

Caring for One Another

Finding Hope in Difficult Times



Opening Questions (select 1 or 2 questions)

- Share about a time when a friend invited you to something that was new to you.
- Share a song, hymn or piece of music that brings you joy or hope.
- Share about a time when something unlikely or unexpected happened and it made a big difference for you.

What Does the Bible Say?

Jeremiah 29:10-14

For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD.

Think About... (optional, depending on time)

- What word or phrase from the text speaks to you today? What might God be saying through that word?
- What does God promise us in this text? What words of comfort do you hear?

What Do Others Say?

It didn't take long for my 12 year old self to feel isolated and lonely after the death of my father on a brisk mid-December day many years ago. Prior to his death, there was hope that the hospital would send him home for Christmas. It was suggested to me to wrap his gifts and place them under the decorated tree as a symbol of hope that he soon would be home. That hope quietly wilted and truth set in as I stared at the unopened gifts on December 26. Unable to properly process all my emotions, I simply sobbed for days, knowing that the anticipation of him coming through the front door was not a reality. Naturally, my next response was that of intense anger. An anger towards God – I felt like God had taken my dad. I even felt a crack in my faith knowing that God had him and I didn't.

It was only a few days after his death that a friend invited me to Incarnation's Cherub Choir rehearsal. With time, my lost hope was refueled in the Incarnation community. It all seemed to happen so fast, but within days I knew that Cherub Choir didn't need me, but I needed them. It was a Natalie Sleeth Christmas song "Were You There On That Christmas Night" that gave me the hope and inspired me to know that I will see my dad again in due time.

Now, as an adult, I find hope is something that comes rather easy for me. Keeping up with the acronym model, I created H.O.P.E "Having Opportunities Presented Everyday". Yes! HOPE is truly present everyday. Opportunities may be as simple as seeing God's natural beauty everyday at the same time, taking on daily challenges with a godly spirit.

There is also hope in Jeremiah's words', "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Those words by Jeremiah are words that I declare daily. God has plans for me, God is in control of my journey, God is my pilot, God is my hope.

Working daily with teens, I know that I need hope. A hope that my students are going home to a loving and warm household, hope that my students are cared for, and hope that my students will find success. Yet, I also know that my students experience hopelessness as they travel to homes with addictive behaviors, hopelessness as they deal with internal struggles of isolation, and hopelessness of feeling misplaced or dejected in the world.

Four simple, yet mighty letters (H O P E) can offer peace to many. Hope can transcend lives, spiritually, physically, mentally, and medically.

Looking for and "Having Opportunities Presented Everyday" is HOPE at its best.

--Reflection by Paula Trettel

Think About... (select one or more questions)

- What are the things in this story that brought about hope? List as many as you can.
- What would bring you hope during a difficult time? What reminds you that hope is even possible?
- When has someone given you a sense of hope? What did they do or say?
- What is the difference between hope and comfort? How might they be connected?
- When you hear about a friend or neighbor or colleague who is experiencing a difficult time, what might be your next step? What thoughts or actions come up for you?
- When you know someone who is facing a difficulty, how do you figure out the best way to respond to someone? What do you consider?

- The writer talks about H.O.P.E “Having Opportunities Presented Everyday”. What everyday things could be daily reminders of hope for you?
- What are some of the difficult circumstances of life that you care deeply about? What gives you hope for others or the wider world?
- What keeps you from inviting someone to share in an experience with you?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, Come to us and shine your light into times of darkness in our lives or the lives of those around us. Guide us to find hope and restoration in you. Help us to be light to one another on difficult days and ordinary days. Guide and teach us to live trusting in your hope, peace, and love. Amen.

Connecting Faith with Daily Life...

(for individual reflection & action)

- Be hope for someone else in a tangible way. Write a card or email. Send a gift card to a local restaurant. Call when you're at the grocery store and offer to pick up and deliver something. What other ideas do you have?
- We never know when others are feeling discouraged or without hope. Make a special effort to greet and talk with someone you don't know very well, simply to bring a sense of connection or community.
- Think of something you're likely to attend – who could you invite to attend with you? Who is an unlikely invite, but someone who might appreciate the chance?
- Invite someone to your home for a very simple easy-to-do dinner.
- Make a list of the things that give you hope. Save it in a location where you can pull it out from time to time to add to it or to be uplifted.

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