

Small Group Guide: "CHRISTMAS: The Coming Hope"

Opening Question: What is the meaning behind your name? If you don't know, take a moment to look it up and share with the group!

Opening Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing us together today. We ask for Your guidance and wisdom as we explore Pastor Dan's sermon on hope and the Advent season. May our hearts be open to Your message and may we leave here feeling refreshed and encouraged. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

KEY SERMON POINTS

Main Idea

This week we began our Advent series focusing on HOPE. Pastor Dan reminded us that hope isn't a "what" we're looking for, but a "who" - Jesus Christ. When hope is deferred or delayed, our hearts can grow heavy and we can fall into learned hopelessness. However, God's timing is perfect, and He was actively working even during 400 years of silence before Christ's birth.

Takeaways

1. Hope is not just a feeling or wish; it is found in Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer.
2. God's timing is perfect, even when it feels delayed or deferred from our perspective.
3. Advent is a reminder of Christ's first coming and the anticipation of His return.
4. Real hope is found not in "what" we desire, but in "who" Jesus is.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Read Proverbs 13:12.** Discuss a time when hope was deferred in your life. How did it affect you spiritually and emotionally?
2. **Read Matthew 1:21.** Why is the name of Jesus described as having significant meaning and power?
3. Pastor Dan mentioned that hope is a "who" rather than a "what." How can focusing on Jesus reshape your perspective on challenging situations?
4. **Read Galatians 4:4.** Discuss the importance of God's timing in fulfilling His promises—especially His promise to send Jesus the Messiah.
5. Can you share a time when you looked back and realized God's timing was actually perfect, even though it didn't feel that way at the time?
6. During the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments, God was actively preparing the world for Christ's arrival. What does this teach us about seasons when God seems silent in our own lives?
7. How can believers maintain hope during times when God seems silent or inactive?
8. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.** How does this promise of Jesus' return encourage you?
9. Jesus came first as a baby in a manger, but He's returning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. How should this future reality affect how we live today?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS (Choose 1 or 2 that apply to you.)

1. Reflect on Hope: Spend time this week meditating on the names and attributes of Jesus, particularly as our hope, and journal about what this means in your current life season.
2. Advent Practice: Create or utilize an Advent calendar to help focus your daily thoughts and prayers on Jesus and the anticipation of His coming. (**[Download the 2025 Advent Calendar - laurelridgechurch.org/advent](https://www.laurelridgechurch.org/advent)**)
3. Prayer Focus: Shift your prayer focus from requesting specific outcomes ("what") to seeking a deeper relationship with Jesus ("who") and trusting Him with your needs.
4. Community Engagement: Share the message of hope with someone in your community who is going through a difficult time, offering them encouragement and prayer.
5. Mindfulness in Waiting: When feeling impatient with God's timing, practice gratitude by listing things God is doing in your life, even when specific prayers appear unanswered.

MEMORY VERSE for the Week:

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." (Proverbs 13:12)

Closing Prayer: *Lord, thank you for this time of sharing and learning. As we leave today, may we carry the hope of Christ in our hearts and be a light to those around us. Help us to trust in Your perfect timing and to find peace in Your presence. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*