

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Basic Doctrines: Hope

Walking with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Version 1.0 - 11/17/10



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Basic Doctrines: Hope

This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Learning Objectives

1. Accept that we have hope of eternal life in Jesus
2. Understand through fulfilled prophecy that God has a plan for our lives
3. Decide to live a life full of hope, focusing on the promise of eternity, and inspire others to do the same

Content Outline

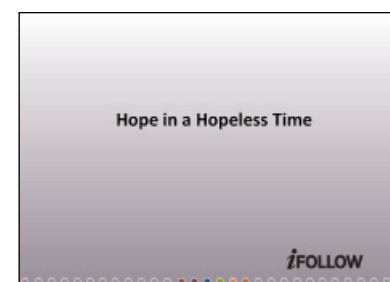
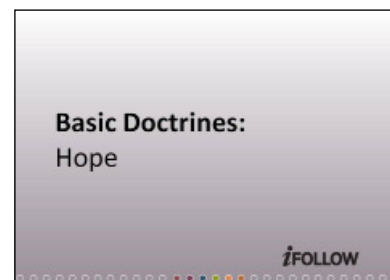
1. Hope in a hopeless time
2. Hope here and now
3. Hope beyond the grave
4. Eternal hope
5. Christ our Hope

Background Material for the Presenter

Hope is a defining characteristic of people with faith. We have hope because our faith informs us that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, an infinitely good and powerful God is in control of the circumstances of our lives.

Hope in a Hopeless Time

The twentieth century began in a mood of great optimism. Since the beginning of the Enlightenment Era, optimism had dominated the way of thinking in the Western world. As human beings, we could not only discover all truth using reason, we also were capable of moral perfection. New inventions, new modes of travel, the dramatic increase of medical knowledge, the introduction of new machines, and the steady advancement of human morals would improve all lives. But after two world



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wars, the holocaust, dozens of smaller wars, the nuclear threat of the cold war, and world-wide terrorism as an ever-present danger, coupled with the realization that humankind is in the process of destroying the environment it needs for human survival, little reason for optimism remains.

More recent events don't offer any more positive outcomes. Life after September 11, 2001, has greatly changed. People will always remember the images of passenger airliners flying into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. We all realize that it can happen again. There is no way we can be fully protected from people who are prepared to die as they use an airplane, filled with men, women, and children, as a flying bomb or are willing to blow themselves up at a bus stop or in a supermarket. There is fear everywhere, and considering the world we live in, that fear is understandable.

Ours is a world of war, corruption, greed, and terror. And we know that many unpleasant things yet will occur in the future even among people who claim to belong to God. But whatever happens, we have hope through Jesus. There may be anguish among the nations. People may even faint from terror—"apprehensive of what is coming on the world" (Luke 21:26, NIV)—but this will not be the case for those who have been expecting their Lord. None of these horrible things should take us by surprise. After all, the Bible has warned us all through its pages that we should expect toil, suffering, and trouble until Jesus returns. The fact that we see these things should only help confirm for us the truth of God's Word.

In fact, Jesus Himself predicted this sort of trouble. His predictions are recorded in both Matthew 24 and Luke 21. He also told His disciples, while on His way to Gethsemane, "Don't be afraid, you will have trouble, I promise you that, but I have already overcome." (John 16:33)

According to Luke 21:26, the predominant reaction of people living on planet Earth in the end times will not be hope but fear. Given the list of natural disasters and strange happenings presented in the previous texts, this reaction can't be said to be unreasonable. If one doesn't know that such things are signs of something better to come, the signs appear to indicate that much worse things will come instead. It is only because of hope-inspiring faith that we can entertain the possibility of standing up and raising our heads because our redemption is drawing near (vs. 28). There is hope, not in what we see or in what we can do but in what God has promised us through Jesus, His Son.

Hope—Here and Now

The Christian hope often is seen as having to do with the future: Christ's return; the resurrection of God's people; a new heaven and a new earth; eternity with God. But salvation is also a present reality. That kind of hope



separates us from those without the certainty that life has meaning and that in Christ humanity has an eternal future. The apostle Paul reminds us of the radical change that takes place when we accept Jesus as our Lord. As long as we are separated from Christ, we are “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12, NIV). But all this changes when we are no longer “far away” from God but have been “brought near through the blood of Christ” (vs. 13, NIV).

“Life” is one of the key words of the Gospel of John. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the concept of life is primarily eternal life. As a current author points out, “But in the Gospel of John, life is particularly focused on the present reality of what Jesus does for those who believe in Him.” (Paulien, p. 189)

“There are two keys to attaining life at its best. The first is to know that the source of that life is found only in Christ (John 14:6; 6:33–58; 1 John 5:11, 12). Wherever Jesus is, life is (John 11:25, 26). The second key to attaining life is believing (1:4, 12). It is through continuous relationship with Jesus that individuals appropriate the life that is ever present in Jesus.” (3:16, 36).” (*Ibid.*)

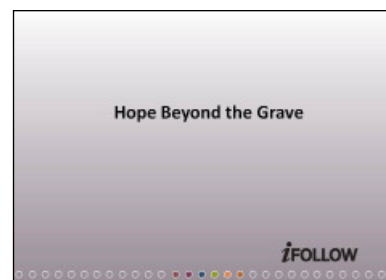
This kind of thinking doesn’t come automatically or easily, in the midst of our lives’ realities. Some time ago, the famous American humorist and poet Dorothy Parker was working on a movie script for producer Samuel Goldwyn, who requested that she give it a happy ending. Parker responded, “I know this will come as a shock to you, Mr. Goldwyn, but in all history, which has held billions and billions of human beings, not a single one ever had a happy ending.” (workinghumor.com)

One need look no further than the evening news to confirm just how much truth Parker’s quip holds. The stock market falls. Friends or spouses leave. And in the long run, as one bumper sticker pessimistically reminds us, we’ll all be dead. But as Christians, we know that the world we see around us is not the only world we have to look forward to. In the real long run, we have the hope of eternal life.

Hope Beyond the Grave

The death and resurrection of Jesus gives us as Christians reason to hope in a better life now and for eternity. This hope transcends present circumstances, because it is based not on probabilities but on certainties.

Death comes to all of us (unless we are alive at the moment of Christ’s return). All of us have lost loved ones in death. We are daily confronted with the grim reality of death. We see it as we pass cemeteries, see hearses, or switch on the television news. But even worse, we face it up close as we say our final



goodbye to a friend or relative. Death is our archenemy, but it is one that will be defeated.

The apostle Paul, in his famous chapter about the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15), stresses that the hope of the resurrection is an essential component of our total faith experience (vss. 12–19). If there is no resurrection, our faith is empty.

Paul refers to his readers as being “without hope” (Eph. 2:12, NIV) before they come to Christ. It is worth noting that these people were not atheists in the regular sense of the word. Most people in the ancient world believed in some god or gods. They had a religion. But it was a religion in which hope for the future, or even a better present, did not exist. Theirs was literally a faith without hope. The traditional Greek view was that the shades, or spirits, of the dead resided in Hades—not hell exactly, but a dark, dreary, unpleasant place—until they just faded out. Philosophers and others rejected this belief or considered alternatives. Plato and Pythagoras, for example, believed in the immortality of the soul. They hinted at reincarnation, or survival, in another realm, even though no one could be certain of its existence.

As for improvement of the state of the world at large, the golden age—as the poet Hesiod suggested—was in the past and most likely wasn’t coming back.

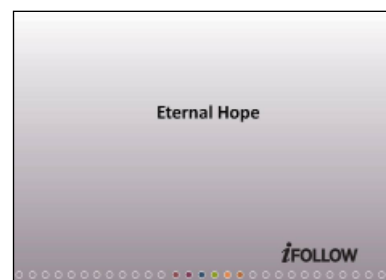
Only the Jews and the Zoroastrians (the Magi of Luke 2 could have been Zoroastrians) foresaw a better world to come. And only the Christians could point to concrete evidence of such a future world in the form of Christ and His resurrection. (*Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol 10, pp. 652-653.)

Of course, there are many aspects of the physical resurrection that we do not understand. But of one thing we can be sure: Our “resurrection” does not depend on the safekeeping of the present material substances of our bodies. It depends on the power of our Creator to safeguard our identity and to re-create us at a given moment with a new (perfect) body that will never need any cosmetic surgery or anti-aging pills.

We have no idea how God is going to perform this miracle. But the God who could create life here to begin with certainly has the power to re-create the earth and fill it with the people whose identities have been safeguarded in the divine memory. Our hope is not based on anything we can verify with our intellect or our senses. The resurrection involves a realm of existence far beyond anywhere science can take us. But it is based on the fact that Christ has conquered death. As a result, the death of the believer is but a temporary “sleep” from which he or she will be raised and given eternal life.

Eternal Hope

How can finite beings ever understand what it is to be infinite? How can we, as mortals—most of whom will not live beyond 80 or 90 years—ever understand what it is to be immortal and live forever? Eternal life is not simply



a continuation of our present life. That would in many ways more resemble “hell” than “heaven.” Eternal life has an altogether different quality. While we are still in our present mortal state, we will have to be content with a glimpse of what the future holds: We see but “a poor reflection” and “know [only] in part” (1 Cor. 13:12, NIV).

As far as we know, humankind is the only species that is aware of his or her own impending death, and no one ever likes it. We want eternity, even if we aren’t quite sure what it is.

But if we really thought about it, few of us would want to continue to live infinitely long with our current imperfect and aging bodies, the tiresome natural laws of gravity and thermodynamics, and the boring and repulsive thoughts continually cycling their way through our befogged brains.

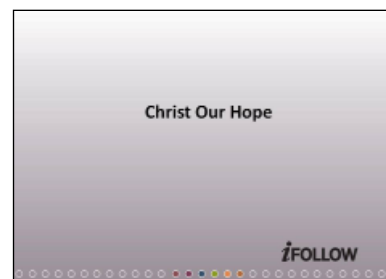
We are left with lots of questions as we contemplate the life that awaits us, questions that will never be fully answered here and now. But we can learn from Jesus’ own resurrection. It is important to note that the Christ who was raised from the dead was the same Person as the One who a few days earlier died on the cross. He arose with a “glorified” body that was no longer subject to the laws of nature in the way our present mortal bodies are. Yet at the same time, He possessed continuity with the “human form” that He had prior to His death and resurrection. He was the same Person, recognizable by His outward appearance, His voice, and His gestures. He even ate. That gives us good reason to conclude that in our new “glorious bodies” we will be recognized by those we knew in this life and who will enjoy the life in the beyond with us.

And yet, we can also experience some of that eternal life now. Paul explains to us (Rom. 8:10) that the Spirit will enter the person who has turned to Christ. The believer, therefore, is already touched by the eternal life that will become a full reality in the world to come. The presence of the Spirit is the pledge of our eternal salvation (Eph. 1:13, 14).

Fortunately, God has promised us a life not only everlasting but also qualitatively different from what we currently have. In 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul contrasts our present physical body with the glorious spiritual body God has waiting for us. What is it like? We don’t know. But whatever it is, we can be certain that it is worth hoping and waiting for.

Christ Our Hope

Long before Christ entered this world, His coming had been predicted. True to those promises, He did indeed come. Manifold are the promises that He will come a second time. He said so Himself: “I will come back!” On the final page of the Bible this promise is repeated: “Yes, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:20, NIV). This is the corporate hope of Christian believers. It is “the blessed hope, the



glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, NIV).

The ultimate solution for the sin problem and all the misery sin has caused is not found in anything humanity can invent or arrange but in the intervention of heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope is not in human technology, clever politicians, or social and moral progress. These things never can solve the problem of death. And although it is important to know what will precede and accompany the coming of the Lord, it is even more important that we are sure of the One we expect.

Our Lord will come soon. “It is just a matter of time, that’s all. And no one can change this fact. No tyrant can reach up and grab the world from His grasp. It remains firmly and forever in the hands of the Crucified One. None can undo Calvary anymore than they can undo their birth. ... Since the cross, we live in time filled by the victory of Calvary, a time determined by that goal. Hence, whether they know it or not, humanity does not merely advance toward a hoped-for goal in some distant day, with the possibility that it may never come. No! Humanity moves triumphantly from a goal Jesus has already reached.” (Gulley, p. 540)

Handout in this Package

1. Participant Notes



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Additional Resources

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Discussion Questions

1. Our hope in eternal life is based in the future. In what ways does God mean for us to experience a real hope for our present lives now on earth?
2. How can our hope be seen in our attitudes and actions?
3. How has God changed your life for the better here and now? What do you have now that you didn't have before coming to know Jesus and the hope He gives us?
4. Share some things you have placed hope in at some point in your life. Were your hopes realized? What happened when they were? What happened when they weren't? How has this affected your faith in God?
5. Too often we may find ourselves turning to God as a last resort when all else fails. What can we do to make God our hope in all things instead of turning to Him as a last resort?
6. What can we do to nourish and strengthen our confidence in the great promise that we have regarding eternal life, a promise that alone can lessen our fear of death now?
7. Share some of your imaginings about eternal life. Be creative; the wilder the better. What are some things you imagine will be completely different from our present life? In what ways do you hope for similarities?
8. Whatever physical or mental challenges we may have, God offers us a fresh, clean start and the promise of a better life with Him, now and in the future. How does that assurance make you feel?
9. What is our role in making our present world better, given that our hope is in the next one? How should we work for peace, a cleaner environment, and so on? Or do such attempts show a lack of faith? Explain why you answer the way you do and explore together the reasons for your differences.

Group Activity

Purpose: To explore and compare pessimism and optimism and try to be more intentional about which to choose.

Preparation: You will need a large board or flipchart, or better yet, two flipcharts and two boards, with markers. Arrange the room so that the group can be easily divided into two halves, all still facing the front, with one board for each, or one large board divided into two side-by-side sections. You could cut two pieces of cardboard about five by 12 inches and write in large letters, **Pessimist** and **Optimist** on them, then attach cords at each end so they may be worn around the neck as labels.

Assignment: Divide the group into two halves. Arbitrarily assign one half to be pessimists and one half to be optimists. Have each send a scribe to the front, to their own board or half of the large board. If you are using the cardboard labels, have each scribe don the appropriate one. This activity is in two parts.

Part 1: Have the optimists call out things or events in their lives or in the world at large that convince them that God is still in control and is still trying to communicate hope to those who look for it. Have the pessimists call out all the current crises they can think of, both personal and in the nation or world. The scribes list these things on their boards.

Part 2: Have the pessimists choose one item from the optimists' board and try to convince the optimists to see all the negatives about it. Next have the optimists choose one crisis from the pessimists' board and try to convince the pessimists to see all the positives about that.

Debrief: Share thoughts, reactions, emotions. Are there some things it's easier to be optimistic about and others it's easier to be pessimistic about? Which way do different participants lean? Can they think of ways to help each other? What's the difference between optimism and a foolish sense of ignoring unpleasantness or ugliness?

Time: Allow five minutes to make lists, another five minutes for each side to attempt to convince the other, and 10 minutes for general discussion debriefing the exercise.

Handout

Key Concepts: Hope Participant Notes

Scripture Focus: Luke 21:25, 26; John 5:24; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 50-55; 1 Peter 3:15; Revelation 21

Concept: The world is full of fear, trouble and heartache. But as Christians, it is possible to live a positive life in a negative world. Hope makes this possible.

Connecting with the Scripture Topic

- A. Take two sheets of paper. Label one “Pessimist” and list all the things you are tempted to feel pessimistic about on it. Label the other “Optimist” and list all the things you find it easier to feel optimistic about.
- B. Which list is longer? Can you think of ways to move the things on the Pessimist sheet to the Optimist sheet? If you need help, think of the most cheerful person you know and ask him/her to help you and to pray for you.

Sharing and Receiving Scripture

- A. Is the hope found in the Bible sufficient to keep you optimistic, in spite of what the world throws at you? What are some of the passages you return to when you need a new breath of hope?
- B. Read Luke 21:28. How does this text give you hope when things feel out of control?
1. I wish it did, but it’s hard for me to see much hope.
 2. I get the calm feeling that God is still in control overall
 3. I know that bad things happen for a reason, and God is watching
 4. The worse things get, the closer we are to the return of Jesus
 5. My face needs to be lifted up toward Heaven—not down at earth and all its problems
 6. Other....
- C. Read 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14. What hope can be found in these texts concerning death?
1. Jesus conquered the grave by rising from the dead
 2. Although death came from Adam’s fall, life will come though Jesus’ victory

3. The dead in Christ will rise first at the second coming
4. At times it's hard to believe that this will actually happen
5. It takes belief—faith—to hope in such a miracle as the resurrection of the dead
6. Other....

D. Read John 10:10. Jesus doesn't want us to wait until Heaven to have a good life. What does it take in order to have an abundant life now?

1. Knowing Jesus as a friend
2. Asking and receiving forgiveness for sins
3. Living any way we choose because Jesus already paid the price
4. Believing even when we can't see Jesus or understand everything Christ asked of us
5. Realizing how much better life is with Jesus
6. Other....

E. Read Revelation 21:1-4. How does the promise of an eternal life in the future bring hope to the present?

1. John saw the new heaven and new earth in vision—it will be reality!
2. Heaven seems like a fantasy world—it's hard to imagine it's really out there somewhere
3. This earth, and all that is negative in it, will pass away
4. Death, crying and pain will be gone—for eternity
5. God asked John to write all this down specifically because it is trustworthy and true
6. Other....

Applying the Message of Scripture

Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. If you have opportunity, share your solution with someone else.

Option 1: Everyone has had a family member or friend die. Write about how the hope of the resurrection and seeing your loved one again makes all the difference. What would life be like for you if you didn't have this hope?

Option 2: Think of one thing in your life that is hard to be optimistic about. Ask someone to encourage you toward optimism by suggesting ways to think and act positively about the situation.

Option 3: Think of someone in your life who's a pessimist. Perhaps it's a relative, co-worker, friend, or neighbor. Make an effort to be optimistic around that person. Smile and be cheerful. Talk of hope. See if you can "rub off" on them somehow.

Valuing Scripture in Your Life

A. Consider these acronyms for the word Hope:

- H** = happiness
- O** = optimism
- P** = peace
- E** = enthusiasm

Now consider these acronyms for the opposite word Despair:

- D** = depression
- E** = emptiness
- S** = sorrow
- P** = pessimism
- A** = anger
- I** = irritability
- R** = resentment

Which will you choose?

B. Reread John 10:10. Are you living an abundant life? What's keeping you from living it? Talk this over with Jesus and vow to begin the necessary changes and start living your life to the fullest!

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