

HOPE: Week 1

Read Aloud:

In a recent staff meeting – in response to our world’s current challenges related to the coronavirus – one of Northview’s executive pastors said:

“This is 2020, and the Church of Jesus Christ, which started over 2000 years ago, has endured much worse; in fact, it has actually thrived in the midst of it. I don’t say this to minimize what could be a truly horrible pandemic in our world. I simply understand that our forefathers in faith — those who have gone before us — have been faithful through many trials, and yet the Church of Jesus Christ has continued on and even thrived in the midst of it all.

Now, as the people of God, we have the unique opportunity and responsibility to lead and to love well. This is a significant moment for all of us to continue being the Church, and to even step up our creativity. In fact, I believe this circumstance may spark new ministry innovation we otherwise may not have realized, since we’re being forced to think differently and to do things differently in this season.

I encourage all of us at Northview Church to be fully engaged in the calling that God has placed on our lives, to serve well, and to make the most of this opportunity. Let’s trust and see what God is going to do as we serve and love our world together!”

At some point hope has probably seemed useless. You’ve been disappointed, even grieved, at the cards you’ve been dealt. *HAVE YOU BEEN THERE?* God’s Word tells us there’s HOPE. HOPE is a glimmer of light when your world has gone dark. It’s that reason to get up in the morning when you’d rather hide from reality. HOPE is what we all need to survive. During the next few weeks, as a group, let’s find our way to HOPE and discover how to stay there. Let the light of HOPE seep into our everyday life.

Now let’s start our study by reading a few hope-filled passages.

Scripture:

2 Corinthians 4:7-9, 16-18 (NIV) But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

1 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you.

Romans 12:12 (NLT) Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.

Observations:

1. What do we learn about hope from these different passages?
2. What can we specifically learn about God's character from these same passages?
3. What other observations did you have when reading these four passages?

Application:

1. As you consider the quote above, what is most hopeful or encouraging to you?
2. How would you describe a "hopeless" situation?
3. How is hope during difficult times different for a Christian than it is for a person who does not know Christ?
4. How can we continue to spread joy, love our neighbors and be the Church during this season?
5. Reread Romans 12:12. Why do you think we are called to keep on praying "in all situations?"

Prayer:

****Leader Note:** *As the Life Group leader, you will lead your group through this time of prayer. You will want to do your best to remove any distractions in the room, and in fact, may find it helpful to play soft worship music in the background. After you've read through the prompts below, and have given people time to talk with God, close the prayer time by praying a blessing over your group.***

Prayer Prompts: (read the following aloud)

Today, you are invited into a spiritual practice called *Palms Up, Palms Down*, which comes from a classic book by Richard Foster called "Celebration of Discipline." This is an excellent practice for opening your heart and mind to hear what God has to say to you. *Palms Up, Palms Down* is a practice you can do anywhere. Even in a crowd of people, you can simply turn a palm down and then up on your lap and pray quietly to God.

Let's first settle into our seats and try to become as comfortable as possible. Once you feel comfortable, hold your palms downward on your lap as a symbolic expression of your desire to turn over your concerns to God. (Leader: Allow time for people to get into a comfortable position. Once everyone seems settled, read the next prompt.)

Let's begin by calling to mind everything that is weighing heavily on our hearts and minds and give it to God. Let your downward facing palms represent you releasing your cares and concerns. Imagine them falling out of your grasp and into the hands of God. (Leader: Pause here to give the group a few minutes of silent prayer before moving on to the next prompt.)

When you feel that you are finished releasing your concerns to God, turn your hands over so that your palms are facing upward, symbolizing your desire to receive from God. Let's spend a few minutes in this posture, asking God what he would like to share with you in this moment. (Leader: Pause here to give the group a few moments of silent prayer before moving on to the next prompt.)

(Leader: When you feel enough time has passed, simply offer thanks to God for being present with your group, then pray a blessing over your group or read aloud the prayer below.)

Dear God, Thank you for your great love and blessing over our lives. Thank you that your favor has no end, but that it lasts for our entire lifetime. Forgive us for sometimes forgetting that you go before us and walk alongside us, that you know what concerns us, and that you cover us as a shield. May your love be known in this time and may our faith continue grow.

(Foster, Richard. 1978. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.)