

Advent 2022 Lapeer Free Methodist Church Week 1

Day 1: What is Hope?

Too many people have difficulty handling the stress of the holiday season. From finding the perfect gift to hosting the perfect party, there's plenty to go around. Most try to gain approval from those around them.

We, as believers, should be reaching out, providing the hope that so many desperately need.

We're told that faith is confidence in what we hope for in Hebrews 11:1. In 1 Corinthians 13:7, we're told that [love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always preserves. Paul goes on to say in verse 13 that these three remain; faith, hope and love.

But what is hope?

According to dictionary.com, it's a feeling that what is wanted can be had; to believe, desire or trust; and to place trust, rely (usually followed by "in"). Quite simply, hope is a desired outcome of a situation or a total reliance on someone or something else. This year, let's show the world the reason for the season. Let's sing with King David that our hope comes from the Lord. Then let's watch how God changes the world through us.

—John Johnson

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Day 2:

Hope is one of those words that means different things to different people in different contexts. One of the most common ways we speak of hope is almost superstitious, like we're talking about having good luck: "Let's hope so," "I hope it's better tomorrow," "Here's hoping..." This does not sound like the kind of hope that Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of when he said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope," that Emily Dickinson wrote about as "the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all," or what the Apostle Paul was referring to when writing to the church in Rome, "...May you abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." It's safe to assume that Paul did not desire for the church to abound in essentially wishing for good luck.

The Greek word generally translated as "hope" in the New Testament is pronounced "elpis," and it implies that something is going to happen. The person with hope is anticipating it with confidence. In modern times, this word could be translated as "anticipation" or "expectation." This hope is not merely wishful; it is confident and expectant. It sounds a lot like faith. This is a kind of hope that can really get us through the darkness.

Mary wasn't merely betting on her encounter with the angel Gabriel being a real experience; she was expecting God to follow through with his promise. The shepherds would not have bothered to enter the town, seeking an audience with the promised messiah, if their hope was wishful and weak. The wise men would not be traversing as far as they did just to see if, by chance, they might happen to run into a great, promised newborn king. Each of these people, along with others in the story of Christmas, were holding onto the anticipation that they would find Jesus.

I find it meaningful that we celebrate Christmas just after the darkest night of the year. The days have started so slowly to get longer that anyone who is not carefully noting the time of the sun's rising and setting would not even notice. Yet, billions of people all over the world are celebrating with lights, candles, trees, gifts, and gathering. I find it meaningful that hope is the first candle that we light as the days are still getting darker and will be getting darker for several more weeks. It adds a layer of defiance to our hope: Even though the days are getting darker, we, together, are expecting the light to come. We may not even notice it at first, but, slowly, our world will be warmed and will start to bloom again.

Advent reminds us that just when we are in our darkest moments, we can confidently anticipate that, somewhere, a warm, bright, growing fire is being lit. When we celebrate the coming of Emmanuel, we are not throwing pennies in a pool -- we are declaring our hope that, because of Jesus, God is truly with us.

-Wesley Lawton

Day 3:

Psalm 61

1 Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. 2 From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.
3 For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.

4 I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.
5 For you, God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. 6 Increase the days of the king's life, his years for many generations.
7 May he be enthroned in God's presence forever; appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him. 8 Then I will ever sing in praise of your name and fulfill my vows day after day.

My parents had a rule: Christmas doesn't start until 7:00 am. Didn't matter what time we woke up, we were not to go into the living room until my parents gave the signal - Christmas music blaring through the whole house of a reel to reel system. Of course, as Youngers, we woke up long before 7:00 am. My older brothers, when they woke up, would come upstairs and hang out in my sister's and my room until 7:00 am. We would sit and play games and talk excitedly about the day to come, while awaiting with anticipation for the sounds that meant Christmas had arrived!

Advent is about anticipating, not only Jesus' birth but His return. We anticipate Christmas by preparing our hearts and remembering what the Christmas story means. How Jesus willingly left His throne in heave to humble himself as an infant human to bring salvation to the world and the forgiveness of sin

-Sue Lovelette

Action: Take a minute and write a Psalm of hope and anticipation for what God will do in you and through you this upcoming year:

Day 4: Opportunities

Read: Zephaniah 3:17

As this year comes to a close, we recognize the year has had challenges - person, family, financial, and work, to mention a few.

What do you do when faced with such challenges? Do you throw up your hands and quit, or do you look to our Lord Jesus for direction? God loves us! He rejoices over us with singing!

God offers each of us a life worth living - sometimes that means trusting Him and stepping into a new direction that we don't know and might even be hesitant to take. If we trust the Lord, we don't have to be afraid. Himself goes before us: "The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 3:18).

Think about the opportunity to spread hope, joy, love, and peace as God opens doors of opportunity this Christmas season for you. What an honor it is to be used to reach our community for our Savior.

Dorothea Rogers

The Word in action: Today, think about how you can become more sensitive to opportunities God places before you this Christmas season. Remember 2 Timothy 1:7 "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of love and of a sound mind."

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Day 5

God of Hope

Romans 15:13 (NIV) May the God of HOPE fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I have needed so much hope this year.

This year started out with my daughter going through something I could never have imagined. Yet I was filled with such peace and hope that we would get through. Praise God, we have so far.

Next was my husband being injured and all the fear of being out of work and trying to heal. I had so much hope that we would find ways to enjoy our gift of time together and come out stronger as a family unit. Praise God, we have so far.

Lastly I had a medical emergency that I'm afraid traumatized my children for a while. I had to have hope that our community of people would care for my children as my body healed. Praise God, I am healed, and my children seem okay so far.

As we come upon the holiday season, I am "overflowing with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." I have needed so much hope this year, and Praise God, I have had it so far.

Action: Think back to this year's events in your own life. Share with a friend where you

faced a challenge and felt hope fill you with joy and peace as you trusted in our Lord. —Sarah Grant

Days 6 and 7: Selah

The New American Standard Hebrew Lexicon defines the Hebrew word (סֶלָה) as "**to lift up, exalt**." Some scholars believe that Selah was a musical notation possibly meaning "silence" or "pause;" others, "end," "a louder strain," "piano," etc.

During the weekends of Advent this year, you're invited to stop and pause your regular reading and the busyness that surrounds this season, and make a plan to do something that involves an Advent sabbath - rest, meditation, thanksgiving, restoration.

As we end our week with "hope," find some way that you can either experience or give hope. Maybe it's an extended time of prayer in the morning. Maybe it's a letter (think long-hand or even email works) that is encouraging and a blessing for an old friend or a family member who has had a tough 2022. Maybe it's doing something for a neighbor -baking, taking your family Christmas caroling - whatever.

To help you in your "plan," here are some scriptures and suggested songs of the season that might inspire you. And on the following page, we have left space for you to mark what you want to do, or you did do, or that happened - whatever you find you want to mark.

It's crucial for us to read, pray, act, and remember. Take this opportunity to really explore the things you've learned about hope this week, and put them into action!

Ephesians 1:18: 'I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.."

Hebrews 10:23: "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

Isaiah 40:31: "but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Mark 9:23: "" 'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

Philippians 1:6 - "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Psalm 33:18 - "But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,

Psalm 71:14.- "As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more."

Carols of Hope:
"It came upon a midnight clear" "Come thou long expected Jesus" "O come, O come Emmanuel" "Go, Tell it on the Mountain"
What will you/did you do with your "pause" for hope?