DISCUSSION GUIDE

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The bottom of the 9th is the last half-inning of a baseball game and only occurs when the home team is behind or tied. It's their last chance to tie up the game or win it outright. As tense as the bottom of the 9th can be, and no matter how far behind your team is, there is always hope. After all, it's not over until the last out.

As difficult as bottom of the 9th moments can be in baseball, they are even more challenging in life. Especially when it feels like there's no way you can get caught up, let alone feel like you are in control or winning. But as writer Anne Lamott says, "Grace bats last."

Whether you are a baseball fan or not, you will want to join us for this powerful series based on a concept developed by the team at North Point Christian Church in Atlanta.

This guide is filled with session summaries and discussion questions designed to help you engage with this series in a deeper way. You can work through it on your own or with other people.

Video recordings of Brian Gerard's sermons in this series can be found at MiddletownChristian.org/Sermons.

THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE Session 1

While the feeling of hopelessness that comes when you are far behind in a ballgame is no fun, it's even less fun when you are falling behind in the game of life. Sometimes it feels like things are spiraling out of control and there's no way you can get caught up, let alone feel like you are in control or winning.

Having faith may not solve every one of life's challenges, but holding on to faith and one another can help us weather the storm, even when the score is 2-0 in the bottom of the 9th.

Scripture: Matthew 19:16-30; 1 Peter 1:3-9

Discussion Questions

1. When is a time in your life when things have felt like they were spinning out of control? How did that time feel?

2. How did you find your way through a difficult time? What help do you wish you had?

3. Read Matthew 19:16-30.

What stands out to you in this story? What challenges you in this story? What comforts you in this story?

4. How does your faith provide you with hope, even when you are facing challenges in life?



No matter what we are facing in life, our faith promises that we have hope. As Christians, we've heard this promise repeatedly, but sometimes the things we face make hope seem like a distant reality.

Just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God asked them to do something that likely seemed odd at the time but would serve as a constant reminder of the hope they had in God. The good news is that we can do the same thing. If only we will remember.

Scripture: Joshua 3-4

Discussion Questions

- 1. How do you define hope?
- 2. How do you define the hope we have in Jesus?
- 3. How do you find hope when you need it?

4. After building a monument to honor God's bringing the people of Israel through their journey in the wilderness, God told the people to build a monument out of stones. God then said, "When your children ask their parents in time to come, "What do these stones mean?" then you shall let your children know, "Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground." For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty." (Joshua 4:21-24)

What does this passage teach us about how we can find hope in our lives?



Life is a team sport, especially if you call yourself a Christ follower. We don't get to walk through life as if it is all about us. We are called to be a body – and sometimes that means caring for others who are hurting or in need.

If you've ever been carried by others through a difficult time, you know the power of that kind of care. If you've ever helped carry someone through a difficult time, you know that no matter how heavy the lifting may have been, it was worth every ounce of effort to see your friend, your loved one, find some hope in the midst of their struggle.

This session is all about being a better teammate to others in the game of life.

Scripture: Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26

Discussion Questions

1. When have you been in a situation where someone offered you care and support? What was that like?

2. Is it easy or hard for you to ask for help? Why?

3. When have you been in a situation where you wanted to help someone but weren't sure what to do? What can you do in moments like that?

4. Read Mark 2:1-12 or Luke 5:17-26.

What does this story teach us about how we can care for others?



Sometimes in sports the game doesn't go your way, no matter how hard your team tried or how much hope you had. As hard as those moments are, they are nothing compared to some of the losses we experience in life.

No matter how much faith we have, there is no guarantee we will win everything in the game of life. Sometimes we will experience loss. Our faith carries a promise that even in those moments all is not lost. In fact, it is in those moments that we might just find the greatest hope ever known.

Scripture: Acts 6-8, Romans 8:31-37

Discussion Questions

1. When is a time when a team you were on, or when your favorite team, lost a big game? What did that feel like?

2. When is a time when you lost something in life? What are some of the feelings you experienced?

3. Read Romans 8:31-37.

What does this passage say to you about hope in the face of loss?

4. What are some things you've done in the past or continue to do when you need to feel God's presence?



MiddletownChristian.org Sunday Worship In-Person at 8:30, 9:50, & 11:10 AM Online at 11 AM