

Session Six Christian Hope

What Is Christian Hope?

To be a hopeful Christian doesn't mean that a person is naïve or ridiculously optimistic about the world. You have looked at passages from the New Testament during some of the sessions in this mini-course in which the writers acknowledge that the world is fallen, and not an easy place for us to live in.

The Words of Our Lord

Jesus himself said something very similar: "In the world you will have tribulation [which means trouble and persecution]; but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world!"

What does he mean by saying that he has overcome the world? He means that the world did its worst to him—the most painful, humiliating of deaths. And the world was doing this not just to a person, but to its own creator (remember that Jesus Christ created the world in perfect cooperation with his Father and the Holy Spirit).

But death could not hold Jesus—he rose from the dead, and shattered death's power over his creation. Read *John 10:17-18* and *12:31-32* to see what Jesus told his followers about this. Write here what you consider to be the main ideas in these passages:

Hope for the Kingdom

Death remains a tragedy for human beings. Seeing it, we can only mourn and weep as Jesus himself did at the tomb of his friend Lazarus (*John 11:35*). But for Christians who believe in Jesus Christ, grief is not the end of everything. St. Paul acknowledged that we all grieve in the face of loss and death, but he said: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died" (*1 Thessalonians 4:13-14*).



Some people have scoffed at Christianity for being hopeful about the life to come in God's kingdom.

"Oh, sure," they say, "Christians look around and see that life is really tough for a lot of people, so they make this big promise that everything will be better in the next world."

But this is a real misunderstanding of Christian teaching. We believe that each person is already choosing, here and now, what his or her eternal life will be. When Jesus Christ comes again in the Second Coming to judge the world, his presence will be the same for every person. Those who love him will rejoice in that presence, and for them it will be infinite joy, eternal life, and paradise.

Again, It's Our Choice

But those who have wanted no part of God in this life—who have ignored his teachings and are totally wrapped up in themselves and the things of this world—will hate his presence, and for them it will be infinite torture. That is what the church means by heaven and hell. God's love will be revealed to everyone at that time in the face of Christ. Every person will see that face, and every person's destiny, yours and mine, will depend on this: Will we turn toward that face filled with God's love, or turn away?

Growing in Hope

Sometimes we find it hard to be hopeful. As you did the exercise where you chose a place to stand on the line, you thought a little about this. Here are some suggestions to help you "grow in hope":

1. **Pray.** Ask God to help you become more hopeful, less fearful, more able to depend on his promise.

2. **Practice.** Try to look at things in a positive way by avoiding put-downs, sarcasm, and hurtful jokes or comments, and criticism of others and what they try to do.

3. **Train your mind and heart.** St. Paul suggests this: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (*Philippians 4:8*). It really is up to us what we think about.



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Anointing at Holy C



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these things" (*Philippians 4:8*). It

4. Make a real effort. When you do anything that requires skill or strength, you have to keep at it and give it your best. Do the same with being hopeful—read God's word in the Bible, go to church services, and work to understand what God is saying to his people.

5. Share. Be an encourager, and you will be doing a great service to others. You may never know how you helped someone else through a bad time by being an example of facing life with hope!

Anointing at Holy Chrismation (from The Order of Baptism)



Sweet ointment in the name of Jesus Christ is poured upon you as a seal of incorruptible heavenly gifts.

The eyes: This seal in the name of Jesus Christ enlighten your eyes, that you may never sleep unto death.

The ears: This holy anointing be for the hearing of divine commandments.

The nostrils: This seal in the name of Jesus Christ be a sweet smell from life to life.

The mouth: This seal in the name of Jesus Christ be a guard for your mouth and a strong door for your lips.

The hands: This seal in the name of Jesus Christ be a cause for good works and for all virtuous deeds and conduct.

The heart: This divine seal establish in you a pure heart and renew within you an upright spirit.

The back: This seal in the name of Jesus Christ be a shield of strength thereby to quench all the fiery darts of the Evil One.

The feet: This divine seal direct your journey to life everlasting that you may not be shaken.



St. Gregory of Narek Speaks to Us

I who was ruined, now stand erect;
I was wretched, and am victorious;
I was a lowly evil-doer, and am in hope;
I was betrayed to death, and am living;
I offended anew, and am again redeemed;
I was bound up with sins, and am promised repose;
I was beset by wounds, and have immortal remedies:
By Christ Jesus and his mighty and glorious Father,
In the name and most generous will of the Spirit of truth.

Session Six

Christian Hope

Key Concepts

- 1.** As Christians, we are given hope by Jesus Christ's assurance: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).
- 2.** Christian hope is based, not on wishing but on the experience of believers through the centuries.
- 3.** An attitude of hopefulness can encourage and strengthen us and all those around us.

Objectives

Students will:

- 1.** Identify some Bible passages that describe Christian hope.
- 2.** Explain how our baptism arms us to face the world with courage and hope.
- 3.** Relate hope to the Christian expectation of judgment and the end of all things.

Background for Teacher

By reading the material in the student text you will get a good understanding of the Christian teachings that underscore this session. The session's main thrust is two-fold: while never denying or covering over or prettying up the fact that our students live in a fallen world where much goes wrong, we want also to assure them that it is still God's beloved creation. Evil will not prevail forever. And, as Christians, we are privileged to live in the hope given by Jesus Christ's triumph over evil and death. With that privilege comes the responsibility to build hope in others by living hopefully ourselves.

Materials Needed

Bible concordance, materials for posters (poster board, colorful markers, scissors, magazines to cut out pictures and words, stickers or other decorative items, glue and tape), four blindfolds.

Procedure

1. Open with a prayer, and then either wrap up discussion of the article, *Littleton Takes the Blame* from the previous session, or review some of the points made during the discussion. (5 mins)

2. Have the class read **What Is Christian Hope?** in the student text. The two Bible passages from John tell us that Jesus died voluntarily, and that he would ultimately defeat Satan (the "ruler" or "prince" of this world). (10 mins)

3. Have the class do an exercise called "Thinking about Hope." For this exercise, designate an imaginary straight line across the room. (You will probably need to move chairs to the walls and corners of the room.)

You are going to read a series of incomplete statements with two possible answers. Each end of the line represents one answer, and the space in between represents students' personal views on the statement. Students should stand at a point on the line that represents their view on each statement. For example, if on the first statement they feel very strongly that God is a "lawgiver" they would stand at that end of the

line. If they feel somewhat strongly a toward the middle. If they feel God is stand on that part of the line, choosing ly they feel about it.

NOTE: For each statement, you represents each answer. Point with y answer, and repeat each one clearly a time to choose a point at which to sta Statements:

- (1) I see God more as a: lawgiver
- (2) Looking at my life so far, I
- (3) My friends would probably not very optimistic
- (4) I think of life as being madings / Friday afternoons
- (5) I usually feel like tomorrow than today
- (6) I am more like: yes / no
- (7) I am more like: can / cannot
- (8) I am more like: trusting / skeptical
- (9) I am more like: open / closed
- (10) I am more like: carefree / vigilant

Read slowly over the statements cise, emphasizing that there are no "r ting students think about whether mo indicated that they have a hopeful or in general.

Have them read **Growing in Ho** encourage them to think about the po come.

4. Say to the class, "Now that you grow hope in our lives, I would like u hopeful."

Begin by looking with the class ing the **Anointing at Holy Christm**

Procedure

line. If they feel somewhat strongly about it, they would stand more toward the middle. If they feel God is more a "love giver" they would stand on that part of the line, choosing a place that reflects how strongly they feel about it.

NOTE: For each statement, you will indicate which end of the line represents each answer. Point with your hand as you read each answer, and repeat each one clearly as you point again. Give students time to choose a point at which to stand; don't rush them.

Statements:

- (1) I see God more as a: lawgiver / love giver
- (2) Looking at my life so far, I have: few regrets / many regrets
- (3) My friends would probably describe me as: pretty optimistic / not very optimistic
- (4) I think of life as being made up mostly of: Monday mornings / Friday afternoons
- (5) I usually feel like tomorrow will be: better than today / worse than today
- (6) I am more like: yes / no
- (7) I am more like: can / cannot
- (8) I am more like: trusting / suspicious
- (9) I am more like: open / closed
- (10) I am more like: carefree / worrywart

Read slowly over the statements again after you finish the exercise, emphasizing that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, but letting students think about whether most of their answers seem to have indicated that they have a hopeful or not-so-hopeful attitude toward life in general.

Have them read **Growing in Hope** in the student text, and encourage them to think about the points it makes over the weeks to come. (10 mins)

4. Say to the class, "Now that you have thought about some steps to grow hope in our lives, I would like us to look at some reasons to be hopeful."

Begin by looking with the class at the words the priest recites during the **Anointing at Holy Chrismation** service (in student text). In

Procedure

this beautiful part of the service, the baptized one is anointed with oil as a "seal of incorruptible heavenly gifts." So when we are chrismated, we receive God's grace and protection through this anointing. If we will strive to live as God wants us to, we may be sure that he is with us and will bless our efforts.

Next, have the class read **St. Gregory of Narek Speaks to Us** in the student text. Explain that these words of the saint are about the change that occurs in us when we come to understand (through prayer and thought) what Jesus Christ has done for us. Even if at times in our life things look black, we can be hopeful because that blackness will not be upon us forever. Give the students some time to read and take in the beautiful words of this saint whose life of prayer can teach us so much.

Finally, ask for four volunteers to come to the chalkboard, and blindfold them as they stand there. Tell them to write the names of their five favorite foods on the board, and that you want to see who can write them most clearly and straight. Ask the rest of the class for silence, and quietly remove the blindfold from one student so the other blindfolded ones don't know you are doing it.

When they finish writing, the person without the blindfold will have done the best job of clear, straight writing. Point out to the class that just as the writer without the blindfold could see what the others could not, God can see what we cannot. Our worry and concern comes from our imperfect vision. But God can see the "big picture," and for that reason we can live hopefully, knowing that the world and human destiny are in his loving hands.

Review the three reasons for hope from this exercise: 1) God's blessing was given to us at our baptism; 2) People of great faith assure us that hope can grow in a person who was once despairing (St. Gregory of Narek is our example here, but there are many others); and 3) God is watching over us and sees everything in its entirety. He has assured us that he will bring everything to a good end. (15 mins)

5. Use the remaining time to have students write about their hope. They can do this together or in small groups. Use a concordance to look up the word "hope" and then illustrate it. (Or they can use words from St. Gregory's writing, that's fine.) (15 mins session.)

Plan to display the posters in the hallway or building.

Close with a prayer thanking God for the gifts of hope during the mini-course, and for the gifts of hope in our common work.

Procedure

5. Use the remaining time to have students make a poster about hope. They can do this together or in small groups. They can use the concordance to look up the word "hope" and find a passage they like, and then illustrate it. (Or they can use some of the Bible passages, or words from St. Gregory's writing, that you have looked at during the session.)

Plan to display the posters in the classroom or somewhere in the building.

Close with a prayer thanking God for your time together completing the mini-course, and for the gifts each student brought to your common work. (20 mins)

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