

Discovering Connection, Purpose and Hope – Part III

Introductions – Welcome to any new participants. Please share your name and why you have come. Question: What do you hope for in the next 3-6 months?

Opening Prayer

Suggestions, some basic ground rules to remember in a small group

There is an art to listening. In a small group, we respect one another's opinions and listen carefully so the speaker feels heard.

There is an art to sharing in a small group. We take turns and try not to monopolize the conversation. Try to speak from the heart and share openly and honestly.

There is an art to NOT gossiping in a small group. When someone shares something raw, personal, or difficult, it stays in the group. If not, trust is quickly squandered.

Background

When I was a young child, about five or six, I was overwhelmed by fear. My parents took the family to the San Diego Zoo one day, but as I admired the peacocks, they left me standing at the chain link fence separating me from the big birds. Their majestic tails, which filled a ten-foot semi-circle, were brilliant. I'd never seen anything so beautiful, so magnificent, and I was awestruck. My parents walked away to view other animals at the zoo, and I didn't notice them leaving. After realizing I was alone, I froze. I clutched the chain links as though they were my lifeline to the world.

Open It

- 1) Do you remember any memorable, early-life fear-filled moments? Would you share that memory with the group, if you can?
- 2) Besides fear, what other events/issues/things contribute to a feeling of hopelessness?
- 3) In chapter six, I discuss our overwhelmed feelings with our preemies. How have you been overwhelmed in the past, and what did you learn from that experience?
- 4) What makes you comfortable or uncomfortable when making complex parenting decisions regarding children?

Continuing Background: It seemed like an hour had passed, but more likely, about five minutes later, my older brother waltzed back into my field of view. He asked why I was lagging behind everyone, like it was my fault. My fear turned to anger, and my abrupt retort was, where are Mom and Dad? About two minutes later, Dad approached me from behind and touched my shoulder. All at once, my fear faded, melting like an ice cube on a hot stove. Hope overpowers fear when love arrives on the scene.

Going Deeper

- 1) What is hope, and where do you find it?¹
- 2) I've found over the years hope in one particular verse, Romans 8:28. *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.* When you read these words, do you find hope in them? If so, why or why not?
- 3) Do you find comfort in any other scripture? If so, what verse? If not, why?
- 4) Do you find hope in other places outside the Bible or church? Where and what is helpful?
- 5) Hope can be elusive. Try to describe a situation in your life where hope comes and goes.

¹ The confidence that, by integrating God's redemptive acts in the past with trusting human responses in the present, the faithful will experience the fullness of God's goodness both in the present and in the future.

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Explore It

The story in Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52, and John 6:15-21 about Jesus' disciples getting into a boat to sail to Capernaum is interesting. He told them he'd catch up with them later. As they journeyed, the clouds darkened, and the waves became choppy. The sea turned nasty, and they began to fear for their lives. The disciples saw someone walking towards them on the water but thought it was a ghost. As the water walker approached, they saw it was Jesus, and fear subsided. Overcome with emotion, Peter asks Jesus if he could meet him on the water. Jesus says, "Come." As he stepped from the boat, all was well until Peter took his eyes off Jesus. Once noticing the wind and huge waves, he began to sink. Once again, fear overpowered Peter. Immediately, Peter cries out, "Lord, save me." Jesus reaches out His hand to Peter and says, "You of little faith, why do you doubt?" Peter traveled through fear of death to victory over death, only to fear losing his life again. Many of us experience a similar path; finding hope is challenging to master in this life.

Apply It

- 1) What actions do you take when you're feeling hopeless? How is that working for you?
- 2) How do connection and purpose lead to hope? Maybe you disagree; why?
- 3) The Bible offers many hopeful stories and events besides Peter's walking on water moment. i.e., David and Goliath, 1 Sam 17, Jesus' resurrection, the empty tomb – Find a story of hope and read it over the next few weeks.
- 4) Below from 1 Peter 3:15-16, Peter tells readers to be ready to make a defense for the hope that is in us. What's your 3-minute elevator speech, and how might you deliver it when possible?
- 5) Chapter fourteen talks about finding hope after disappointment. If you've not read this chapter yet, please do. How did connectedness and purpose lead to a new sense of hope?

Life Application

For Peter, hearing from Christ and seeing his outstretched hand increased his faith, and his fear subsided. Peter likely remembered his water walking experience and how easily hope can vanish as he wrote First and Second Peter. It says in 1 Peter 3:15-16: *Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence.²*

Wrap-up

What worked or didn't work during the three-week small group experience?
How might the questions we used or our discussion time be improved?

Small group take-away:

*This three-part small group series on faith drew on stories and thoughts from the book, *Hard Questions: About Life, Death, and After Life* by Pastor Richard Braun. The three elements discussed, connection, purpose, and hope, are like legs on a stool of life. Remove one of the legs; the stool becomes unstable and can no longer support a meaningful and rewarding life. I hope you enjoyed this short small-group study, and if you'd like to use other small-group studies I've written, they can be found on the website: hardquestionsforsmallgroups.com.*

² [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#) (1 Pe 3:14–16). (1989). Thomas Nelson Publishers.