



Hope Purifies

FOCAL SCRIPTURES:

- Mark 4:35-41
- Psalm 147:11
- Isaiah 40:31
- Jeremiah 29:11
- Lamentations 3:25
- Romans 5:5

SMALL GROUP OBJECTIVE:

Group members will assess their view of Jesus and how that might impact their ability to sense His presence, to worship and their desire to please Him. Participants will ask God for needed changes and then experience Christ's acceptance.

KEY TRUTHS:

Following Christ does not mean freedom from the storms of life. Rather, as we hope in Him and His Word and experience contagious hope among His people, life transformation takes place.

We have hope in Jesus, who welcomes us.

Notes to the Small Group Leader: This session will provide opportunities to assess your view of God and how that might impact your love of Him and ability to reflect His presence. As our view of God may need to be reshaped, we can see God's true identity through the testimony of His Son, through the truth of His Word and through the love of his people. Consequently, you may have noticed our intentional encouragement for you to encounter Jesus, experience His Word and enjoy fellowship with His saints.

Cultivate Awareness and Acceptance

During this session, group members will assess their view or perception of God. Many of us have never discussed our view of God and therefore assume that all our perceptions about God are correct. Unfortunately though, on some level, we all have an imperfect view of God. During this session, participants will consider and share how they "see" God. Keep in mind, this may be a new level of awareness for group members and therefore will require an atmosphere of acceptance among the group. Do your part to foster an atmosphere of acceptance with words like, "There are times when we see God for who He really is ... and at other times, we miss Him. I'm just glad I'm on the journey of knowing Him" Or "It's understandable how you might view God in that way. Thank you for trusting us with that part of your life."

Additionally, this session helps participants make the connection that our view of God directly relates to our ability to love and worship Him. If we see Jesus as He truly is: loving, comforting, pursuing, and providing; then our hearts will more easily worship Him. In contrast, it is hard to worship a God who is distant, disappointed in us or inspecting us. An underlying goal of this resource is to encourage Christ's followers to see Him as He truly is, in order to deepen our experience of reverence and worship. Furthermore, the more we see Christ as He really is – the more we long to please Him.

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.



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- Ephesians 1:18-23
- 1 Corinthians 12:13-27
- John 6:9-11
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After you have encountered Jesus' welcoming embrace and His unconditional acceptance, let your 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: *To the King Eternal* by Michael W. Smith.

Getting From Here to There:

- In the midst of life's storms, we can forget that Jesus is with us. Christ's first concern (even in the midst of storms) is His relationship with us.
- There is a difference between knowing the "real" Jesus, having an intimate relationship with Him and just knowing about Him.
- Our walk with Jesus will prompt us to see Him "more clearly" as He really is.
- The more we see Christ for who He really is – the more we long to please Him.
- Our longing to please Him will empower our effective love of 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 His provision and our thankfulness for having freely received. We were also encouraged to write to God about our willingness and plans to give to others. Our prompts were as follows:

Dear God, thank you for your provision in my life. I am especially grateful for . . .

Dear God, help me to “freely give” to others this week, by . . .

Remove my hindrances that keep me from loving others well. Hindrances like . . .

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. In the midst of the storms and struggles of our lives, we can sometimes forget that Jesus is with us. We can forget that we have a God who comforts, pursues, prays and provides. When have you “forgotten” that Jesus was with you? When have you “forgotten” that Jesus is “in the boat” with you?

There have been times when I have forgotten Jesus was with me, such as the time ...

2. Christ's first concern in the midst of life's storms is His relationship with us. Jesus' first priority is our deep knowing of Him, who He is and how much He loves us. Many times, we are too focused on the storms themselves to see Christ as He really is. When you are in the midst of life's toughest trials, how do you see Jesus?

When I am in the midst of trials, I often see Jesus as ...

3. Jesus asked Philip a question that bears repeating: “Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? (John 14:9). Do we really know Jesus, or do we just know about Him? Talk with your small group about the difference.



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4. Discuss where you are in the process of truly knowing Christ. The disciples made a journey from calling Christ, “Teacher” to worshipping Him as Lord. They first “saw” Jesus their teacher, but ultimately came to “see” Him as Lord. Take a few minutes to brainstorm about some of the ways that we might see Jesus. How do we often “see” Him? Do you view Jesus as your: Savior? Teacher? Guide? Counselor? Comforter? Friend? Judge? Accountability partner? School principal? Disappointed parent? Distant acquaintance? [The leader will share first, with other group members to follow.]

At times, I have seen Jesus as my ...

At other times, I have seen Jesus as my ...

5. Our walk with Jesus will prompt us to see Him in different ways. The disciples moved from admiration, to fear and then to worship. How does our image of Jesus relate to reverence and worship? In other words, how easy/difficult is it to worship a Savior? A teacher? A guide? A counselor? A comforter? A friend? A judge? A disappointed parent or distant acquaintance? Discuss your observations with your small group.
6. The disciples needed to remember Who was in the boat with them during their storm. They needed to change how they “saw” Jesus. Are there any changes that you might need to make in how you see God?

At times, I could benefit from seeing Jesus as ...

7. Our faith needs to be purified. The disciples walked away changed from their encounter with Jesus. They came to know, understand and experience the real Jesus; the encounter with Jesus purified their faith. Our faith can be purified as we encounter the real Jesus. When we frequently encounter His deep love for us, we long to please Him.

Imagine those days of your first love, those first weeks or months when you were enraptured by someone special. Wasn't there a part of you that longed to please that special person? Didn't you long to do or say just the right thing, in order to avoid displeasing them? When we consistently encounter Christ's love for us, we will long to please Him. We will long to do and say just the right things in order to avoid displeasing Him. The hope of His love can purify our faith.

Think again about the ways we often “see” Jesus (Counselor, Judge, School Principal, Savior, Friend, Guide, Disappointed parent, etc.) How easy or difficult will it be for you to want to please this “kind of Jesus?”



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I often see Jesus as ...

My desire to please Him comes easily because ...

My desire to please Him is more difficult because ...

After group members have shared, reflect on this truth: The more we see Christ as He really is – the more we long to please Him.

8. Reflect on a time when you have failed, messed up or fallen short in some way. (You won't have to share this with the group). Have there been times of regret, failure or evidence of immaturity/lack of growth in your life?

Romans tells us that, "the goodness of God draws us to repentance." It is the goodness of God that draws our hearts to change.

Encountering Jesus

Take a moment and allow your heart to respond to Christ's presence in the midst of your life situations. Recall the end of Zacchaeus' story. The man who was an outcast, a tax collector from Jericho, encountered Jesus and his life was forever changed (Luke 19:1-10).

"A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way" (Luke 19:2-4).

There's no doubt that life's challenges brought Zacchaeus a certain measure of loneliness and cynicism. And his loneliness must have reinforced his self-reliance, fear of rejection and shame. There must have been unanswered questions like, "Why me?" and "What now?" Zacchaeus certainly experienced his share of failures. His life was characterized by thievery, deception and lies. Zacchaeus was just like us. There were times when he tried and failed. There were times when he was filled with regret. There were times when he messed up, disappointed people or let them down.

But now imagine an image of Jesus— looking toward you with out-stretched arms and a welcoming glance. Just like He did with Zacchaeus, Jesus sees each and every one of our failures and yet He comes to find us. He calls us by name and invites us into relationship with Him.

"When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly" (Luke 19:5-6).

contagious hope for small groups

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Quietly meditate on this “real” image of Jesus. He’s not giving advice or lectures. Christ is offering a welcoming embrace. It’s no wonder that Zacchaeus hurried down to receive Him gladly! Allow your heart to receive the love and renewed hope that flows from Jesus. But consider also, that to receive this hope in Christ will mean an invitation of transformation and your willingness to embrace Christ-likeness.

“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.’” (Luke 19: 8-10).

Pause quietly to imagine Christ welcoming you closely. Thank Him for being so loving and faithful. And now invite God’s Spirit to speak to your heart: “Jesus, Lord over heaven and earth, how might I better please You? Change me as You desire. I thank You that You are more concerned with our relationship than even the storms of my life.”



End your time of meditation with quiet reflection on Christ’s acceptance. Group members may even want to journal about their gratitude for how Christ welcomes us or share about their gratitude with two or three others.

As I imagine Christ’s acceptance of me and welcoming me in the midst of my failures, I feel encouraged/empowered/convicted/grateful because ...

Experiencing God’s Word

“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds . . .” (Hebrews 10:24).

Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us of the real God’s heart for us: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

What are you sensing God is hoping for in you?

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Do you sense God's plans to prosper you? What are they?

What does He want for your future?

I sense God wants me to...

(Be a good father, be more actively involved in caring for people, get more involved in ministry and missions, be a more attentive friend, etc.)

[Leaders will share first, with group members to follow.] As each person shares their response, give words of encouragement. These might sound like:

- *I'm excited for you about that.*
- *I can't wait to see what God does through you.*
- *I'll be looking forward to hearing more ...*
- *It sounds like God has really impressed this on your heart, I want to be there for you too.*

Expressing Contagious Hope

Expressing Contagious Hope will include living out the responses mentioned above.

During this week, will you be:

- Comforting others?
- Pursuing others?
- Praying for and with others?
- Freely giving to others and meeting their needs?
- Living out the hope God has spoken to you about during this session?

As you start session six, group members will be invited to share their stories of hope as they have lived this week.

Preparing for the Next Session

Continue your encounter with Jesus this week by writing a letter to God (*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 with me in the storms of life. Help me to remember the "Real Jesus" and how You ...

God, please purify my faith by making me more...



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Close the Session in Prayer

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