



Hope is In His Word

FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- Matthew 14:22-33
- Mark 6:45-52
- Romans 15:4
- Hebrews 7:25
- Matthew 28:20
- John 15:11
- John 16:33
- John 17:18
- Luke 6:31,35
- Matthew 5:16

SMALL GROUP OBJECTIVE:

Group members will experience the blessing of a Jesus who prays for them and then have the opportunity to pray WITH and FOR one another according to God's Word

KEY TRUTHS:

God's Scripture redirects the focus of our hope away from the uncertainty of changing circumstances, to the peace and certainty of God's Word. His Word remains true, regardless of whether our life's storms subside!

We have hope in Jesus, who prays for us.

Notes to the Small Group Leader: We hope that this session will be particularly encouraging to group members because of the emphasis on Christ's prayers for us! This potentially, new image of Jesus can offer a renewed sense of His care and grace for our lives.

Secondly, the emphasis on God's promises will also provide a tremendous source of hope for group members. Feel free to emphasize other promises within God's Word as well.

Be Mindful

Be mindful of the many different emotions that others may voice through their letters to God during this session. Some individuals may celebrate their experience with God. Other participants will 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 you to create and maintain 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 are here for you and we are 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 you and what you're going through."

Help Participants Distinguish Their Prayers

During this session, participants will be asked to pray WITH one another and pray FOR one another. We suggest that, at times, there may be a difference.

To pray **with** a friend, might mean joining together in prayer, over a specific life circumstance. Praying with a friend may mean praying alongside someone as each of you express appropriate concerns about the storms of life. For example:

- Praying for God to perform a needed miracle of healing or restoration
- Praying for God to give wisdom and direction to doctors
- Praying for God to grant freedom in the life of a teenager
- Praying for God to open new doors of employment

In this way, we are agreeing in prayer with another person that God might direct and intervene in a particular circumstance.





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Praying **for** a friend is more personally focused. These prayers might include a petition for what God might want to do in a person's life, even if the circumstance never changes. For example:

- Praying that God would increase a friend's faith or develop their patience
- Praying that God might bring joy or peace into a person's life
- Praying that God might refine a person's life-calling or direction
- Praying that God might increase a person's deep concern for those around him.

Each of these prayers focuses on the person and the changes that might be needed, in spite of any life challenges.

Have Your Own Encounter with Jesus

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' prayer for you and His 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: *No Need to Fear* by Wintley Phipps.

Getting From Here to There:

- Jesus notices the struggles of our lives, just as He did the disciples (Matthew 14:22-33).
- Jesus not only notices our struggles, He prays for us in the midst of them. The High Priest intercedes for us! (Hebrews 7:25).
- Jesus prays for us and the concerns of our hearts. What might He be praying? Christ is likely praying for the certainty of God's Word to be true in our lives.
- As a ministry of hope, we can pray WITH others.



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Enjoying Fellowship

During our last session, we were encouraged to write letters to God as a way of communicating more intimately with Him. We were encouraged to specifically talk to God about our gratitude for how He notices and cares. Our prompts were as follows:

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 ...

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.

Exchanging Insights

1. Jesus notices and cares about the struggles of our life. Jesus saw the struggles of His disciples with spiritual eyes (Matthew 14:22-33). He wasn't too busy to notice. Christ wasn't too preoccupied to care. What hope now arises in you, as you reflect on this kind of Jesus – One who notices and pursues us?

As I reflect on the truth that Jesus notices my life and pursues me, I feel . . .

2. Jesus not only saw the struggles of His followers, He prayed for them. God reassures us that Jesus prays for us as well. The same High Priest is interceding for us today. He is praying at the right hand of the Father on our behalf. The Son of God is sitting next to God and He's praying for you and me (Hebrews 7:25). How does it move your heart to consider this truth? What feelings are prompted in you as you imagine Christ sitting next to God, praying for you? [The leader will share first, followed by other group members.]

I feel _____ when I imagine Jesus praying specifically for me.

3. Jesus is praying for us, but what might He be praying? Take a few moments to write in your prayer journal. Write down some of the things that Jesus might be praying for you. Could He be praying about the needs of your life? Could Christ be interceding on your friend/family's behalf? Could Jesus be praying for the issues that are heavy on your heart? Might Christ be praying for your relationship with Him or others? Quietly ask the Lord to speak to you, then spend a few moments writing down the ideas He gives you. Share one or two of your ideas with the group.

One of the things Jesus must be praying for me is ...



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Encountering Jesus

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Take the next few moments and reflect on your own life. Are there times recently when you have struggled? Have you been challenged in personal relationships or struggled with behaviors that you just can't seem to stop? Have you lived with emotions that seem to control you or patterns that you just can't break? Are you facing challenges of health, finances, job loss, or infertility? Are you weary of struggling?

Now imagine the scene: Jesus is kneeling at the top of a mountain. He sees you struggling and His heart is concerned for you. Just as He "saw" the disciples straining at the oars of the boat, Jesus sees your struggles and His heart is moved with compassion and He's moved to demonstrate care.

Meditate quietly on the image of Jesus, however you might picture Him. He might have a bearded face and flowing robes. He might have sandaled feet and dark brown hair. If you look closely, you can see Christ's expression. His face is fixed on His followers – on you and me. He gazes with compassionate concern. He's saddened by our struggles and He can't wait to respond.



We watch as Jesus lifts His head and begins to pray. The High Priest is praying! The Son of God is praying to His Father. If we were able to move just a little closer to Jesus, what would we hear? The Scriptures tell us: "He always lives to intercede for us" (Hebrew 7:25). So if you could listen to the Savior's prayer, He would be praying for you! Jesus would be praying for your struggles and your challenges. The Son of God – is praying to His Father – for you! Let that truth impact your heart.

4. What an incredible truth: Jesus prays for us! He actually lives to intercede for us, just as He did the disciples. How does that truth impact your heart? When you imagine Jesus talking to His Father on your behalf, what emotions do you feel? [The leader will share first, followed by other small group members.]

I feel _____ when I imagine Jesus praying to His Father just for me ...

As a small group, spend a few moments giving thanks to God. Pray together in groups of two or three and express your gratitude for a Christ who prays.



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5. Christ not only prays for us, He wants us to hear His Word. Jesus has promises to share with us. Just as He spoke to Peter, He wants to speak to us. Review just a few of the promises that we can count on:

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

-I will be with you day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

-I want My joy to be your joy, and your joy wholly mature!

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

-In trusting Me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world, you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I’ve conquered the world.

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

- In the same way that My Father gave Me a mission in the world, I give you a mission in the world.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you ... then your reward will be great” (Luke 6:31, 35).

-Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! You’ll never – I promise – regret it!

“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

-By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God.

Experiencing Scripture

“I delight in your decrees . . . Your statutes are my delight” (Psalm 119:16, 24).

6. These six promises are guarantees. Jesus said them; we can count on them! God’s Word is certain, regardless of the storms or struggles. Think back to times of struggle, loss or trial in your own life. Which one of Christ’s promises meant the most to you? Which one of His promises stood true? How did you know? Spend the next several moments *delighting* in the Word of God through your journal writings or sharing with your group.

I was especially grateful for Christ’s promise of _____ because ...



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Isn't it amazing how our hope can be refreshed by the certainty of God's Word? Romans 15:4 confirms the connection between God's Word and our hope: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

7. Just as Christ prayed for the disciples and just as Jesus prays for us, we can offer that same ministry of hope to others. Look at the six verses of promise again. Which of the six verses would you like to experience more often? Which one of these promises might need to be lived out more often? Would you need more joy, peace, more of a sense that God is with you, or more of a sense that you are being sent out? [The leader will share first, followed by other members of the small group.]

I would like to experience more of (name specific promise) _____, because ...

For example: I would like to experience more of John 15:11 because I need more of God's joy in my life.

For example: I would like to experience more of the promise in Luke 6:31, 35. I need to sense more often that God is working in my life to impact others.

Experiencing God's Word

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us"(1 John 5:14).

Divide into smaller groups of two or three. Pray again together. This time, you will want to pray FOR your partner(s). Pray specifically FOR your partner based upon the Bible promise they most need to experience. You can have the confidence that your prayers will be heard, since all the prayers will be according to God's will. You'll know they are God's will because you will be praying for God to make His promises true in the life of your partner.

God, please make this truth a more consistent experience in the life of my friend...

Expressing Contagious Hope

Living out a *Contagious Hope* with others includes:

- Looking for opportunities to comfort (Session 1)
- Taking initiative to care or pursue (Session 2)





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Then after our initiative in these ways, God may provide opportunities to pray WITH other people. He may also provide opportunities to pray FOR others. What will be the difference? Praying with someone will include praying together about the concerns or struggles that each person is facing. Praying FOR someone is God-focused. Praying FOR another person means praying a prayer that concentrates on their relationship with God. (For instance, if a friend is facing a serious illness, we might pray with them about the wisdom of the doctors and their physical healing. As we pray FOR our friend, we might pray FOR God's peace in the midst of the struggle or FOR the assurance of His presence.)

Could you pray specifically WITH someone this week? Who might that be? After you have pursued this person, taken initiative to care and offered words of comfort, how might you pray WITH them?

Could you pray specifically FOR someone this week? Who might that be? After you have pursued this person, taken initiative to care and offered words of comfort, how might you pray FOR them? What promise of God could you claim for them?

Preparing for the Next Session

Continue your encounter with Jesus this week by writing a letter to God. (You may want to use your own *Letters to God Journal*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530) Consider these sentence starters as a way to begin your letter:

God, I'm so grateful that Your Son prays for me. I am humbled that . . .

Jesus, thank you for being a Savior who prays for me. I am particularly grateful for Your promise of ...

Close the Session in Prayer

Dear God...