

5-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

Our Hope Has Come

CELEBRATING THE
PROMISE OF **ADVENT**

LIFEWAY WOMEN



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PROMISE OF **ADVENT**

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How to Use This Study

Welcome! We are excited you have chosen to join us as we journey through the Advent season together.

Since many Bible study groups don't meet during this busy season, we've created a study you can do alone, with family, or with friends. In each week's session you'll find:

- An introduction;
- Five days of personal study;
- Activities to do individually (or with your friends and family);
- Activities to do with kids and teens; and
- Group discussion questions.

This study is designed to encourage you and renew your hope in Jesus this Christmas. Use the five days of personal study to reflect, allowing God's Word to challenge you and nourish your soul.

GROUP DISCUSSION

If you decide to do this study with others, use the Group Guide discussion questions found at the start of each week to guide your conversation. In addition to answering the questions in the Group Guide, invite women to share the things they learned from each day of study and verbalize how each week's Scriptures impacted them.

Invite women to tell how they've incorporated the kids, teens, and adult activities into the season of Advent. If you choose, your group may want to bring the supplies needed for completing one of the activities in a group setting as you discuss the Group Guide questions and personal study.

Because Christmastime is inevitably busy, we hope the activities in the study provide a time of rest and reflection. Enjoy sharing the love and hope of Jesus with your family, friends, and neighbors this season.

A GROUP TIME MIGHT LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

- Welcome. Use this time to light a candle if you choose to incorporate an Advent wreath into your devotional time each week. (Refer to “The Advent Wreath” on pages 156–157 for a detailed guide.)
- Ask the questions on the Group Guide page for that week.
- Review the five days of personal study.
- Ask women to share any special activities they added to their week as they focused on Advent.
- Read Scripture related to the week’s theme. You may consider reading a selection of verses from the daily readings or those highlighted in “The Advent Wreath” activity at the back of the book.
- Close in prayer.

SHARE WITH OTHERS

You probably have neighbors who do not understand Advent. Consider inviting others to join you, using the Group Guide questions and hosting a group in your home. Explain the Advent wreath, what the Bible says about Jesus, and how your celebration of the Christmas season is different because of the hope you have in Christ.

Introduction

by Sarah Doss

Don't get your hopes up. Maybe someone offered you that warning recently. Undoubtedly, you've whispered it to yourself before. I know I have many times. Trying not to get our hopes up is an attempt at managing expectations, a well-intentioned effort to protect our hearts from pain or hurt because we know that this world brings its fair share of disappointment and uncertainty. Hope is risky. Maybe if we don't put our hearts into it, we think, we'll be able to bounce back if things don't pan out the way we wish they had. Unmet expectations won't matter as much, or they won't leave quite such a deep cavern of despair.

Sure, there may be times when a refusal to hope is healthy, times when it keeps us grounded in reality. But there are other times when that most certainly is not true. Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God “has put eternity into man's heart” (ESV). In other words, God has placed in us an innate understanding that this life here on earth isn't all there is, that we were made for more. So, when we counsel our hearts not to get their hopes up about things like a better future, freedom from sin, or redemption in relationships, we are pushing up against the reality that the hope of a restored world and eternal life with God lives in our hearts as His children.

Consider the apostle Paul's words in Romans 8:

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

Romans 8:22-25

“In this hope we were saved,” the hope of redemption. The hope of God setting everything right and making everything new again begins with the birth of Jesus, God's Son, who came to earth as a baby clothed in full humanity, lived a sinless life, died for us on the cross, and then came back to life again. Also rooted in Jesus is our hope that until He returns, the seed of redemption that has made our stony hearts tender to God will continue to grow, breathing new life into our hearts and minds and souls.

This is Advent—a celebration of the in-between, where we reflect on Jesus’ birth and everything it meant for us and our world, while we also hope with eager anticipation for His return. What better way to remind ourselves of the hope we have in Jesus than to celebrate His coming to this earth as a newborn babe, and His coming again as our conquering King.

When Jesus is the sole object of our affections, we have the hope we need to face every mountain top view and valley low voyage we encounter in this life. Hope for peace with God. Hope for identity—the ability to cease striving for the approval of others and rest in who God has made each of us to be. Hope for belonging—a place for the lonely in the family of God. Hope for joy—eternal joy found only in the loving embrace of our heavenly Father.

In our study together, we’re going to trace the triumph of hope that was the result of the coming of Christ to this earth. We will see how Jesus fulfilled so many hopes that God had revealed centuries before, how God placed hope in the hearts of His followers in their obedience to His call on their lives, and how the biblical examples of hope deferred can encourage those of us who may be struggling to wait with patience, as Romans 8 so eloquently puts it.

Many of us come to this Bible study in the midst of hard seasons. During those times, “hope talk” can feel like mere lip service, rubbing salt in an open wound, or reminding us of all our unanswered prayers. Even when we know hope is “the right answer,” it can be hard to feel it in our hearts.

Dear friend, no matter where you find yourself, God has hope for you. He wants you to bring everything from your wounds to your longings to your dreams and your bursting-at-the-seams joys to Him. He is gentle and kind. He can be trusted, even with a fragile hope. God’s Word shows us that He meets our shaky hopes with the unshakable and unchanging reality of who He is. Real hope doesn’t let us down because it’s fixated on who God is, who He’s always been, and who He will always be—our Creator and Redeemer.

We can face the uncertainties of the future with defiant joy in God and the confidence that “hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). We can rejoice in what God has in store because He loves us, He’s a good Father to us, and He’s not letting us go.

Whether you’ve trusted in Jesus for a long time, you find yourself wondering who He is, or you’re anywhere in-between, we’re so glad you’re here. Maybe it’s a good time we all get our hopes up after all?

God
sent
forth
His Son



When the fullness of
the time came, God sent
His Son, born of a woman,
born under the Law, so
that He might redeem
those who were under
the Law, that we might
receive the adoption as
sons *and daughters*.

GALATIANS 4:4-5, NASB



Hope Revealed

WEEK
ONE



THE FATHER'S PROMISE

by Sarah Doss

Hope can be an elusive concept, one that is hard to put into words or may mean different things to different people. The dictionary defines *hope* as “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen; a person or thing that may help or save someone.”¹ When I say I’m hoping for something, I’m usually trying to describe the idea of *joyful expectation*—a longing or anticipation of things to come.

As the people of God, Advent is a time of joyful expectation. During Advent we celebrate with joy God’s faithfulness to us, seen most clearly in the arrival (or “advent”) of Jesus, the fulfillment of so many promises God made to Old Testament saints and His followers today alike. We also look forward with much expectation and hope at Jesus’ return, a promise God has yet to fulfill.

The Advent season also serves as a beacon of light in a dark and weary world for people who aren’t in the family of God. Even those who wouldn’t call themselves followers of Christ stand in the glow of the Christmas season. To quote the classic holiday movie *Home Alone*, “This is Christmas. The season of perpetual hope.”²

We get to celebrate Jesus’ birth knowing the full story of His time on earth, death, and resurrection. But the Bible tells us about brothers and sisters who lived in joyful expectation of Jesus’ birth long before it was clear how or when He would come, or what He would accomplish when He did. This week, through snapshots from the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Ruth, David, and Zerubbabel, we’ll see our Old Testament faith family members walk steadily down the paths God mapped for them, trusting Him to make their way plain and illuminate each step, though their destinations were unclear. We’ll read about how they faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their assignments from God and persevered. We’ll also trace the hope of Jesus’ coming (and what that would mean for God’s people) that was revealed in each of their lives.

Their steps of obedience, even in seasons of waiting and sorrow, had far-reaching ramifications to push forward the kingdom of God. And the same is true for our obedience.

These passages have a lot to teach us about faith-filled hope in God's character and what it looks like to trust God's guidance and gifts along the unique path He's picked for each of us. Like the people we will spend time with this week, you'll likely never know on this side of heaven all the ways God will use your life to make His kingdom come on this earth, but He promises to use your steps of faithful obedience for your good and His glory.

These stories also show us what it looks like to rejoice in God's complete and sovereign knowledge and our limited vision. Many of us believe that God is for us, but when our experiences are tough and life doesn't look as we'd planned, it can be easy to abandon our devotion to God and instead put our hope in the temporary relief this world offers.

In the Advent season, we celebrate God's kindness to us, even as we wait on the future hope of His return.

Thankfully, God is kind toward us in His plans for our individual lives and His plans for the world. In His sovereignty, He works and acts at just the right time as we see clearly modeled in Jesus' birth story. Galatians 4:4 says, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son . . ." (ESV). Jesus was born into the world after an incredibly long season of silence from God, the approximately four hundred years of time that elapsed between the Old Testament prophet Malachi and the opening of the New Testament. Even though the people of God couldn't see it, God was working to orchestrate the coming of Christ at just the right time.

We also see God's perfect timing in Jesus' death and resurrection—His rescue of us eternally. Romans 5:6 reminds us, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly." That's us, you and me. When Jesus died on the cross, His death was for us and our sins. In the Advent season, we celebrate God's kindness to us, even as we wait on the future hope of His return.

In the end, it seems, hope is more than an expectation. Hope is a trust—trust in God, whose character won't disappoint us if we'll keep traversing this life hand in hand with Him.



GROUP GUIDE

1

In the introduction, *hope* is defined as “joyful expectation.” Write your own definition of *hope* in the space provided.

2

Our ability to hope in God is because of who He has revealed Himself to be in His Word. Make a list of the character traits of God from Scripture that prove He is worthy of your trust and hope. (If you need some help getting started, read Ps. 145.)

3

Read Galatians 4:4-5. What is the good news of these verses? How can the truth of these verses inform the way you wait and hope today?

4

In this week’s daily readings, we will learn about maintaining hope through obedience, sin struggles, brokenness, long seasons of waiting, and wrenches in our plans. Which of these most resonates with where you find yourself today, and why?

5

What is something you are hoping God will do in your life or teach you this Advent season? Take some time to pray over that specific hope and surrender it to the Lord.

NOTES



DAY 1

TRUST IN GOD'S PLANS

by Joy Allmond

I come from a long line of late spiritual bloomers. My parents and grandparents all came to Christ as adults. Each night, my great-grandfather Hayes prayed over his seven children—the youngest of whom was my paternal grandfather. One of those consistent prayers was for their salvation. From what I have been told, the thing Hayes cared about most in his life was that his family would be an unbroken one in heaven. By the time my great-grandfather died, none of his children were Christians. But one by one, all seven came to Christ. Although his prayers did not come to fruition while he lived on earth, he never ceased praying, and they were indeed answered.

I'm humbled every time I think about my great-grandfather. I'm humbled because those prayers prayed one hundred years ago covered me, as well. According to the story, he didn't just pray for his kids; he also prayed for his kids' kids. And their kids. And so on.

In some ways, Hayes reminds me of Abraham. Like Abraham, my great-grandfather was obedient to trust and pray as he waited for God to move in a big way. They both hoped for things they could not see (Heb. 11:1), and they both lived faithful lives without seeing the fruit of their obedience. God used the faithfulness of both men to make His name known.

READ GENESIS 12:1-3.

We are introduced to Abraham (initially named Abram) in Genesis 11, where we learn he was a descendant of Noah from Noah's son, Shem. At the start of Genesis 12, we read that God interrupted Abraham's life much like He did Noah's. For Abraham, obedience to God's call was costly. The Lord told him to leave everything he knew, to leave the community that raised him, to leave what he held dear. But Abraham trusted that God's purpose in telling him to make this major life pivot was to accomplish something infinitely greater than anything that involved his comfort.

How do you imagine you would have reacted if you were in Abraham's position?

Reflect on a time when you believed God was calling you to make a sacrifice or do something uncomfortable out of obedience. What seemed hard—or maybe even irrational or counterintuitive—about it? What was the outcome of that step of faith? If you're still waiting to see the outcome, what are you praying while you wait?

Make a list contrasting the promises God made to Abraham in verses 2–3. What stands out to you as you compare your list?

In verse 3, God indicated there would be trouble. He made several “good” promises: He would make Abraham “a great nation”; Abraham would be blessed (and would be “a blessing”); and Abraham's name would be great. But when God promised He would defend Abraham against those who mistreated him, He indicated that the road to seeing faithful obedience rewarded and promises fulfilled wouldn't be easy. In most of our contexts, we aren't suffering outright persecution for obedience. But a life of submission to the Lord and His Word is not free from suffering and hardships.

Describe some ways you have suffered or experienced negative consequences as you waited in obedience to God.

As it turns out, packing up and going to an unknown place with an uncertain future was just the beginning of Abraham's obedience.

READ GENESIS 22:1-19. What did God tell Abraham to do this time?

It's hard to imagine being asked to do anything more difficult than what God asked of Abraham in this scene. What does Abraham's obedience here teach us about his relationship with God?

Abraham had seen evidence of God's faithfulness and goodness over many years—through his obedience to leave the land and people he knew and live as a foreigner in a strange place, through the improbable conception of his children, and through God's consistent presence with him. God had shown Himself trustworthy throughout the life of Abraham, and it seems that is what Abraham fixed his eyes on in this very difficult moment.

READ HEBREWS 11:7-11. List each of the people mentioned and how God worked in their lives.

What's the common denominator in all of their stories?

The people listed in Hebrews 11:7-11 listened to God and trusted Him to fulfill His promises. Because of their faith in God, they trusted Him to carry them through their circumstances, even when the road ahead was unclear. As a result, God used their obedience and faith to build His kingdom.

READ HEBREWS 11:9,13, AND 16. Summarize these verses in your own words. How does the hope of eternity impact your faith today?

When we're asked to trust and obey, especially in the hard things, it's helpful to remember that this place where we physically dwell isn't our home. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that our ultimate home is in eternity with God. While this world will be wrought with struggles, an enduring faith is worth it because of what is coming—eternity with a loving God, in His holy city, alongside our Immanuel.

What's God asking of you this Advent season? Is He telling you to do hard things? Is He calling you to sacrifice something important for the sake of your personal holiness or for the spiritual benefit of another person? Spend a few minutes with Him in prayer, confessing what feels hard and renewing your commitment of faith to Him.

Ultimately, every act of obedience we make through faithfulness is for God's glory—not for our personal gain, comfort, or earthly reward. As we wait for Him to work through our circumstances, let's remember that this place where we live and these bodies we have are only temporary. Our purpose for now is to love Him and do what He commands. May God's work through our obedience point to the kingdom that is to come.



ADULTS



BIRD FEEDER WREATH

by Lauren Ervin

Whatever your obstacle this Christmas season, cling to the hope that God has not left your story unfinished and unredeemed. He is committed to His people. When you find yourself before an obstacle or in a season of waiting, don't rely on your own strength. Commune with God. Let prayer be your first plan of action, rather than your last resort.

GATHER

- 1 envelope unflavored gelatin
- 1/2 cup hot water
- 3/4 cup flour
- 3 Tbsp. corn syrup
- 4 cups birdseed
- *Bundt pan or mold
- Nonstick spray

*If you want to fill your Bundt pan, you'll need to double the ingredients.

DIRECTIONS

Spray your Bundt pan/mold liberally with nonstick spray. Mix the gelatin packet with hot water until dissolved. Stir in the flour and corn syrup until mixed with the gelatin, then add your birdseed and combine. Pour or scoop your mixture into your pan or mold, pressing down with the back of a spoon. If you're using a wire ring in the middle of your mold, add half your mixture, then the wire, then top the wire with the seed. Place your mold in the refrigerator or somewhere cold to set and firm up. After 24 hours, remove your seed wreath.

Now hang your bird feeder outside. Every time you glance over and see a critter enjoying it this week, pray. Pray for your neighbors, family, and leaders. Pray to have obedience during a season of waiting or courage to face hard things. I hope you feed many birds and bring all your thoughts to the Lord.



MAKE A FAMILY HANDPRINT WREATH

by Bekah Stoneking

Have you ever stood in a really long line? Or waited a few weeks to celebrate a special day? Waiting for something you're hoping for can be hard, and you might begin to feel impatient. But God doesn't waste time. In His plans, even time spent waiting has a purpose.

GATHER

- Green construction paper
- A paper plate
- Markers
- Scissors
- Liquid glue
- A hole puncher
- Yarn or ribbon

DIRECTIONS

Trace your family members' hands on the construction paper. Cut out at least 10–12 handprints, and cut out the center of the paper plate.

Glue the handprints around the rim of the plate to make a wreath. It works best if you glue the larger handprints first, and then glue a second layer of smaller handprints on top of them.

If you want, add decorations to your wreath, using the hole puncher to make a hole at the top. Tie the yarn or ribbon through the hole. Then find the perfect place to display your family wreath.

GAME

Play “Red Light, Green Light.” Have your child stand at a starting line. When you say “green light” the child moves forward toward you, until you say “red light!” Vary the amount of time you stay stopped on red. Ask, *How did you feel while you were stopped and waiting for the fun to start back up?*

In Matthew 1:1-17, forty-two generations are listed. That's hundreds of years between Abraham and Jesus' birth! You stopped and waited for only a few moments during your activity, but God's people watched and waited for a very long time for God to send His promised Messiah. In the meantime, God used many families in His good plan to reveal His faithfulness and to send Jesus to earth at exactly the right time.

PRAY

God, thank You for our family and friends, and thank You for the generations of families You worked through to send Jesus. Thank You for revealing Yourself through the Bible and for showing us that You are faithful, trustworthy, and that You always keep Your promises. Amen.