



Hope

WEEK THREE





Hope Waits on God's Timing

Unwrapping: Luke 1:5-25

When my daughter was a teenager, the Christmas season found our home aglow, not just with festive lights but also with hope. One evening after a heart-warming movie, Madison, and I each penned a private hope for the future and slipped our notes under a candle on the fireplace mantel. Each time the Christmas candle was lit, the flickering glow was a gentle reminder that God was at work in our lives. This little secret between mother and daughter became a sacred tradition between us.

Much like our family tradition, the Bible shares a profound story of hope, kept alive in the lives of Elizabeth and Zechariah. This elderly couple had waited years for a child, their hope dwindling with the passing seasons. Yet, God had not forgotten them. An angel appeared to Zechariah, announcing that they would have a son, John, who would be the precursor to Jesus Christ.

"Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John" (Luke 1:13, NIV). Imagine Zechariah standing in the temple, the light of the candles flickering, as he received this extraordinary message of hope.

Elizabeth and Zechariah's story reminds us that God's timing is impeccable. He is always at work, even when we can't see it. Their

years of waiting weren't in vain but were a preparation for a son who would pave the way for our Savior.

Charles Spurgeon put it beautifully when he said, "Hope itself is like a star—not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity, and only to be discovered in the night of adversity." Indeed, the Christmas story is one of ultimate hope—from Elizabeth and Zechariah's anticipation of John to Mary's divine blessing with Jesus, the reason we celebrate and our source of eternal hope.

As you light your Christmas candles this season, may you, like Elizabeth and Zechariah, be reminded that God hears your deepest hopes and prayers. Let each flickering flame ignite a sense of divine expectancy in your heart, trusting that God is at work in your life, fulfilling His promises in His perfect timing.

What is one hope or prayer you have this Christmas season that you're willing to patiently wait for God to fulfill?

Did You Know?

In the temple where Zechariah received his angelic message, the Menorah (a seven-branched candelabrum) would have been continually burning as a representation of God's eternal presence.

Considering that Zechariah and Elizabeth were well past the years of childbearing, what does the angel's proclamation in Luke 1:13 teach us about God's wisdom and timing in answering prayers?



Hope is Alive in Seasons of Waiting

Unwrapping: 1 Samuel 1 & 2

Christmas—a season of hope, anticipation, and promise. It's a beautiful concept, but what happens when your heart feels far from hopeful? How do you keep the Christmas spirit alive when you're weighed down by longing? Hannah's story offers a beacon of hope for days such as these.

Hannah knew what it felt like to carry a dream unfulfilled. She wanted a child, yearned for it, but her prayers seemed unanswered. "In her deep anguish, Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly" (1 Samuel 1:10, NIV). Her situation might sound far removed from festive holiday cheer, but it's her journey towards hope that brings us a Christmas message.

Hannah teaches us that hope starts in a place of deep honesty with God. She wasn't afraid to present her raw emotions and deepest desires before the Lord. In return, God heard her plea and blessed her with a son, Samuel. It's as if her earnest prayers broke through the heavens, touching God's heart.

John Piper once said, "Hope is like a reservoir of emotional strength." And it's true; hope is not about ignoring our circumstances, but facing them with the assurance that God hears us just as He heard Hannah.

So, this Christmas, let's look to Hannah as a model for harboring hope, especially when it feels like our prayers go unanswered.

Did You Know?

Hannah's promise to dedicate her son to the Lord, without cutting his hair, mirrors the Nazirite vow from Numbers 6. This special dedication signifies being set apart for God, a commitment also seen in figures like Samson and John the Baptist.

Much like Paul and Mary, Hannah's joy and hope stemmed from her knowledge of God. Looking at 1 Samuel 2, we discover five things she knew about God. Let's look at them closely.

- ① **He is Sovereign** (1 Samuel 2:1): Hannah recognized God as the ultimate authority.
- ② **He is Just** (1 Samuel 2:3): She celebrated God's justice, humbling the proud and lifting up the lowly.
- ③ **He is Faithful** (1 Samuel 2:1): Hannah trusted in God's faithfulness to His promises.
- ④ **He is Omnipotent** (1 Samuel 2:4): She marveled at God's limitless power.
- ⑤ **He is Merciful** (1 Samuel 2:8): Hannah celebrated God's mercy and compassion, especially in hearing the cries of His people.



HOPE BLOSSOMS in Miraculous Ways

Unwrapping: Exodus 1:15-2:10 & Matt. 2:1-18

When I was pregnant with my son, Nathaniel, doctors warned us that his condition looked grim. "Even if he does make it to term," they said, "he'll have serious health problems."

That night, my heart was heavy, wondering what God had in store. After restless hours of tossing and turning, a name was given to me, as though a voice gently whispered into my heart, Nathaniel, was all that it said.

Turning on the night light, I opened my Bible to understand the meaning of this name. There it was—"Nathaniel: Gift from God." Whether by divine intervention or a mother's intuition, the message was clear: hold onto hope. That next summer, I gave birth to a baby boy named Nathaniel, who was healthy and is still healthy today.

We all have stories to tell, don't we? Stories about the struggles we've faced and the challenges we've overcome. Perhaps that's why the first Christmas happened the way that it did: a long journey while Mary was heavily pregnant, the absence of a welcoming place to stay, and the humble surroundings of a stable for the birth of the Savior. Yet, even in the midst of these trials, hope blossoms in the most miraculous way—reminding us that God's plans can flourish even when circumstances are less than ideal.

This theme of hope blossoming aligns beautifully with the story of Moses from Exodus Chapter 2. The Bible tells us that after facing a horrifying decree, Moses' mother, made a daring choice to hide her son for three months. When hiding him became impossible, Jochebed placed Moses in a basket along the Nile, right where she "knew" Pharaoh's daughter would come to bathe.

Whether it was the name Nathaniel whispered to me in the night or Jochebed placing her son among the reeds, these acts were filled with hopeful intention and perhaps even guided by divine insight.

As you celebrate Christmas this year, hold onto hope. Let it guide you toward joy and peace, and comfort you on difficult days. Hope is not always something you see, but you can trust that it's there, quietly powerful, waiting for God's perfect timing to reveal itself.

Both Pharaoh, in the story of Moses, and King Herod, in the story of Jesus, specifically targeted male infants. What might their actions reveal about their fear in these narratives?

Did You Know?

The name "Moses" means "to draw out" in Hebrew, symbolizing how he was drawn out of the water by Pharaoh's daughter. It's fascinating to think that even in his name, the idea of hope and deliverance was already being woven into Moses' story.

As you were reading the story of Moses, perhaps you noticed a few similarities between his birth and the birth of Jesus. Let's take a closer look at them here:

- ★ **The threat to male infants by rulers (Pharaoh and Herod).** Both Pharaoh and Herod felt threatened by prophecies and attempted to quash potential rivals by targeting young male children.
- ★ **The defiance of earthly authority by those who feared God (midwives and the wise men).** In both stories, individuals chose to prioritize their reverence for God over obedience to earthly rulers, leading to acts of divine protection and guidance.
- ★ **The flight to safety to protect the infants (Moses in the basket on the Nile and Jesus' escape to Egypt).** Whether being hidden away in a basket on a river or fleeing to another country, divine providence ensured the safety of these two foundational figures in biblical history.



HOPE IS AN ENDURING LEGACY

Unwrapping: Job 19 and 42

The holiday season has a unique way of drawing loved ones together. But when a chair at the table is empty, as it was for my family the first Christmas without my dad, that absence becomes a painful reminder of loss, but in that heart-wrenching emptiness we felt that year, Dad left us with a lasting legacy: he left us hope.

We're all familiar with the trials of Job—a story that takes us through the painful journey of human suffering and loss. Job lost his children, his wealth, and even his health. Despite all these calamities, however, his faith remained steadfast.

His proclamation of faith, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth" (Job 19:25, NIV) reveals a sense of deep unwavering faith. His hope isn't rooted in the shifting circumstances around him; it's grounded in the steadfast, unchanging nature of God.

Job's faith is a radiant beacon of hope. A North Star leading us through the darkness of suffering and grief. More than a fleeting hope for a moment of happiness, it's a rock-solid hope anchored in God's immediate and daily presence—a hope we can touch, feel, and find comfort in.

Our first Christmas without Dad brought this profound lesson of hope into clear focus. Our comfort didn't solely come from the traditions he cherished, but from the eternal assurance he instilled within each one of us. This hope became our most treasured gift that Christmas. Though it wasn't wrapped in paper and bows, it was sealed in the enduring fabric of faith.

As we navigate through this season, embracing its highs and lows, let's remember that our true hope comes from a God who is eternally with us. If life feels unbearable, and if we're feeling the pain of suffering and loss there's a hope that empowers us in the same way it empowered Job. The heart of our hope is this: "I know my Redeemer lives."

What does the metaphor of the tree in Job 14:7-9 teach us about the potential for renewal and hope in seemingly desperate or bleak situations?

Did You Know?

When Job proclaimed, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth" (Job 19:25, NIV), he was reaching for a hope that would be fully realized in the birth of Jesus. Christmas celebrates this exact hope—the Redeemer living among us.

What is the purpose of the comfort God provides us, according to 2 Corinthians 1:3-4? And what are some ways you can extend that comfort to others this Christmas?



Hope Anchors the Soul

Unwrapping: Genesis Chapters 37, 39-45

The Christmas season is often billed as the "most wonderful time of the year," but some years the season feels less than ideal. For us, it was 1995. We spent Christmas Day in the emergency room waiting for a doctor to confirm what I already sensed: we had lost the baby.

Days like that are a stark contrast to the expectations we hold for the holiday season. They may shake our spirits and cloud our joy, but they can't dim the hope that's shining within us. Not when it's deeply rooted in the faithfulness of God. Even when the nights are long and our hearts are heavy, God's love for us remains constant. It wraps around us like a warm blanket, comforting us in our pain while anchoring us in the midst of the storm.

Looking to the Bible we see a glimpse of this steadfast, unyielding hope in the person of Joseph. From the honor of his father's favor to the indignity of being falsely accused and thrown into prison, his life was a sequence of shifting circumstances. In spite of all he endured, Joseph held fast to the hope set before him. He trusted that God had a plan for him, allowing him to extend grace and wisdom during challenging times. It's this unwavering faith that caught the eye of Pharaoh and eventually elevated Joseph to a position of authority.



HOPE is the Breath of Renewal

Unwrapping: Ezekiel 37:1-14

As the Christmas season approaches, it offers us a chance to reflect on the past year, celebrate the joyful moments, and embrace the spirit of the season. Yet, for some of us, the shorter days and colder nights can stir up the winter blues, casting shadows of despair or leading us to question if hope still lingers in the frosty air. We all have moments like that. Days when we feel like our situation is hopeless, wondering if and how things could possibly change.

Turning to the Scriptures, we find solace in Ezekiel Chapter 37. It reaffirms our faith, reminding us that God is sovereign. He holds the power of life and death in His hands. No situation is beyond His reach.

God presents Ezekiel with a profound vision—a valley of what the Bible refers to as "dry bones." These bones were way past any sign of life. Amid this desolation, God posed a question to Ezekiel: "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel responded, "Oh Lord God, thou knowest."

It's worth asking ourselves, are we prepared to echo Ezekiel's sentiment? When faced with our problems, where does our faith lie? In the enormity of the issue or in God's boundless ability to resolve it?

Ezekiel's vision unfolds, showing these bones coming to life, standing tall, transforming into a vast and formidable army. This story of the Valley of Dry Bones is a testament to God's miraculous

Did You Know?

The word for "breath" in Ezekiel 37 is "ruach," which also means "spirit" or "wind." It appears seven times in this chapter, emphasizing that God wants to breathe not just life, but His Spirit into us.

What does the fact that the bones in Ezekiel's vision were dry teach us about how we should approach difficult or seemingly impossible situations in our own lives?



HOPE USHERS in the Miraculous

Unwrapping: Mark 2:1-12

The Christmas season is a special time, radiant with the glow of hope and the promise of new beginnings. It's when families come together, stories are shared, and the atmosphere is charged with an expectation of good things to come. It's a season that reminds us of the strength of hope and its ability to usher in the miraculous.

In the bustling town of Capernaum, the air was thick with such anticipation. Jesus was in a house, teaching, and everyone wanted to be there. The house was packed to the brim. Among the crowd were a paralyzed man and his determined friends. They believed (and hoped) that if they could just present their friend to Jesus, a miracle would happen.

Faced with the challenge of an overcrowded room, their hope took on a dynamic form. They made their way to the roof, creating an opening to lower their friend directly in front of Jesus. Their hope was active and daring, and it got Jesus' attention.

Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Soon after, He told the man to rise, take his mat, and walk. The man did just that, to the astonishment of everyone.

This story isn't just about a physical healing; it's a testament to the power of hope. When combined with action, hope can break through barriers, defy the odds, and bring about the extraordinary.

As you quiet your heart for the holidays, let the story of undying hope in Capernaum inspire you. Let it be a reminder that with hope, determination, and faith in Jesus, we can experience wonders in our own lives. For in the season of Christ's birth, hope isn't just a feeling; it's a force that ushers in the miraculous.



Just as there was a hustle and bustle surrounding Jesus that day, the holiday season can often mirror that same frenzy. Here are some ways to cut through the holiday noise and experience a meaningful connection with Jesus:

- ① **Dedicate Quiet Time:** Amid the festive chaos, carve out moments each day for prayer, meditation, or simply sitting in silence, inviting Jesus into your heart.
- ② **Bible Reflection:** Revisit the Christmas story in the Bible, soaking in every detail, while considering the profound love God showed by sending His Son.
- ③ **Serve Others:** Acts of kindness, whether big or small, can help you feel closer to Jesus. Consider volunteering at a local charity or simply performing random acts of kindness for strangers.
- ④ **Limit Technology:** Reduce screen time and engage in meaningful conversations with loved ones, sharing testimonies and personal experiences with Jesus.

Questions and Answers

Day 15

What is one hope or prayer you have this Christmas season that you're willing to patiently wait for God to fulfill?

Answers to this question will vary among individuals.

Considering that Zechariah and Elizabeth were well past the years of childbearing, what does the angel's proclamation in Luke 1:13 teach us about God's wisdom and timing in answering prayers?

It underscores the fact that God's plans and timing transcend our human expectations and limitations. Even when it seems impossible, God can work miracles in alignment with His divine wisdom and purpose.

Day 16

Hannah's barrenness and subsequent blessing of a son echo that of Zechariah and Elizabeth's experience in Luke 1. What hope do these stories offer us in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances?

They offer us hope in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances. These stories remind us that God's faithfulness, sovereignty, and ability to bring forth new life are not confined by human limitations.

Day 17

Both Pharaoh, in the story of Moses, and King Herod, in the story of Jesus, specifically targeted male infants. What might their actions reveal about their fear in these narratives?

Both Pharaoh and King Herod were afraid that a king or leader would rise up from among the people, posing a threat to their authority and rule. This fear of a potential challenger drove their actions in targeting male infants in the respective narratives of Moses and Jesus.

Day 18

What does the metaphor of the tree in Job 14:7-9 teach us about the potential for renewal and hope in seemingly desperate or bleak situations?

This metaphor suggests that there is always the potential for renewal and revival, even in seemingly dire or hopeless situations. In a broader sense, it conveys the idea that hope can spring forth even from seemingly lifeless circumstances, much like the resilience of a tree's ability to sprout new growth when given the right conditions. It's a message of optimism and the potential for new beginnings.

What is the purpose of the comfort God provides us, according to 2 Corinthians 1:3-4? And what are some ways you can extend that comfort to others this Christmas?

The comfort we receive isn't just for us. God comforts us so that we, in turn, can comfort others who are going through difficult times.

It's like a divine cycle of empathy and love. When you've walked through a dark valley and felt God's comfort, you're uniquely equipped to guide others through their own valleys.

The answer to the second part of this question will vary among individuals.

Day 19

Joseph held fast to the hope set before him; what made his hope a rock-solid anchor? And, how can this anchor of hope steady us in times of trouble? (see Hebrews 6:17-19)

Joseph's hope was anchored in the unchanging nature of God and His promises. Hebrews 6:17-19 tells us that God's purpose is unchanging, confirmed by an oath, making it impossible for Him to lie. This gave Joseph a firm and secure hope, no matter the circumstances. Likewise, this same anchor can steady us in times of trouble because God's nature and promises haven't changed. When life shakes us, this unshakeable hope holds us steady.

How does Jeremiah 29:11's message of God's purpose and plan for our well-being resonate with our experiences in times of uncertainty, and how does it provide us with enduring hope?"

It reminds us that God has a purpose and plan for each of our lives. His intentions are for our well-being and not for harm. This verse reassures us that even in times of uncertainty, God is working behind the scenes to provide us with hope and a future.

Day 20

In Romans 15:12-13, we read about the hope, joy, and peace that the coming of Christ brings to the world. What is the key to experiencing this hope according to the passage, and why is it crucial in our lives?

The key to experiencing the hope, joy, and peace is belief in Christ and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. This is crucial because this kind of hope isn't based on our circumstances, but on the steadfast nature of God. It offers a resilient form of hope that sustains us in every season of life.

What does the fact that the bones in Ezekiel's vision were dry teach us about how we should approach difficult or seemingly impossible situations in our own lives?

The fact that the bones were dry teaches us that God specializes in miracles. He gives hope where all hope is lost. Even when situations seem to be way past the point of repair, He is able to breathe new life into them.

Day 21

What are some lessons we can learn from the friends in this story about the way we treat others?

The story underscores the importance of lifting each other up, both spiritually and practically. It's a strong call to action for us to elevate those around us. Additionally, they teach us the importance of being there for others in tangible ways, showing us that friendship often calls for action, not just words. It's a compelling reminder to be the hands and feet of Christ in the lives of those around us.