



GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

While we have hopefully come through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are still plenty of concerning things taking place in our world right now. Sometimes the realities of this world can feel overwhelming. Our faith teaches that even in the most difficult of times, there is always hope. This worship series, based on the book *Hope for Hard Times* by Magrey deVega, will remind us all of the hope we have in the living and loving God we worship.

This guide is designed for individual or group use. Sermons in this series are available at MiddletownChristian.org/Sermons.

Content and questions by Brian Gerard and Corey Miller
Art by Brando Hall

May 1, 2022: A Warning, A Wadi, A Widow

Key Scripture: 1 Kings 17

After delivering a warning to King Ahab, the prophet Elijah had to flee for his life. His journey took him to the life-giving waters of a wadi in the wilderness and ultimately to the home of a widow who makes an incredible sacrifice at Elijah's request. This is a story filled with the promise that no matter how dried up our lives may feel, there is always hope that can be found through our faith in God.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some things happening in your life or in the world today that cause you to feel worried or anxious?
2. What are some things happening in your life or in the world today that give you hope?
3. Read 1 Kings 17:8-16. How does this story speak to how we can find faith and hope in trusting God?
4. In his message, Brian suggested that one way we can find hope when things are hard is to focus on the present. For example, the Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray for today's bread - not tomorrow and the next day, just today. How can focusing on the present help us to find hope for tomorrow?
5. What practices do you have that help you make room for more gratitude, hope, and praise in your life, even in the midst of hard times?

May 8, 2022: Small Signs

Key Scripture: 1 Kings 18:41-19:18

After suffering through years of a terrible drought, the people of Israel were beginning to lose hope. One day God told Elijah to go and share the news that the rains were coming soon, and the drought would end. The promise of God was confirmed by a sign that was so small it was almost imperceptible. Sometimes all it takes is the smallest sign of hope to know that better days are on the horizon.

Discussion Questions:

1. When it comes to finding hope, do you find yourself looking for it in the small things or do you need to see it something big? Why?
2. Read 1 Kings 18:41-45. What do you make of the fact the servant had to go and look seven times for the sign? What does that say about finding hope in the midst of hard times?
3. Read 1 Kings 19:4-8. What does this story say to you about the journey of finding hope in hard times?
4. Read 1 Kings 19:11-13. What does this part of the story say to you about finding hope in hard times?
5. Describe a moment when you've felt or experienced the presence of God. What was that like? In what ways did it give you hope?

May 15, 2022: Dangerous Hope

Key Scripture: Acts 16:16-40

In today's story, we learn about Paul and Silas when they confronted the world of Caesar on its own turf for the first time. They confronted a world that allowed slaves to be abused for financial security and people could be thrown into jail for standing up to the powers that be. Paul and Silas instead showed a different kind of world was possible. A world where hope is not just something we hold on to but something we share through our actions every day. When we allow our hope to be forward facing; when we allow it to be the type of hope that can change the world, that is when our hope can become dangerous.

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of world do you think the kingdom of God envisions?
2. What is our role in bringing this kingdom of God to earth?
3. When Paul and Silas freed the slave girl who was telling fortunes, they directly opposed the financial structure of the day. What are things today that we need to not be scared to oppose?
4. How might we share the hope we have for the world?
5. How are you living a dangerous type of hope? How can you make it even more dangerous?

May 22, 2022: Keep Pouring

Key Scriptures: 1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-18; 2 Kings 4:1-7

In today's message, we hear the story of another widow who can teach us something about finding hope in hard times. While her story involves a miracle, the journey toward getting the hope and help she needed also included some things that are far more common--things we sometimes take for granted, but that can help us find the hope we need when things are hard.

Discussion Questions:

1. In his message, Brian talks about the importance of both having a mentor and being a mentor. Who do you consider as a mentor in your life? In what ways have they served that role?
2. If you have ever been a mentor, what was that experience like?
3. Read 2 Kings 4:1-7. What are the character traits of the widow, her sons, and her neighbors?
4. How do you understand miracles? Have you ever experienced one? If so, what happened?
5. While the story of the widow's oil involves the direct action of God, it also involves human participation. What examples are there of human engagement in this miracle? Have you ever had an experience of a miracle that was made possible by human hand? If so, what was it? What does this say about how we can bring hope to others during hard times?

May 29, 2022: Hope Lives

Key Scripture: 2 Kings 4:8-37

In the final message of this series, we hear two miraculous stories. While one is more familiar than the other, they both remind us that no matter what we may face in life, hope lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read 2 Kings 4:8-16. What was the woman's response to Elisha's promise that she would conceive a son? (see v. 16). Why do you think she responded this way?
2. In what kinds of circumstances can the idea of hope bring about the same response the woman had in today's story?
3. Read 2 Kings 4:17-37. What is your response to this story? What surprised you? What gave you hope?
4. Read John 11:1-37. In what ways is this story like that of the Shunammite's son? Do you find Jesus' actions in the story concerning or comforting? Why? In what ways does this story give you hope?
5. As part of his sermon, Brian shared a list of everyday miracles. What are some miracles that surround you every day? How do those things give you hope?