

## **The Season of Advent: Hope**

Hope is something we cannot live without. Let's spend some time this week working on the amount of hope in our lives:

### **Day One**

#### **Meditate on the Cross**

When we struggle to find hope in our lives, perhaps the best course of action is meditation on the cross. When we look at the cross, we see that God paid the ultimate price for our salvation. I don't know about you, but when I pay a lot for something, I generally don't let it fall into neglect and ruin. Imagine the most valuable thing that you ever paid for, and then imagine that the currency you used to pay for it was actual pain and suffering rather than dollars. Pain is one of the most unequivocal things in life. We cannot delude ourselves about it, pretend it doesn't exist, or reframe it. Pain is the ultimate currency, because you are only willing to suffer for something that you truly value. When you see the suffering of the cross, you see the value of our salvation to God and clearly know how much he cared for us. Will God let that ultimate price that was paid just go to waste? Will he do so much to save you and then just neglect you? Will he save you from your sins but not from your bills, or your fears, or your troubles? Are the circumstances of your life proof of God's indifference? Or does the cross reframe your life to proof of God's love and concern? Meditate on the cross today, and explore what it means to the trials and concerns you face on a daily basis.

*Verses: 1 Peter 2:24, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Colossians 2:14, Philippians 3:10-11*

*Prayer Topics: Faith, Peace, Confidence*

### **Day Two**

## **It's All Good**

One way to increase our hopefulness is to meditate on the promises God has made to us. One of the most profound promises is found in the book of Romans in chapter 8, verses 28 and 29. We read in those verses that God has promised us to work all things for good in our lives. This is such a powerful reason for hope. When it seems like God might be neglecting us because we face circumstances that look destructive to our well-being, God has promised to use those circumstances for our growth and maturity. We are being fashioned into the likeness of his son through those trials when we face them with faith and love. We have a misguided view of salvation, that somehow God can save us and leave us as we are. Like if we are drowning in the ocean and God, like a lifeguard, can just pluck us from the sea. What we don't understand is that salvation turns us into swimmers, rather than rescued victims. God is using all of the circumstances of your life for your salvation, the transformation of you into the likeness of Christ. What circumstances can you thank God for today, and thereby increase the hopefulness of your life?

*Verses: Genesis 50:20, James 1:2-4, 2 Timothy 1:8-10*

*Prayer Topics: Trust, Curiosity, Anticipation, Joy*

## **Day Three**

### **The Future**

Movies that are set in the future always get the future wrong. When I was a teenager, one of my favorite movies was Back to the Future, and the second movie of the trilogy was set in 2015, which looked nothing like the real 2015 when it arrived. Because we always get the future wrong, we should probably just leave it alone. But we can't. Our brains are wired with a future orientation. Your memory is faulty precisely because it is oriented toward the future rather than the past. It is organized so that you can use past memories to help you navigate toward future possibilities, rather than just review and

re-experience past memories. God doesn't want you sitting around thinking about the glory days, but instead heading into a better future. The reward system in your brain is also oriented toward the future, making you feel good about making progress towards a goal you believe to be important. The minute you achieve the goal, the reward is over. This seems cruel, but it makes you move toward a new goal. What is the point of all of this? God has made a future home for you, a home he wants you moving toward every day. That new home is secure, your future is not in doubt. You can move toward it confidently knowing that it is attainable. That future home not only includes a new place to live, but a new you. The home that you move toward is a transformation of who you are in Christ Jesus. We should always be moving in hope toward the end-state of being formed in the image of Christ, living with Christ and being surrounded by His people. We are not just waiting out the time for the end of our lives. We are making the most of every moment to move toward our future in hope.

*Verses: Romans 6:5, John 14:1-3, Revelation 21:4*

*Prayer Topics: Inspiration, Striving Toward, Big Picture, Preparation*

## **Day Four**

### **Hope Training**

Many times, we are reminded by sermons or bible verses that we have hope in Christ, but yet our outlook on life doesn't seem to change in any appreciable way. Why is this? Perhaps the main reason is that we expect to overcome decades of thought patterns instantly. I have mentioned many times that I come from a family of gloomy people, and that my natural tendency is toward this gloom. When I became older, I realized that this was not the natural way to approach the future for a Christian who lives in hope. Having realized that, my natural gloominess did not change immediately, but it has changed in large measure over the years. How did it change? I had to be trained in hope. What does it mean to be trained in hope? It means that we must take every thought captive, and that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. It means that we must purposefully replace gloomy or unhopeful thoughts with hopeful ones whenever we find

our natural fear, anxiety, or gloominess intruding on our hope. We must constantly be reminded of our hope until it becomes natural to think in hopeful ways. This is a struggle at first, but becomes easier with time. How do we begin? Think of times when you become unhopeful. Is there a pattern? Can you put up reminders in the places this usually happens? Can you prepare yourself for the times you get unhopeful? Spend some time today making a list of the times you are tempted to live without the hope that Jesus gives you, and make a plan to train yourself in hopefulness.

*Verses: Romans 15:13, Isaiah 40:31, Hebrews 11:1, 1 Peter 3:15*

*Prayer Topics: Discipline, Consistency, Intentions*

## **Day Five**

### **The Work**

To Change our outlook to one of hope, we must do the work. Spend some time today with a concordance or a bible program like biblegateway on the internet looking up verses about hope. Commit to a plan to memorize some of the most powerful verses on hope so that your mind will be equipped to meet the temptation of losing hope. Begin today.

*Verses: Ephesians 1:15-23, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, 1 Peter 1:13*

*Prayer Topics: Dedication, Purifying, Habits*