



Prepare Him Room
Spiritual Practices for Advent

Week One: Hope
Nov. 29th - Dec. 5th 2020



HOPE

Hope.

It's a powerful word, isn't it?

Let the word roll around in your heart and mind for a moment.

What comes to mind when you think of hope? When have you experienced hope in a way that has made all the difference for you? What is bringing you hope in this moment of your life?

When things are going well, the concept of hope doesn't tend to hold a lot of weight for us. We might like the word. We might get warm fuzzies when we see it written on pillows and mugs, or when we hear it spoken about in sermons. But ultimately, it feels like no more than a nice sentiment, an abstract concept that evokes positive feelings and invites us to try to find the bright side in every situation.

But then there are those other times – the times when life gets hard. When things feel uncertain. When things haven't gone as we have planned, and we can't see the way forward.

In those moments, hope makes all the difference. It allows light to break into the darkest situations. It gives us the strength we need to take another step and face another day.

During the first week of advent, we celebrate hope.

The hope that we celebrate isn't just a nice sentiment. It's not wishful thinking, or a naivety that requires us to look at the world with rose-tinted glasses and deny the brokenness within us and around us.

Our hope is found in a person - Jesus Christ. Emmanuel. God with us.

For generations, the Jewish people waited for their promised Messiah. They waited and they waited and they waited. Through war, exile and captivity they waited. Through pain, suffering, and silence they waited. It's easy to imagine that there were moments when they struggled to hold on to hope.

But God kept his promise. God always keeps his promises.

Jesus came into the world and ushered in the Kingdom of God. He overcame the power of sin, death and evil. He reconciled us to God and set us free to become the people that God made us to be – to live as His children, fully loved.

The hope that we have in Jesus is a hope that can never be taken from us. It is a hope that endures through all of the ups and downs and twists and turns that life takes us on. It is a hope that has the power to carry us through life's most difficult moments, and it's a hope that will last forever.

As we move into the Advent season in the midst of a pandemic, God invites us to be people who know His hope intimately. Who experience it, who cling to it, who build our lives on it, and who spread it to everyone we meet.

God is with us, friends. May you discover the fullness of the hope that we have in Jesus this Advent season.

Sunday, November 29th

READ AND MEDITATE

The announcement of Mary's pregnancy brought about all kinds of excitement and anticipation about the new thing that God was doing in the world.

When Mary found out that she was pregnant with Jesus, she went to Judea to visit with Elizabeth, her relative, who was pregnant with John the Baptist at the time. After receiving a joy-filled greeting from Elizabeth (and baby John in her womb, who 'jumped for joy' when he heard Mary's voice), she broke out into song. The words of Mary's song are packed with hope and joyful expectancy.

Spend some time meditating on the words of Mary's song. Let your heart connect with the words. Imagine what Mary and Elizabeth would have been experiencing in this moment. Use your imagination. Ask questions. Pay attention to the feelings that the passage evokes in you. Consider writing down a phrase from the passage and meditating on it throughout the day.

Meditative Reading: Luke 1:46-55

"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

49 For the Mighty One is holy,
and he has done great things for me.

50 He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.

51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

52 He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands.

54 He has helped his servant Israel
and remembered to be merciful.

55 For he made this promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children forever."

PRAY

Take a moment to rest in God's presence. Thank God for the ways you have experienced hope through Jesus Christ. Pray about the areas of your life that you need to receive God's hope the most. Ask Him to fill you with His hope so that you can share it with others today.

Monday, November 30th

READ AND RECEIVE

Read the following verse over several times slowly. Pay attention to the key words of Paul's benediction, and let your heart connect with each one of them. Imagine this benediction being prayed over you.

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

REFLECT AND JOURNAL

Prayerfully reflect on the following questions. Consider writing your responses to one or more of these questions in a journal.

When in your life have you experienced God's hope in a powerful way?

How does trusting in the God of hope allow us to be filled with joy and peace?

Think of a person you know whose life overflows with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit? What do you admire most about this person?

What are you placing your hope in?

What would it look like for your life to overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit?

PRAY

Spend some time thanking God for the ways you have experienced His hope. Ask Him to help you experience his hope today, and to extend it to the people you interact with.

Tuesday, December 1st

READ AND REFLECT

Read through the following passage slowly and prayerfully. Receive these words of encouragement for yourself, and allow your heart to rest in the hope of the gospel.

¹⁹ And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. ²⁰ By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. ²¹ And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, ²² let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. ²³ **Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.**

-Hebrews 10:19-23

PALMS DOWN/PALMS UP

Palms Down/Palms Up is a posture prayer that can help us surrender our worries and challenges to God, and open us up to receive the blessings that he wants to pour into our lives.

As we go about our day to day lives, we all experience moments of discouragement, defeat, anxiety, and frustration. In the season we are all living through, it can be easy to lose sight of the hope that we have in Christ.

Palms Down/Palms Up is a practice that you can continue to use throughout the day to release those things that are overwhelming you or cluttering your heart and mind over to God, and open yourself up to receive God's hope. Here's how to do it:

Turn your palms down, and release your concerns to God

Start by resting your hands on your knees and turning your palms down as a symbol of releasing your cares to God. What has been causing you discouragement lately? What has been causing you to feel defeated, anxious, or frustrated?

Allow your heart to surrender these burdens to God. You might pray something like "God, I surrender my discouragement about...to you.", "Lord, I give you my worries about this meeting", or "God I release my fear about...to you". You might feel a sense of release in your heart or in your hands as you pray. Take a few moments to lean into this posture of surrender.

Turn your palms up, and receive God's hope

Now turn your palms upwards and posture your heart to receive from God. Ask God to provide you with His hope in the area you have been struggling. You may pray something like "God, I pray that you will fill me with Your hope as I face this challenge" or, "Father, please give me Your peace as I enter into this conversation". Take a few moments to enjoy God's presence. Allow your heart to rest in fellowship with Him before continuing on with your day.

Wednesday, December 2nd

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an approach to reading the Bible that opens us up to hear God speak to us in the present moment. Central to the practice of Lectio Divina is the belief that the Holy Spirit actively uses the Scriptures to lead us and change us. Lectio Divina places us in a position to be transformed by the Scriptures as we immerse ourselves in them and surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Try practicing Lectio Divina using the following passage. Beneath the passage, you will find the steps that will walk you through Lectio Divina.

PASSAGE - ROMANS 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ² Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

³ We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

LECTIO DIVINA - STEPS

1) Prepare: Centre yourself in God's presence

Start by taking a few minutes to breathe and quiet yourself in God's loving presence. Express your willingness to hear from God and your desire to be led by the Spirit.

2) Read: Listen for the word or phrase that God lifts to your attention

Read the passage all the way through slowly. Savour the words and let them sink into your heart. As you read, listen for a word or phrase that stands out and seems to resonate with your heart. Don't let yourself feel pressured or worried about whether or not God will speak to you. Lean into the Holy Spirit and rest in the knowledge that God is already with you. Take a moment to sit with the words that have been drawn to your attention.

3) Reflect: How does this word connect with my life?

Read the passage through a second time. As you do, reflect on how this word or phrase relates to what is going on in your life at the present moment. How is God revealing himself to you through these words?

4) Respond: What is my response to God?

Read the passage through a third time. Following this reading, take a few moments to pray to God in response to this encounter. Express your feelings about what you have read. Pay attention for any sense that God is calling you to step out in obedience in some way based on what you have heard. This may be a good time to journal your prayers.

5) Resolve: Live it out!

As you continue on with the rest of your activities for the day, carry this word with you. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring it to your attention throughout the day. Live it out and let the Holy Spirit lead you into a deeper understanding of its meaning as it relates to your everyday life.

This structure follows the approach to Lectio Divina laid out in an article called "Lectio Divina: Engaging the Scriptures for Spiritual Transformation" by Ruth Haley Barton. Read the full article here: transformingcenter.org/2019/07/lectio-divina-engaging-the-scriptures-for-spiritual-transformation-2

Thursday, December 3rd

READ AND RECEIVE

Read through the following verse slowly. Imagine this prayer being prayed over you.

I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

-Ephesians 1:18

BREATH PRAYER

Breath prayer is an ancient prayer practice that can help us become mindful and attentive to God's presence and provision in every moment of our day. Breath prayer is simple form of prayer, in which our expressions of worship, declarations of truth, and petitions to the Father, are expressed rhythmically as we inhale and exhale.

Look over the following breath prayers and find one that resonates with you. Inhale deeply as you pray the first half of your breath prayer, and then exhale slowly as you pray the second part of the breath prayer.

Calm your heart and mind and spend a few minutes breathing through the breath prayer. Allow your entire being to be re-centred in God's presence and find rest in the truth that your are declaring as you pray.

We put our hope in the Lord.

He is our help and our shield.

-Psalm 33:20

**Let us hold tightly to the hope we affirm,
for God can be trusted to keep his promise.**

-Hebrews 10:23

**And his name will be
the hope of all the world.**

-Matthew 12:21

**Let your unfailing love surround us, Lord
for our hope is in you alone.**

-Psalm 33:22

**Let all that I am wait quietly before God,
for my hope is in him.**

-Psalm 62:5

Come back to your breath prayer throughout the day and let it realign your heart with the hope of Christ.

Friday, December 4th

READ AND REFLECT

Read through the following verse a few times slowly. Reflect on the truth that it declares and let the words bring you encouragement and hope.

¹⁸ So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. ¹⁹ This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary.

-Hebrews 6:18-19

EXPERIENCE HOPE: PRAY

Identify a situation in which you have been experiencing discouragement, frustration, or defeat. Spend a few moments holding this situation before God in prayer. Ask Him to give you a sense of His hope and guidance in it. Spend some time in silence, listening for what He would like to say to you today.

SPREAD HOPE: PRAY

Now spend a few moments praying for others to experience hope.

You can pray using your own words, or pray using a simple blessing like this one:

"May they experience the fullness of Your hope."

Pray hope over somebody you care deeply about and have a close relationship with.

Pray hope over somebody you look up to.

Pray hope over the last person you spoke to that was struggling in some way.

Pray hope over somebody you don't know very well - the first person who comes to mind.

Pray hope over somebody you find difficult to love.

Pray hope over our church family.

Pray hope over our community.

LIVE HOPE: ACT

Ask God to show you a practical way that you can show somebody hope today. Maybe there is somebody who could use an encouraging text, or a card. Maybe you can offer to help to somebody that you know has been feeling overwhelmed. Maybe you can make a donation to an organization that supports those in need. Spend a few moments with God, conspiring how you might be able to spread hope together today. Then go for it!

Saturday, December 5th

READ AND REFLECT

Read through the following passage slowly. Reflect on the ways that Jesus is described in this passage and let yourself be reminded of His goodness.

¹⁵ But Jesus knew what they were planning. So he left that area, and many people followed him. He healed all the sick among them, ¹⁶ but he warned them not to reveal who he was. ¹⁷ This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning him:

¹⁸ "Look at my Servant, whom I have chosen.

He is my Beloved, who pleases me.

I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

¹⁹ He will not fight or shout
or raise his voice in public.

²⁰ He will not crush the weakest reed
or put out a flickering candle.
Finally he will cause justice to be victorious.

²¹ And his name will be the hope
of all the world."

-Matthew 15:15-21

THE EXAMEN

The Examen is spiritual practice that helps us become more aware of and engaged in God's activity in our lives – both in the big things and the small things. The prayer involves reflecting back on everything that happened over the course of the day, paying special attention to how God was moving and how you were responding. As we open ourselves up to the Spirit in this reflective practice, God will be able to speak to us about the gifts he has given us, the way we have been responding to Him and to others, and how He may be calling us to move forward.

While the Examen is often done at the end of each day, today we will use this practice to reflect back over the past week. We will pay attention to the ways we experienced God's hope, the ways we allowed Him to use us to spread hope to others, and how He is calling us to move forward in hope as we look ahead to a new week.

PRACTICE THE EXAMEN

1) Ask the Holy Spirit to lead this time of prayer. Start by centering yourself in God's loving presence. Take a minute to remind yourself that God is all around you, He is closer than the air that is filling your lungs. Try sitting up straight with your feet flat on the floor and your palms up. Take some deep breaths. Breathe in God's hope. His peace. His joy. His love. Breathe out everything that is not of him – your anxieties, your fears, your anger.

2) Give thanks. Take a few moments to express your gratitude for the gifts that he has given you over the last week – both big and small. Don't rush to create the longest list that you can come up with. Instead, take the time to really savour these blessings.

3) Reflect: Did I receive and live in God's hope this week? Take a few moments to reflect back on your week. Were there moments when you felt discouraged? Overwhelmed? Defeated? Hold those experiences before God and open yourself up to receive His hope. Over the course of the past week, when **did** you experience God's hope? Take time to thank God for those moments.

4) Reflect: Did I communicate hope to the people I interacted with? Think about the significant conversations and encounters you had with people over the course of your week. Did your words, demeanor, and actions point them towards hope? What opportunities did you miss? What opportunities did you act on? What was the outcome?

5) Choose a feeling or situation from your reflection to pray through. In what experience or situation from the past week do you need God's hope the most? Pray through this situation. Speak to God about your thoughts and feelings. Then open yourself up to listening to what he might have to say.

6) Look ahead to the next week. Scripture tells us that God's mercies are new every morning. What will it look like experience and live out hope as you move forward into a new week? Receive God's grace and ask the Spirit to empower you as you look forward to the week ahead.