

It may be no surprise to you that one of the biggest themes in Christianity is hope. Hope is one of the main themes throughout Scripture. Hope is one of the largest themes in Scripture; especially when we get to the stories of Jesus and the early church. But what exactly are Christians so hopeful about? What exactly is our hope?

1. What do you think is the goal of the Christian faith? In your own words, what do you believe to be the ultimate hope and purpose of following Jesus? Ask 5 different people these same questions and bring their responses to small group.

Watch bible project video titled “Yakhal – Hope”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WYNBjJSYvE>

Looking back to notice where God showed up in our lives is one of the crucial parts of hope. It may be remembering stories where someone found strength while struggling through depression. It could be remembering stories of people like Martin Luther King Jr. or Rosa Parks or Mother Theresa who were bearers of Christ’s light in the darkness of the world.

Christian hope is focused on new creation when all things are made right. There is a prayer we pray each Sunday at church, and millions of Christians pray everyday around the world: The Lord’s Prayer. “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That line that millions of disciples pray every day speaks volumes about our hope that all of creation will be rescued from injustice, evil, violence, sin.

2. Read Matthew 6:7-13. What other parts of the Lord’s Prayer describe the kind of world we hope for as Christians?

Do we have a role in this? Of course! Just as Jesus showed us what God is like and what God desires for the world, Jesus also reminds us that God will work through and with us (John 4:12-14). We can’t do this work alone – we need God. But God decidedly doesn’t leave us in the dust to go it alone. God partners *with* us. Time and time again in the Bible God remains with humanity, even when we mess up. Even when we reject God’s ways and treat our brothers and sister poorly and the earth poorly, God does not abandon us.

One particular way we are called to partner with God is by seeking Shalom – the Hebrew word for Peace. That’s a pretty familiar word to us, often referring to stillness, or tranquility. We might look out on a still lake or take a walk through the woods away from the noise of life and think “Ah, this is really peaceful.” But when it comes to Shalom, that stillness is only one part of the meaning. The word Shalom is more of an active seeking of goodness, and working toward a world where all people and creation flourish. As you’ll see in the prophets, God delights in peace and is deeply grieved and frustrated when it is absent.

Read through some of the prophets**Isaiah 11:1-11 / Isaiah 59:1-15 / Zechariah 8:16-19 / Jeremiah 8:8-12**

One of the things that is opposed to shalom is the myth of redemptive violence. We live in a culture that's pretty steeped in redemptive violence. What is redemptive violence? We don't even need to look very far past the action movies that come out year after year: John Wick, The Dark Knight, Deadpool. The myth of redemptive violence is a belief that evil and violence can actually be overcome by using the same tools of violence. The reality is, responding with more violence 1) usually inclines to hit back harder and 2) easily turns into an endless cycle. That's why I think Martin Luther King Jr. responded in a unique way to the violence of his day.

Every year we celebrate Dr. King to remind us of the life and legacy of one of our country's greatest revolutionaries and socio-religious heroes. He was passionate about the value of all human life, regardless of race, religion or economic class. He spoke of his dream for the day when all people would live in equality with one another and peace would reign in the hearts of all people and relationships. In an age of racism and segregation, many suggested, and some practiced violence retaliation and forceful resistance against those considered enemies. However, Dr. King, a Baptist minister and follower of Jesus, spoke of a different kind of spiritual movement:

"We are outnumbered; we do not have access to the instruments of violence. Even more than that, not only is violence impractical, but it is immoral; for it is my firm conviction that to seek to retaliate with violence does nothing but intensify the existence of evil and hate in the universe...I believe firmly that love is a transforming power that can lift a whole community to new horizons of fair play, good will and justice."

3. How did Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. respond to racism and segregation in his day? What else do you know about Dr. King and his role in the civil rights movement?

The movement embraced and modeled by Dr. King is known as nonviolent resistance. It's a spiritual discipline that doesn't respond to evil, hatred, and violence with more of that stuff, but seeks to overcome evil with good. Sound kind of strange? That's probably because we aren't used to stories that celebrate or illustrate nonviolence. We dwell in a world saturated with movies, cartoons, music, video games, books, and superheroes that practice and teach violence as the justified response to evil. It can even be a form of entertainment.

Dr. King's movement of nonviolent resistance wasn't just a strategy for him – it was deeply ingrained in his faith in Jesus and God's kingdom. Let's look at some of the ways in which the Jesus and the early church practiced and taught this countercultural way of life...

Read Matthew 5:38-42

4. How does Jesus call his disciples to respond to enemies? How is this like MLK Jr.? How is it unlike what we read and watch in culture?

Read Matthew 26:47-56

5. How does Peter want to respond to those about to arrest Jesus? What is Jesus's response and how does this relate to nonviolence?

Read Romans 12:14-21

6. What is the dream and vision of this passage? How does it call followers of Jesus to live, especially in relation to our enemies?

Read Colossians 1:15-20

7. How does this passage suggest that Jesus made peace? How does this compare to the typical methods for "making peace" that we hear about in the news, watch on movies, and maybe play in our video games?

Seeking peace and being a peacemaker is strange and hard work because it calls us to act and react differently to people. Indigenous Australian activist Lilla Watson once said, "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." We all need to be liberated from the myth of redemptive violence.

What Lilla's words can remind us of is our *interdependence* with one another. As Americans we are very familiar with being independent people. Heck, even one of our country's founding documents is the Declaration of *Independence* 😊 But there is something we miss about what it means to be human when we focus so much on being independent that we forget that we need one another. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way...

"Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured." (Hebrews 13:1-3)

8. As your family about some of the world's great "peacemakers". Who are they? What did they do?

As a teenager you're at a point in your life where you are probably seeking more independence as you take on more responsibilities, start driving, begin to think more for yourself – and those are all good things! But it's also important to remember to not forget our interdependence; that our lives are bound up with God; that we are not only called to serve our neighbors, but through empathy, we can see that we are deeply connected with our neighbors.

We are called to be peacemakers (Matt 5:9). We get to join God in bringing about peace in the world! What can you do today to be a more empathetic peacemaker in your community?

This week find ways to creatively pursue peace. Maybe pray for war torn countries or victims of war or pray for someone you might consider an enemy or someone you don't normally consider a friend. Maybe read through the Bible and notice places where it talks of peace. Maybe think about areas of conflict in your own life and ask God to grant you the strength to live into peace.

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