



HOPE, PEACE, LOVE & JOY

WEEK ONE



Pause to Pray

HOPE

Lord, You are the world's HOPE! As we celebrate Your birth and anticipate Your second coming, we thank You for coming to earth as the Savior for all people. We pray for the 7,327 unreached people groups who do not know Your hope, who have not believed in You because they have not heard, and who cannot hear unless someone tells them. We pray our IMB missionaries will have opportunities to share Your everlasting hope with their lost friends and neighbors this advent season. Amen.

HOPE'S FOUNDATION

“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:19

In 1999 my wife and I and our two children were living in southern France. One Saturday, we took a day trip to northern Italy to see the Leaning Tower of Pisa. This tower is one of the most well-known structures in the world, not because of its columns, arches or white marble construction, but because of its legendary tilt. Construction began in 1173. Before the first three levels could be completed, the tower began to shift on its foundation ever so slightly. Gradually leaning further and further over the

centuries, it is now famous (or infamous) for being the most lopsided structure in the world. The word "pisa" comes from the Greek and means "marshy land." You would think the architects would have considered that before they chose the site. The sandy soil on which the city of Pisa was built was not stable enough to support a monument of this size. The tower didn't have a proper foundation.

Foundations are important, not just in building a structure but also in building a life. Foundations are what Jesus referred to in His Sermon on the Mount. He said, "The wise man built his house upon the rock" (Matthew 7:24). The storms of life are certain to beat down upon you, but if your foundation is sure, you will pass the test.

You'll do more than simply survive;
you'll thrive.

Hope is vitally important in our daily lives. We live in a hostile and brutal world. Every week we are inundated with news and events that could easily shatter us, except for one thing — we have hope! We have hope for a better life, a better world and better circumstances. We know the evil around us isn't going to last forever. Ultimately, good is going to triumph over evil. We don't just wish it would be so — we know it will be so! The hope we have is rooted in nothing less than the resurrection of Christ! That's the point the Apostle Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 15.

Everybody needs this kind of hope,

but billions of people all over the world don't have it. On every continent, millions and millions of people are plagued by hopelessness. You and I can change that. We must change that! Through our prayers, our giving, our sending and our going, we can be powerfully used by God to take the good news of the gospel to those who have not yet heard it. Do something today to share the hope you have in Christ with someone else who needs hope.



HOPE FOR SOMETHING BETTER

*“We remember before our
God and Father your work
produced by faith, your labor
prompted by love, and your
endurance inspired by hope
in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

1 THESSALONIANS 1:3

Daniel is one of my favorite books in the Bible. There are so many times when Daniel and his friends displayed unshakable faith and hope. We all hope we would do as well under similar terrifying circumstances. The sixth chapter is a great example that not only demonstrates Daniel's faith in God but also vindicates it. Daniel trusted God in the lions' den, and God honored his faith by protecting

him through the night. But you know what? It doesn't always happen that way, does it? Paul believed in God, and he was martyred for his faith. Peter believed in God, and he was crucified upside down.

Believing in God doesn't mean that the lions will be foiled. History is full of martyrs. They believed in God, but they died. As Christians, we do more than believe in God. We accept His will. If it's to live, then we live. If it is to die, we die. But either way, we're never defeated.

If Daniel had lost his life to the lions, he would have been in the presence of God. He couldn't lose. If he had been torn to shreds, the angel that came would have carried him into the presence of the Lord. The

truth of Paul's words remains firm.
"To live is Christ and to die is gain!"
(Philippians 1:21). We never lose.
Adrian Rogers, a former Southern
Baptist Convention president, used
to say, "Heads, I win. Tails, I win. If it
lands on its side, I still win!"

"Because Your lovingkindness is
better than life, My lips shall praise
You." (Psalm 63:3)



HOPE BRINGS SECURITY

*“Why, my soul, are you
downcast? Why so
disturbed within me? Put
your hope in God...”*

PSALM 42:5

There's a Peanuts cartoon where Peppermint Patty asks Charlie Brown to describe security. Charlie Brown answers by comparing security to sleeping in the back seat of the car as a little kid. As a kid, he tells her, you don't have to worry about anything, your mom and dad are in the front seat, and they do all the worrying. They take care of everything.

A worried look comes over Charlie Brown's face. "But it doesn't last!

Suddenly, you're grown up, and it can never be that way again!"

Charlie Brown came to the realization that you don't get to stay in the back seat forever. You grow up. After a while, you must get in the front seat and make all the decisions because you're an adult. You might have children of your own. In the comic, Charlie Brown feared never feeling secure again.

For many people, security is a fleeting thing. You might find yourself saying, "There was a time in my life when I felt secure, but I don't anymore." There might have been a time when you felt financially secure. However, unforeseen circumstances pulled the rug out from under your savings and retirement.

Or maybe there was a time when you were very active and physically strong. You could not have imagined then that you would ever have any problems with your health.

The past few years, however, may have shown you how temporary a healthy body can be. Some people look back and say there was never a time when they doubted their marriage would ever be anything but secure. Then, they learned how painfully fragile a marriage can be.

How are you and I ever going to get to the place in our lives where we really feel secure? Will we ever get to the place in life where we don't have anything to worry about? Where can we find hope? It's not as difficult as we may think. According

to Jesus, it's pretty simple. He said, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). Do what the psalmist said, "Put your hope in God" (Psalm 42:5).



A FUTURE AND A HOPE

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”

HEBREWS 10:23

There's a great verse in Jeremiah that we all love to quote. It's one of those "coffee mug" verses. We like to use the Bible verse when we're writing a letter of encouragement to somebody who is going through a difficult time. The verse is Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Do you know what was happening to the Israelites when God used Jeremiah to pen these words? God's people were living in exile in Babylon, and the

encouragement came several years into their captivity. Little did they know they would be there for 70 years. Their homeland was a smoldering heap of ashes. They were carried into captivity as prisoners of war. They lost their houses, their businesses and their farms. They were snatched away from their relatives and families. And, worst of all, to make it all seem so final and so futile — the protective walls around Jerusalem were broken down and the temple of God lay in ruins. It seemed like God himself abandoned them.

Have you ever been to a place where things looked hopeless? Have you ever been at a point in your life where things looked so bad, and there was no way you could imagine they would ever get any better? Maybe that's

where you are right now.

It was at a time like that when God said through His prophet Jeremiah, "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." That's what we're longing for, and hope is available to everyone who knows Christ. Let's spread that message to the multitudes! Let these days preparing for Christmas be a season of hope.



HOPE AND PERSEVERANCE

“But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

ROMANS 8:25

My wife and I recently bought a new washer and dryer. After installing them, I ran errands. While I was gone, my wife threw in a load of clothes. When I got home, she had an exasperated look and told me that when the washing machine went into the spin cycle, it sounded like a helicopter was landing in our house! Whatever happened was so violent that the heavy washing machine had worked its way into the middle of the laundry room. I was upset that we had just spent a lot of money on a brand-new appli-

ance, and it didn't even accomplish its maiden voyage!

It's frustrating when things don't work how they're supposed to — especially new things. On a spiritual level, we also get frustrated. More than that, we get disheartened. Far too often, things don't go the way we wish they would. Something happens that pulls the rug out from under us, and we suffer the heartbreak that comes with living in a broken world. We wonder if things will ever get better.

Being a Christian in first-century Rome was no picnic. They weren't worried about household appliances. They were worried about staying alive. To have a king other than Caesar was a crime punishable by death. To these struggling believers, Paul wrote, "Yet

what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay" (Romans 8:18–21).

Hope gives us the ability to endure hardship and persevere in adverse circumstances. That's why hope is indispensable for Christ's followers. He told us that in this world, we would have trouble, but He promised us He has overcome the world. Hope, like so many things, flourishes when we have the right mindset. That's why

the Apostle Paul tells us to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). Paul also wrote, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things ... and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8–9).



THE BLESSED HOPE

“...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

TITUS 2:13

J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings series is truly a masterpiece. I enjoyed all three books, but *The Return of the King* is my favorite. I love a victorious ending. Tolkien's use of biblical imagery is captivating, and a powerful example occurs at the "Battle of Helm's Deep." When it looks like the evil armies of Saruman are going to destroy the army of Rohan, Aragorn remembers the words of Gandalf: "Look to my coming at first light on the third day. At dawn, look to the east." Just as the sun has fully risen,

Gandalf, in blazing glory, arrives riding on a white stallion and leading a massive army. In stunning fashion, the tide turned, and the battle is won!

Those of us who know Christ will witness an even more glorious event. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle John looked into the future and wrote, "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed him on white horses" (Revelation 19:11–14).

Things around us seem to be spinning out of control. Evil is no longer lurking in the shadows — it's out in the streets in broad daylight. Without hope, we would be undone. However, for the well-studied believer, we know evil will be amped up just before the second coming of Christ.

Andrew Peterson's song, "The Dark Before the Dawn," is an amazing testimony to the power of hope. Every verse is fantastic, but for the sake of brevity, let me share just the third verse.

*So I'm waiting for the King
To come galloping out of the clouds
while the angel armies sing
He's gonna gather His people
in the shadow of His wings
And I'm gonna raise my voice
with the song of the redeemed*

*‘Cause all this darkness is a
small and passing thing*

What are you hoping for? A raise? Good health? A strong marriage? Respectful kids? Those are all desirable things, but you can set your sights so much higher than that. Put your hope in Jesus Christ. Long to see the consummation of His kingdom! Look with expectation for the return of the King! Join the Apostle John in praying, “Even so, come Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)

