5): Write each Scripture reference on separate index cards: Isaiah 2:1-5; Isaiah 7:10-16; Isaiah 9:2-7; Isaiah 11:1-10; Isaiah 40:1-5; Isaiah 60:1-6; Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-9.

GETTING STARTED

OPENING RITUAL

Welcome participants. Complete your group's gathering activities (introductions, offering, prayer concerns).

If you are using the Advent candle lighting ritual, distribute copies of Resource Page 2. Light the first candle and lead the litany for Advent 1. Leave the candle lit during the session.

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and invite a participant to lead the litany. Collect copies for the next sessions.

PRACTICE OVERVIEW

Introduce the faith practice: *Hope*. Some people will have read the *Adult Reflection Guide* prior to this first session; others will hear about the practice for the first time. Summarize the practice using information from the "Hope Unit Overview" (*Adult Reflection Guide*, pp. 4–5). Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay that begins on page 45 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEOS

Show the "Hope Practice Overview" video and the "Hope Session 1" video from the Growing Faith Resources YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR). Lead a brief conversation about participants' thoughts and questions the videos prompt as you introduce the session.

WHILE YOU WAIT

Invite participants to name examples of when they find themselves waiting. Discuss:

- ➔ What do you do while you wait?
- ➔ What gives you hope while you wait?

HOPE IS A ROPE

Display the *Hope* infographic poster and call attention to the image of the rope. Summarize the information on page 4 of the *Adult Reflection Guide* about farmers using ropes as guides through blizzards. Tell participants about the literal meaning of *tikvah* and use the quotation in the sidebar to associate the rope image with being connected to God.

Using the *Hope* infographic, discuss the significance of three strands coming together to form a rope.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

THE PROPHETS' HOPE


Summarize or read aloud the information from the sidebar at the top of page 6. Distribute Bibles and prepared index cards to participants. Invite participants to read their passages aloud and share the message of hope. Discuss:

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

-
- Copies of Resource Page 1
 - Copies of Resource Page 2 (optional)
 - Advent candles and wreath (optional)
 - This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

-
- Internet-connected device

-
- Hope* infographic poster

 Think of hope like the rope farmers tied to the barn and to their home. In faith terms, think of hope like a rope that tethers you to God.¹

-
- Bibles
 - Prepared index cards

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

Pens



For Jews, the words of comfort (in Isaiah) spoke accurately of Israel's restoration after the judgment of exile. For Christians, these same prophetic words of promise found such perfect fulfillment in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the book was occasionally called "the gospel within the Old Testament."

Bibles

HOPE ACROSS SCRIPTURE

Throughout the Bible, we hear words of hope reminding us that we are not alone. Refer to pages 9–10 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite volunteers to read aloud the Scripture passages on these pages. Encourage participants to circle words, images, or phrases that help them hear hope and remind them that they are not alone. Give participants additional time to re-read the passages and mark their pages.

Invite volunteers to talk about the words, images, and phrases they identify as hopeful. Encourage them to discuss their sources of hope. Ask:

- ➔ What passages do you turn to when you seek hope?
- ➔ What passages remind you that you are not alone?

JESUS' ASSURANCE OF HOPE

Distribute Bibles and locate Matthew 28:16–20. Explain that this text tells about an event that happened after Jesus' resurrection. Have four volunteers take turns, each reading one verse. 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 Jesus' disciples to hear?
- ➔ How does this message give hope to today's disciples?

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

Internet-connected device

FREEDOM SONGS

Refer to the *Adult Reflection Guide*, page 11, "Hearing Hope Through Music." 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. Listen to and reflect on different hymns and songs from the civil rights and anti-apartheid movements. Discuss where participants hear hope in the songs chosen.

- "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)

Hymnals

Internet-connected device to play hymns

ADVENT SONGS

During Advent, the Sundays leading up to Christmas, churches sing songs about waiting with hope and trust in God's promises. If your congregation has hymnals, distribute copies to participants. Invite them to locate "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (*GtG*, #88) and "Comfort, Comfort, Now My People," (*GtG*, #87), two hymns commonly sung in Advent. Play the hymns and read the corresponding texts. Discuss where you hear hope in the hymns:

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

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

THE HILL WE CLIMB

At the 2021 inauguration of President Joseph R. Biden, 22-year-old Amanda Gorman, youth poet laureate, delivered a six-minute poem that captured the struggle and hope of the nation. Show the YouTube video of her speech, “Watch: Amanda Gorman Reads Inaugural Poem, ‘The Hill We Climb’” (bit.ly/FMAmandaGorman, 5:52), with closed captions turned on so that participants can read the words. Discuss:

- ➔ What images from Gorman’s poem resonate with you?
- ➔ Where do you hear hope in the poem?

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

HEARING HOPE AROUND US

Invite participants to identify where they hear hope in their daily lives. Offer suggestions such as the sound of a child’s laughter, ringing church bells, a flowing waterfall, or a bubbling brook. They may record examples in their *Adult Reflection Guide*.

GOD IS WITH YOU, ALWAYS

Refer to Resource Page 1, and read the story. Invite participants to share rituals they can use in their homes that remind them of God’s promise to always be with us.

DAILY HOPE

Have participants read through the Scripture passages included on pages 9–10 in their *Adult Reflection Guides* and identify a passage that encourages hope. Distribute paper and pens and have participants write out the passage. They may hang the writing in a prominent place at home and read it aloud each day for a week. Hear this as God’s word to them. If you chose “Hope Across Scripture” (p. 6), invite participants to choose one passage identified there to write out.

FOLLOWING JESUS

Brainstorm ways in which participants can help others hear hope and know they are not alone. Challenge them to pick one idea to do this week.

Engage in this closing ritual:

Select someone in the group and say, “(Name), hear hope.” The group responds by saying, “(Name), you are not alone.”

Repeat this process with the person whose name was called picking the next person and saying, “(Name), hear hope.” The group responds, “(Name), you are not alone.” Continue until all participants have been named. The leader closes by saying, “Friends, hear this good news: We are not alone! Thanks be to God.”

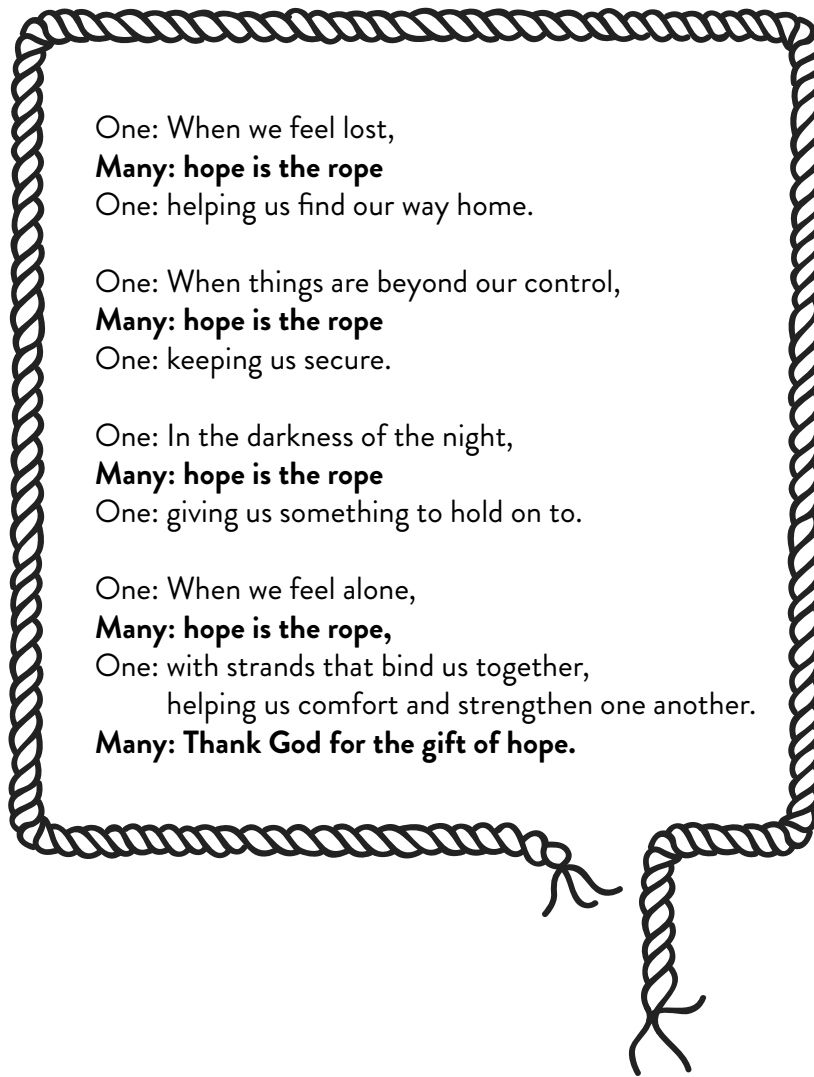
Internet-connected device

Pens

Copies of Resource Page 1

Paper
 Pens

Opening Litany



God Is with You, Always

Charlene Jin Lee, author of the foundational essay for the practice of Hope, tells of a spiritual practice she shares with her children. Read her story here:

Since I am a parent who teaches spirituality professionally, other parents curiously inquire about the spiritual formation my children receive at home. I have reflected on the questions that have come my way over the years.

If I could distill a core theological insight and spiritual resource to equip my children for their way in the world, I would arrive at the hopeful words I offer in this study: You are not alone.

Since they were babies, I would simply—and always—tell my children: God is with you, always. At school drop-off in the mornings, I would holler “God is with you . . .” and they would—sometimes with smiling eyes, other times with eyes rolling—complete: “. . . always.”

If this bit of Christian education plants and takes root in their hearts, it will be enough. When pain and loss collide in their lives, as they inevitably will, when they are depleted and unsure about how to move on, I pray they will hear: You are not alone. I pray they will collect enough hope as they remember (*and repeat, as I have required them to do when they were little and compliant!*): God is with me, always.

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 are 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).

