



"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"
(Ephesians 1:18).

"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us"
(Hebrews 12:1).

I. INTRODUCTION

Years ago, during the U.S. Special Olympics, viewers were brought to tears during the 100-yard dash. When the starter's gun sounded, the runners, most of whom had Downs Syndrome, took off down the track. About midway through the race, one young boy stumbled and fell, sprawling on the track.

The crowds who were present, and the millions who were viewing, looked on in sympathy. The spectators were given an unforgettable lesson in the power of community by the runners they watched that day. One by one, the young runners stopped running and went back to the fallen boy. After helping the boy to his feet, the crowd of runners headed off again toward the finish line, crossing it together arm-in-arm.

II. LET US RUN THE RACE

Scripture speaks of how we are running this race of faith. It's not a solo event, but a team relay where each of us is being encouraged by others toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

- A significant measure of the hope God has in mind for you is to be received in relationship with others, but our self-reliance can hinder this blessing.
- A significant measure of the hope that others need is to be shared in relationship with us, but our self-focus can hinder this blessing.
- Just as hope is found in the Person of Jesus and the truth of His Word, God's design is for hope to be freely given and received among His people.



This teaching outline was developed in support of the resource, *Contagious Hope: For small groups*.

Check out this resource and many others today at:
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A. Walking in the Light of God's People

Hope fades . . . when we're asking the wrong questions.

Like the Emmaus disciples, do we miss opportunities to relate to Jesus and experience His presence because we are too preoccupied with earthly concerns?

"But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21).

Colossians 3:16 Moment:
"Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you."

Pastor/Teacher:

Pause during the sermon and share a personal story of when you may have asked these questions of the Lord.

"Freely we have received, therefore we freely give"
(Matthew 10:8).

The disciples were preoccupied with their own agenda and were therefore asking the wrong questions:

- How will Jesus deal with the Roman government?
- How will He defeat Caesar and restore the kingdom of Israel?

If we are preoccupied with the wrong questions, the more significant, *relational* questions often go unasked. The disciples were left asking the same rational questions that often preoccupy our hearts:

- "Why did this happen?"
- "Why have I been left to go through this?"
- "Why have I been let down?"

Have you ever dwelt on questions like these during your valley experiences? Dwell on them long enough, and you, like these disciples, can't help but lose hope.

Although we often ask *rational* questions during times of loss, there is a more significant question that's underneath our pain. We'll likely never know the answer to many of these rational questions, but underneath them all, *we can know the answer to this relational question:*

In the midst of loss, disappointment, disillusionment, sadness and anxiety . . . DOES GOD REALLY CARE? If so, hope prevails!

At different times, Jesus declared to the disciples, "*I am the light of the world*" (John 8:12), and "*You are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:14). The disciples must have found this paradox confusing. Perhaps there was some point, in an attempt to clear up the matter, that they asked Him: "Master, are You the light of the world, or are we the light of the world?" Jesus would have responded, "Yes!"

Encountering God's love in one another is a significant aspect of how hope becomes contagious. As we encounter God, in and through other believers, transformation takes place, and hope is spread. This is why genuine community is not optional; it is a necessary ingredient for the spiritual health of every believer!

"And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus"
(Philippians 4:19).

B. The Mystery and Ministry of Real Fellowship

To unravel the mystery of genuine fellowship (Greek: *koinonia*), we will begin with a familiar passage, Philippians 4:19.

First, it is noteworthy that Paul's expression, "*my God*," is rare in the New Testament. It is almost as if Paul, by using the phrase "*my God*," is bragging on the Father. He seems to be excited to declare that his God is a God who meets needs.

Paul's God is a need-meeting God, but where are the glorious riches?

We might imagine that God has His glorious riches hidden away in heaven in a big cabinet, closet, or safe. When you and I are in need, the Holy Spirit mysteriously unlocks the source, takes some of the riches of His glory, and somehow zaps us with them. We might imagine that if we were hurting and in need of comfort, we could pray and God would zap us with comfort. If we were discouraged, we sought after Him in faith, and God could zap us with encouragement.

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit does directly bless us with comfort, encouragement, and other blessings. But let's take another look at Ephesians 1:18.

Pause to consider the next words; "... in order that you may know what is the hope of His calling . . . the riches of His glorious inheritance **in the saints.**"

Allow the Holy Spirit to fix your heart on the words, "*in the saints.*"

Many of God's glorious riches are already in His saints!

- If you need acceptance in the midst of your self-doubt, He often desires to give acceptance through His people.
- If you need encouragement, care, or affirmation when you grow weary in well-doing, God will often provide through His body.
- It is still His acceptance, His encouragement, His care, but God wants to share them with you by expressing His glory through His Church.
- The same Jesus who longs to meet us in worship and prayer also wants to bless, encourage, and change us as we encounter Him in others.

III. SERVING OTHERS STIRS HOPE

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms"
(1 Peter 4:10).

How are we to respond to His glorious riches?

God's glorious riches are simply dimensions of His grace that we administer as we serve others; they are facets of His grace that we live out in various forms.

These riches include God's acceptance, encouragement, comfort, support, etc. God's riches are things that we all need—things which we often receive through others, but which are ultimately from God. Therefore, if we experience another's acceptance in the midst of failure, they have administered a gift of God's grace. If we receive comfort in our pain, we've received a form of God's grace, and our hope is restored.



P3. Discerning the relational needs of others with a heart to give of His love

Expressing Love to Those Around Us

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24).

When we come together in community as parts of the body that are all attached to Jesus Christ, the Head, we must:

- Avoid comparisons of knowledge: "How much do you know vs. how much do I know" (See 1 Corinthians 12:13–27, Ephesians 1:22).
- We must avoid thoughts of: "I wonder if I can impress my small group?"
- Instead, we must gather in small groups with this motivation: **I am bringing God's glorious riches into our place of meeting, in order to serve others with those riches so that hope might be encouraged.**

Think about some of the contexts in which you gather with other Christ-followers. Could there be someone in your group who could benefit from you being a good steward of God's riches? Is there someone in your small group who could benefit from the acceptance you have received, the support that the Spirit of God has given you, or the encouragement with which God has blessed you?

Pause and pray that God might send you as an ambassador of hope as you share some of His glorious riches.

A. Sharing Hope from Your Inheritance

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is filled with reminders of our inheritance.

- "...the riches of the glory of His inheritance" (Ephesians 1:18).
- "...also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11).
- "...you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13–14).

It's the wonder of such an inheritance that gratefully empowers our freely receiving and freely giving of Christ's multi-faceted grace (Matthew 10:8; 1 Peter 4:10).

From our Ephesians 1:18 text, we ask: How did the glorious riches get *in* the saints? Were they earned? deserved? merited? Absolutely not! They were freely received! We have been made partakers of God's glorious acceptance and encouragement, His compassion and support.

Were these gifts obtained by our performance or the gift of divine grace? It's only by His grace! It will be our gratitude for receiving these gifts that empowers and constrains us to become ambassadors of His hope for others.



P7. Expecting and demonstrating the supernatural as His spiritual gifts are made manifest and His grace is at work by His Spirit



Encountering Jesus

Jesus, with "*all things in subjection*" (Ephesians 1:22), is no better illustrated than in His miracles! Miracles such as:

- Turning water into wine (John 2:1–11)
 - Walking on water (John 6:19)
 - Calming the wind and the seas (Matthew 8:23–27)
- The list goes on and on...

And there is no better illustration of freely receiving and freely giving of His provision than Christ's miracle of feeding thousands.

"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish..." (John 6:9).

"Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish..." (John 6:11).

Pause quietly...

Picture Christ with eyes toward heaven, His hands open. With one hand, He receives what is available—five loaves and two fish from a young lad. With the other hand He gives freely and abundantly to the needs of all.

At times, this calling is to freely receive as He gives to you through relationship with others. At other times, He calls you to freely give to the needs of others. His inheritance toward you never runs out; His provision is without limit.

Quietly consider what encouragement, care, support, or affirmation you might need in the midst of your struggles? Would you, even now, open your heart to receive these gifts from Christ, the One who provides?

What acceptance, compassion, appreciation, or respect might you freely give to someone this week? Could you take the time to think of a specific name and then yield to the Spirit's prompting? As you share His life and love, others will find hope in the Jesus who provides.

This Jesus, who provides, Jehovah Jireh, is head of His church, and He has a hope-filled calling for you! (Ephesians 1:18).

We find hope in a Jesus who provides.