



Hope
ADVENT

VISION OF THE FUTURE

**WEEK
ONE**



READ

The Spirit of the Lord God is on me, because the Lord has chosen me to bring good news to poor people. He has sent me to heal those with a sad heart. He has sent me to tell those who are being held and those in prison that they can go free. He has sent me to tell about the year of the Lord's favor, and the day our God will bring punishment. He has sent me to comfort all who are filled with sorrow.

ISAIAH 61:1-2 (NLV)

...That He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6 (NIV)

UNDERSTAND

Waiting.

It's the hallmark of the Advent season. Thousands of years ago, so many people were waiting for the long-promised birth of their Savior. They had listened to the prophecies that proclaimed and pointed to His coming for years, but still, as the season we now know as Advent was beginning, the people were still waiting to see those promises fulfilled.

Even though we live on the other side of the story—the side that knows the promises of the prophets were fulfilled in Christ—we still struggle in the waiting. Whether we're waiting on the answer to a desperate prayer, or the fulfillment of a hope we hold deep in our hearts, or just a resolution to a circumstance that we're struggling with in our lives,

the waiting is hard. Because it's in the waiting that we begin to wonder if things really are going to turn out the way we hope. It's in the waiting that our faith in the promises of God begins to feel flimsy.

In those seasons of waiting, we can look back to this season of Advent and remember the hope that the birth of Christ brought to the world, both then and now. We can look back to the messages of those who came after Him. Men like Paul, who reminds us in Philippians that God is faithful to complete every single good work He's begun in our lives. Those assurances may not always make the waiting easier to walk through, but they can give us the confidence that we can always trust that God is still working in the waiting.



RESPOND

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When it comes to waiting on important things in your life, how do you handle it? Are you peaceful and patient? Or are you anxious and afraid?
2. How does remembering the promise of Christ fulfilled at Christmas give you hope that other promises He's made to you will be fulfilled, too?
3. What are you waiting on right now in your life? How can you remember the hope of Christ in the midst of that?
4. How can you look for God working in your waiting?

FAMILY TIME

At dinner one night this week, talk to your kids about what it looks like to wait on something they really want! And as you do, make them wait! Together as a family, make your favorite dessert (if you don't have one, don't worry, we've included a recipe for gingerbread crinkle cookies in the Additional Activities). Divvy up the tasks and spend time together in the kitchen, and then once your dessert is in the oven, ask each person this simple question:

What's one thing I'm waiting on this Christmas?

Their answers could include anything from gifts under the tree to prayers they hope to see answered to experiences they want to share this season. And no dessert until every single person has answered!

Then, as you pass out dessert and begin digging in, talk about why waiting on something—whether it's your favorite treat or an unanswered prayer—can be difficult...and rewarding.

To close, pray together as a family, asking God to remind you that He is with you as you wait on anything in this life.

Prayers of Hope

Here are five prayer prompts to invite and nurture a spirit of hope into each day this week. Use this guide with your family or small group.

WHEN YOU ABIDE

On your own: What do you need to surrender to the Lord? Are you willing to hope even if it means waiting? Spend some time writing out the things you are holding on to. Give each of these to the Lord through prayer.

Pray together: *God, thank You that we don't have to wonder where You are in the waiting. Thank You that we can always trust You to fulfill Your promises to us. As we remember the hope that Christ brought to the world this Advent season, fill us with hope that You are always working for our good in the waiting. Amen.*

WHEN YOU WORSHIP

On your own: How does being a part of the body give you hope? Each week, we gather together to breathe in the goodness of God to go back into our community to breathe it out to those who need His hope. How do you contribute to worship? How do you hope for our church?

Pray together: *Life-giving God, who makes all things new, breathe Your Spirit into Your church. As we seek your guidance in a new season, fill us with hope, refresh every weary heart, and prepare the way you ask us to walk in. Amen.*

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

On your own: List out the names of those in your small group and spend time praying for each member. Pray that God would be treasured in their lives first and foremost. Pray that He would be the source of their hope. Pray that God would be lifted up above all other names in their lives.

Pray together: *God, our Refuge and Shelter, You are ever present among us. Guide us as we seek to follow Your example by giving of ourselves, that we too might be present with those you have given us to live life with. Help us share Your kingdom with all, that those who are far away may be brought near, and that together Your people may be restored. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

FOR THOSE YOU SERVE

On your own: Think of three people you have the opportunity to serve in our church who have been walking through a season of grief, waiting, or stress—how can you share the hope of Christ in this Advent season. If you are not currently serving in our church, spend time asking the Lord to direct you in using your time, talent, and giftings. Pray about how the Lord might be prompting your heart toward deeper obedience.

Pray together: *Generous God, enlarge our imaginations so that we might see how, through simple obedience, we can be a part of sharing Your hope with those in our church. Help us to be stirred by the same things that stir Your heart. Silence our chatter so we may hear Your Word and follow Your call. Amen.*

FOR YOUR INTERSECTIONS WITH THE WORLD

On your own: In January, our church will embark on a year-long journey to specifically pray for 5 people in our intersections. As you go about your day and engage with the people in the places that you live, work, and play, who do you know that doesn't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Who is walking in a hopeless world? Start listing names of people who have not surrendered their life to Christ.

Pray together: *Gracious God, who sends us out to proclaim good news to the world, let Your kingdom come. Make all things new. Help us share Your kingdom with all, that those who are far away may be brought near, and that together Your people may be restored. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Small Group - Hope

THE GLORY OF LITTLE BETHLEHEM

FROM SHE READS TRUTH | GUEST WRITER

The Christian life, it seems, is a constant trading in of “big” things for seemingly “small” ones.

We exchange the bravado of pride for the posture of humility.

We surrender the booming voice of self for the quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit.

Each Christmas season highlights this tension. We are drawn to the bigger and the better: bigger gifts, bigger budgets, bigger light displays. And yet, since the very first Christmas, Christ has compelled us to look away from the “big stuff” that seems so significant. Quietly, He invites us to strain our eyes and bow our hearts to see the wonder of the small. But this invitation did not start with the tiny baby in the tiny manger. God was attentive to making sure every detail of His arrival was understated “from ancient days” (Micah 5:2).

Here, in Micah 5, we find God’s people under attack and in distress (v.1). Any small glimmer of hope becomes momentous when our lives are under siege. We latch on to any news that better days are ahead when the day we’re in the midst of threatens to overtake us. So we can surely celebrate with the citizens of Zion because as enemies surrounded them, hope started to spark.

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler of Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient of days” (v.2).

Look around. If we handpicked the details of the Christmas story, we’d prioritize grand above modest, spectacular above common, big above small. We’d likely dismiss Mary and Joseph as too unremarkable, the stable as too drab, and Bethlehem as too small and seemingly insignificant. Yet, as we trace God’s hand throughout all of Scripture, it’s clear God does not assign value according to our scale.

This fixation with the small stuff was as confusing to the people who encountered Jesus as it often is for us. In the Gospel of John, we find folks bickering over Micah’s prophecy (John 7:40-44). They knew the Messiah would come from the the hometown of David, but because mankind tends to have a collective obsession with bigger, shinier things, the point missed its mark in their hearts.

Bethlehem wasn’t chosen as the epicenter for redemption because David made it famous. It was chosen for its smallness.

Bethlehem was a small, sleepy town, handpicked by God to incubate a spark of hope until it burst into flames. In the same way, our own smallness points to the

greatness of God. There is nothing we can do about our brokenness.

Yet, like Bethlehem, our sin works like an epicenter for hope when we trade it in for the humongous grace God offers.

When we exchange our obsession with making all things bigger and better, we are free to see that the promise delivered to God’s people through Micah is ours to hold on to this Christmas.

“And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.” - Micah 5:4

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- When are you most aware of the smallness in your life and how has the Lord redeemed and used that smallness?
- Advent is a season of waiting for the birth of Christ—as our church is joyfully anticipating the movement of God in our body, what is your prayer for our church?
- How are you positioning yourself to be used by the Lord in your intersections?

SOAP STUDY ON HOPE

ISAIAH 61:1-2 (NLV)

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SOAP STUDY ON HOPE PHILIPPIANS 1:6 (NIV)

S *...That He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion*

until the day of Christ Jesus.

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SOAP STUDY ON HOPE

JOHN 15:1-4 (NIV)

ADVENT IS A SEASON OF JOYFUL ANTICIPATION BEFORE WE CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST. THIS YEAR, AS A CHURCH, WE NOT ONLY AWAIT THIS CELEBRATION BUT ALSO THE FULLFILMENT OF THE VISION GOD HAS GIVEN US FOR THE NEXT YEAR.

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until the day of Christ Jesus.

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