

# contagious hope for small groups

## FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

## SMALL GROUP OBJECTIVE:

Participants will be given the opportunity to reflect on specific life challenges and then experience a restored sense of hope as they encounter Jesus and experience His care (both directly and through other people.)

## KEY TRUTHS:

We can have hope during the most tragic of circumstances. We can have a hope that prevails, because hope is a person and His name is Jesus.

We find hope in Jesus, who pursues us.

# Hope is a Person

**Notes to the Small Group Leader:** As you continue your journey through the *Contagious Hope* resource, encourage all group members to begin/renew the habit of writing letters to God. This will be an integral part of the spiritual conversations among group members. You might even want to provide extra paper and pens so that each person will be able to participate during the sessions.

## Consider this Opening Activity

You might consider beginning this session with the following activity. Prepare a list of "Life Events" that members of your group would likely have experienced. Choose both positive and painful events, with an ultimate goal of making this a light-hearted activity for your group. Match your list of events with a deck of cards. (For example: Ace = You've won \$10 million dollars, King = You've been audited by the IRS, Queen = You get a promotion at the office, Jack = You catch a cold from someone



at the office, etc.) Post the list of *Life Events* on a piece of poster board. As you begin the session, give each participant two or three playing cards from a regular deck of cards. Give these instructions: *I am dealing each of you two/three playing cards from this deck. Life has just "dealt" you certain positive events and certain painful events. I'm going to show you the key for these events now.*

Show the key for the *Life Events*. Read each item on the list aloud. When you are finished, ask participants to compare the things that "life" has dealt them.

- How many of you experienced two positive life events?
- How many of you experienced two painful life events?
- How many experienced a combination of positive and painful events?

Conclude with these thoughts: Many of us experienced a combination of positive and painful life experiences in the activity. The same is true in our real lives. Some days, life deals out events that are pleasant, positive or not too bothersome. Other days, life deals out events that are quite painful, difficult or irritating.



## Hope is a Person

### Practice Celebrations and Comfort

#### FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

#### NOTES:

This may seem somewhat obvious or trivial, but it will be important to practice celebrating with one another during your small group sessions. This relational skill will be a fundamental way for your group to connect and fellowship with one another. We all feel less alone (even in our celebrations) when people around us take the time to rejoice with us. You will also want to emphasize to your members that the simple act of rejoicing with another person is a great way to reach out to those outside of faith in Christ. As the leader, be sure to model “celebratory” responses for your group.

Rejoicing or celebrating with group members might sound like:

- I’m so happy for you...
- Wow! That’s terrific. I’m so glad that happened.
- That’s fantastic. What a blessing. I’m thrilled for you.

During this session of your small group, you will also focus again on the ministry of comfort. Be sure to model compassionate and caring responses for your group. Remember that the human need for comfort is one of the most critical and perhaps the most misunderstood needs in the church today. This is why we deal with this particular need more than once. Since we live in a culture riddled with pain, it is vital that we learn and practice the loving ministry of comforting people when they hurt.

Everyone suffers physical and emotional pain in life. Medical treatment can bring relief to a physical injury or illness. But the emotional hurt from rejection, the death of a loved one, a business failure or a broken marriage or friendship requires a different type of treatment. Romans 12:15 admonishes us to “mourn with those who mourn.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). Meeting the need for comfort in someone struggling with painful circumstances requires a sincere expression of caring words and a compassionate heart.





## Hope is a Person

### Have Your Own Encounter with Jesus

#### FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

#### NOTES:

A key point of leadership during this session will require that you lead participants through a time of quiet reflection on Jesus. This is one of the most important elements of this session, so please make sure to allow time for *Encountering Jesus*. Read the *Encountering Jesus* paragraphs several times as you prepare for this session. Let the truths of this meditation impact you. Don't stay in your head. Let the love of Jesus impact your heart.

After you have encountered Jesus and how He takes initiative to let you know He cares, let your own gratitude guide the time of reflection with your group. Say the meditation in your own words or simply read it out loud. You might find it helpful to play soft, instrumental music during this time of reflection. Take your time. Invite Jesus to be the unseen source of hope for your small group.

**Supplementary Ideas:** We have provided media resources for each lesson of your small group. These videos (from the *Greatest Story Ever Sung*) may be helpful as an opening worship element or music that can be played during times of group interaction. For this session we suggest: *Never Heard Anyone* by Shirley Caesar and Darwin Hobbs.

### Getting From Here to There:

- We all experience a combination of positive and painful life experiences.
- Hope can be refreshed and even inspired when we take the time to celebrate the positive events together. When we celebrate the good things with one another, we feel less alone. And feeling less alone means feeling more hopeful. (Romans 12:15a)
- Painful events that come as a surprise or are out of our control are often the most difficult to endure. Our closest relationships can also bring some of life's greatest challenges. When our hurts come as a result of religion or as a result of ministry relationships, the pain can feel exponential.
- Even in the most difficult circumstances, hope can prevail. The story of John 9 reminds us of the compounded pain when uncontrollable life events, combine with challenging relationships and painful religious experiences. The key to a hope that prevails is the person of Jesus.

# contagious hope for small groups

## FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

## KEY TRUTH:

We can have hope during the most tragic of circumstances. We can have a hope that prevails, because hope is a person and His name is Jesus.

We find hope in Jesus, who pursues us.

## NOTES:

## Hope is a Person

“Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him . . .” (John 9:35).

Scripture reminds us that we have a God who notices our lives, is moved with compassion and takes action to care.

## Enjoying Fellowship

During our last session, we were invited to begin writing letters to God as a way of communicating more intimately with Him. We were encouraged to specifically talk to God about our gratitude for His compassion. Our prompts were as follows:

*Dear Jesus, Thank you for Your compassion. It means so much to me that ...*

*Dear God, I am so amazed that I have a God who cries for me because ...*

Take a few minutes for participants to read their letters to God out loud. If time is short, ask only two or three members to read their letters during this session. Reading your letters to God can be a beautiful way to celebrate the truths that are being experienced during this series, as well as a way to enjoy true fellowship among Christ's followers. (Group leaders may want to share their letters first.)

Be mindful of the many different emotions that others may voice through their letters. Some individuals may celebrate their experience with God. Other participants may have more questions of God and cry out to Him for answers. And still others may be in a place of dissonance with God. It will be important for each person to do their part to create an atmosphere of acceptance. Group members need to know that it is safe to share a full spectrum of emotions in their letters to God.

Your accepting words might sound like, “Thank you for trusting us enough to share what you're really feeling. We're here for you and we're walking through this with you.” Or “I am grateful that you were honest with God. He can handle it. We want you to know that we care about what you're going through.”





## Hope is a Person

### Exchanging Insights

#### FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

#### NOTES:

“Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him . . .” (John 9:35).

Our last session revealed how God loves us through His compassionate care. His heart hurts when we do (As He expresses Himself as the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). During this session, we will be considering the amazing truth that Christ takes initiative to care for us; He comes to find us when we hurt. Jesus pursues us!

1. Reflect on these thoughts after the opening activity: Most of us experienced a combination of positive and painful life experiences in the opening activity. The same is true in our real lives. Some days, life deals us events that are pleasant, positive or not too bothersome. Other days, life deals us events that are quite painful, difficult or irritating.



Hope can be refreshed and even inspired when we take the time to celebrate the positive events together. When we celebrate the good things with one another, we feel less alone. And feeling less alone means feeling more hopeful.

Let's celebrate some of the positive or pleasant events of our week. Romans 12:15 reminds us to, “Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn.”

To rejoice or celebrate might begin like this:

*I am glad that \_\_\_\_\_ happened this week because ...*

Then to rejoice or celebrate with someone might sound like:

- *Wow! That's terrific. I'm happy for you.*
- *How exciting! I'm thrilled for you.*
- *Good for you. I'm so glad that God provided ...*
- *Thank you so much for sharing that with us. I'm blessed to hear about ...*

Allow time for each person in the group to share a life celebration. And be sure to rejoice with one another! (If time is short, you could share this experience in groups of two or three.)

**FOCAL SCRIPTURES:**

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

**NOTES:**

## Hope is a Person

2. The story of the man born blind (John 9:1-36) reminds us that there are many of life's events that are out of our control. And unfortunately, the painful events that come without warning or possibility of control can be the most challenging to endure. Think about some of your most significant painful events that came as a surprise or were out of your control. (You won't be asked to share details of those events with the group). How did the lack of control make the circumstance more difficult for you?

3. The story of the man born blind reveals a painful tendency within the disciples. Upon seeing the blind man, the disciples were concerned with the "cause" of his blindness. They wanted to know, "Who sinned?" By contrast, when Jesus saw the man who was blind, He was moved with compassionate care. What about you? Do you have a tendency to see the painful events in another's life and ask yourself, "Who sinned?" Do you have a tendency to experience painful events of your own and ask yourself, "Is this happening to me because I've sinned?"

***I have a tendency to ...***

4. The story of the man born blind also shows us that painful life events can come in the form of challenging relationships. Our closest relationships, like our marriage, children and family can often be the most difficult to navigate. Relationships with friends, ministry leaders, co-workers and employers can also bring life stressors. What current relationship challenges are present for you? **(Talk only about the situations that can be shared without giving names or specific details that would cause hurt for someone else. If your most pressing relationship challenge is your marriage, ask your spouse's permission before talking about your struggles with the group.)**

***My most pressing relationship challenge would be ...***

[The leader will share first, with other group members to follow. As each person gives their response, group members will want to offer words of comfort.]

5. Finally, the story of the man born blind shows some of the tragic consequences of irrelevant religion. Recall one of your painful life events that was made more difficult because of painful religious experiences – when even God's people got it wrong. (Talk only about those situations that can be shared without giving names or specific details that would cause hurt for someone else.)

***I/we experienced the painful consequences of irrelevant religion when ...***

[The leader will share first, with other group members to follow. As each person gives their response, group members will want to offer words of comfort.]

6. Take a few moments to give comfort to one another and pray together. In smaller groups of 2 or 3, spend some time offering words of compassionate care, based on group members' earlier responses. Experience the second half of Romans 12:15: "Mourn with those who mourn." Finally, pray together, thanking God for His caring concern.

# contagious hope for small groups

## FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

## NOTES:

## Hope is a Person

7. Even in the most difficult circumstances, hope can prevail. The story of John 9 reminds us of the compounded pain when uncontrollable life events, combine with challenging relationships and painful religious experiences. The key to a hope that prevails is the person of Jesus. Just like the blind man, **we find hope in Jesus who pursues us!**

- Can you recall a time when Jesus “showed up” in the midst of a challenging life event and your hope was refreshed?
- Can you think of a time when God answered a prayer ... that you hadn’t even voiced?
- Can you recall a time when God delivered you or rescued you from a difficult circumstance?
- Can you remember a time when you felt like God was “with you” and His presence restored your hope?
- Can you recall a time when you sensed God’s care, as He seemed to pursue you?

I remember when \_\_\_\_\_ and I had a special sense that God \_\_\_\_\_.

Recalling God’s initiative on our behalf can remind us of the Hope that is within us ... and prompt our praise.

I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will **hope**, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints (Psalm 52:9).

## Encountering Jesus

“Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him...” (John 9:35) Now imagine that you are in the midst of that painful time. Your mind is filled with rational questions that have no answers: “Why did this happen?” “Where was God?” You hear someone draw near to you. He gently calls you by name. And as you turn toward His voice, you see Christ standing near by. Jesus has come to find you.



He has noticed you and pursued you. The Christ of glory is near to you. Your unanswered, rational questions give way to a “heart reality”... He cares!



## Hope is a Person

### FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

### NOTES:

You may never know why this happened, but Jesus notices, cares and pursues. He reassures you, as surely as He did the blind man.

“I want you to know that I will be with you in this trouble; I will deliver you, and honor you (Psalm 91:15). I will not leave you comfortless, my friend. I will come to you (John 14:18). I will not abandon you on account of My Father’s great name (1 Samuel 12:22). I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you (Isaiah 42:6). I love you and I will never, ever leave you.”

Could you spend the next few moments allowing God’s Spirit to confirm the truths that He pursues and He cares? Talk with God about the gratitude that’s in your heart.

Jesus longs to share His prevailing hope with you, regardless of the severity of your tribulation. May we remember to meditate on the Person of Hope - and His name is Jesus!

**Optional:** The music video entitled *Never Heard Anyone* provides a very upbeat, “rejoicing” environment for the next part of rejoicing together.

### Experiencing God’s Word

“Rejoice with those who rejoice” Romans 12:15a.

Just as Jesus took initiative to “go and find” the man born blind, He has likely done so for each of us. Think about the times when Jesus seemed to pursue or take initiative to meet your needs. Remember again the times when He:

- Showed up during a challenging time of your life
- Answered a prayer
- Delivered or rescued you
- Was especially close to you

Take a few moments to write about this time. Using your *Letters to God Journal*, thank Jesus for caring enough to pursue you.

Thank you, Jesus for caring enough to pursue me when . . .

Now as each group member shares their experience and renewal of hope, respond to one another as the Scripture encourages: “Rejoice with those who rejoice” (Romans 12:15a).

Celebrate the variety of ways that Jesus’ care is revealed. Rejoice with one another over the ways that Jesus has pursued members of the group. Notice that the stories of Christ’s care and rejoicing together bring renewed hope to the group. Celebrating together encourages our journey in Contagious Hope.



## Hope is a Person

### Expressing Contagious Hope

#### FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- John 9:1-36
- Romans 12:15
- Romans 4:18
- Psalm 91:15
- John 14:18
- 1 Samuel 12:22
- Isaiah 42:6

#### NOTES:

Living out a *Contagious Hope* with others will not be a self-imposed action, nor will it be accomplished by revving ourselves up to reach out to others. A genuine love for others won't be conjured up through a motivation of guilt or regret. Our empowerment to love others with Christ's love will only come through our love relationship with Jesus – our gratitude for how He has loved us. He is our hope!

- Think of a person who could benefit from a special note or letter just from you. Who could benefit from your written words of comfort, encouragement, celebration or support? (The *Letters to God* cards from Dayspring have been especially designed for this ministry of sharing hope.)
- How might you love another person this week, like Christ has loved you?
- Who could you “pursue” this week that might need your care? How might you help? Support? Provide for them?
- Who could you take initiative with this week, especially to rejoice with them?
- Who could you take initiative with this week, especially to comfort them?
- Who could you reach out to this week, who might be ministered to by the *Letters to God* movie? Would you make a call, send an email or text with your invitation?

If time permits, pray together about these opportunities for Contagious Hope.

### Preparing for the Next Session

Continue your encounters with Jesus by writing your own letter to God. Consider using the *Letters to God Journal*. (*Letters to God Journal*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530) Consider these sentence starters as a way to begin your letter:

God, thank You for being a God who notices and cares. When I remember my painful circumstances, I also remember how You came through ...

Thank You for being a God who takes initiative to care. I can remember times when You have loved me in a special way by ...

### Close the Session in Prayer

Dear God...