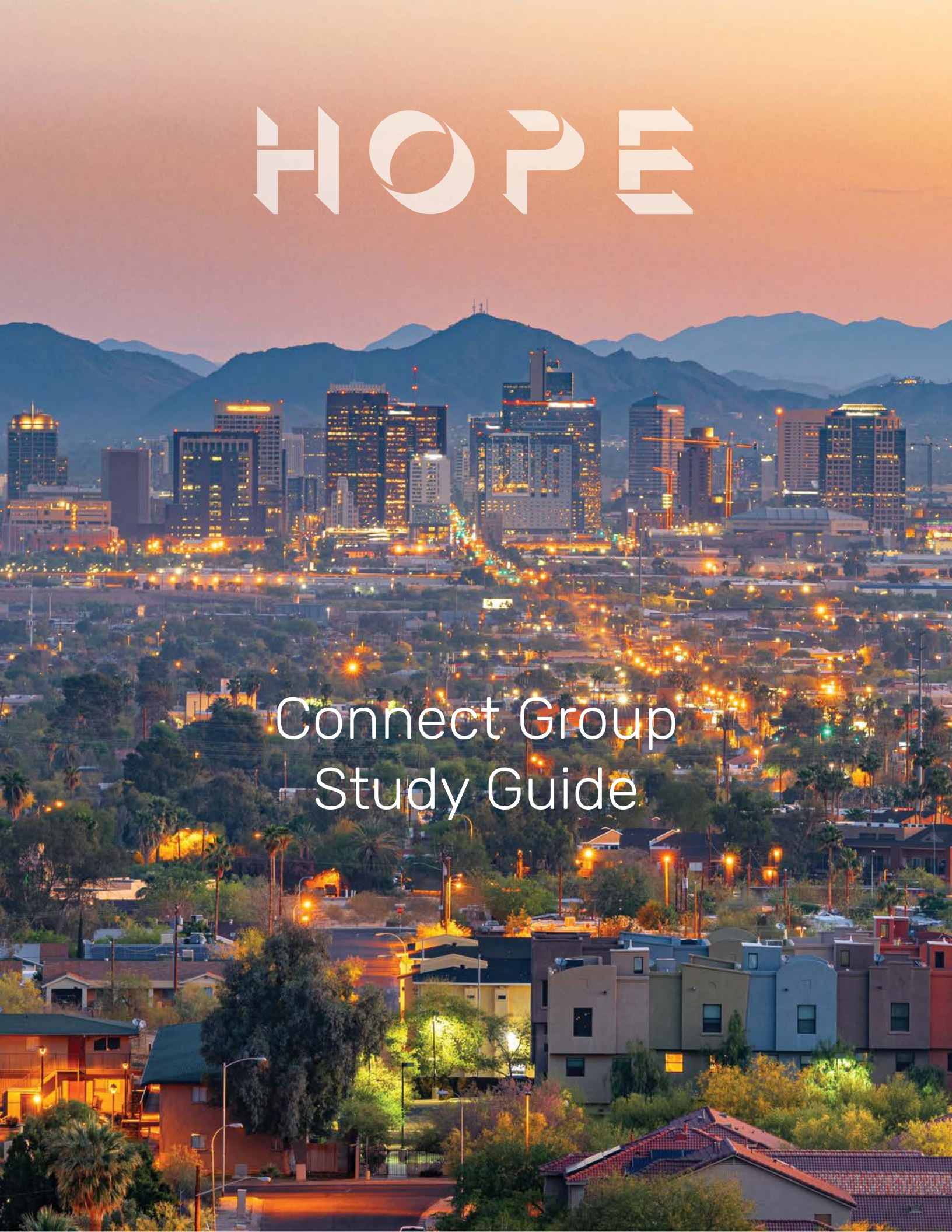


HOPE

Connect Group Study Guide



HOPE

Blessings,

I want to welcome you to the HOPE Connect Group campaign for Fall 2024. We are so glad that you and your group will be joining us in this awesome experience. We are so excited to give you an opportunity to take our Sunday Sermons deeper by discussing them throughout the week with your group.

Since our church is in the process of changing our name to HOPE this year, we are looking forward to exploring our new name and identity as a church and how Christ has gifted us to share His love and HOPE with a hurting world around us.

As we begin a new year of Connect Group opportunities, we want to offer every member of our church and every Connect Group, opportunities to “Connect” and grow closer, first to God in prayer, then to one another in fellowship and finally to our community in service.

In this introduction you will find the following to help you and your group grow and share HOPE with one another and our community:

1. An introduction to our 3 Challenges.
2. A schedule of the HOPE campaign including a list of service projects.
3. Our Group Expectations and guidelines.

We hope that you are blessed as you grow with God, together and our community. Godspeed.

Pastor Tim Duerr

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Duerr". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "f".

*“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”
- Romans 12:12 (ESV)*

*“And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.”
- Psalm 39:7 (ESV)*

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his
great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through
the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”
- 1 Peter 1:3 (ESV)*

HOPE

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3 Challenges:

1. **Daily:** Pray and journal what's on your heart and mind as you talk to God.
2. **Weekly:** Meet with your Connect Group to study scripture, pray and grow together.
3. **Monthly:** In your Connect group, participate in one of the 6 service projects we have scheduled during each week of this campaign.

We challenge you and your group to come together to grow in these ways.

Prayer/Journaling: At the end of every weekly study, there are daily prayer journal topics for you to use in your personal reflection time. We want to encourage you to take 5-10 minutes each day in prayer and journaling. Research shows that you retain much more of what you hear in a sermon if you discuss the sermon in a small group setting and spend time journaling or answering questions based on that sermon. Your prayer and journaling time can be personal. You can keep that private to yourself, or if you and your group would like to share those prayers together, you are welcome to do so. It all depends on what you and your group are comfortable with.

Meeting: If we don't meet and connect with each other, then we don't have Connect Groups. No Christian lives in isolation. Scripture tells us in Hebrews 10:25; "25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." We have to meet, we have to support, we have to be there for each other as we go through this difficult life together.

Serve/Outreach: As a church, we want to mobilize you to serve and share God's love and HOPE with our community. When we serve together we can all achieve more together. We can multiply our impact of love that we share with our community. So our church is offering an outreach opportunity each week of this campaign that you can participate in. Some are in the neighborhood of our church, some are elsewhere in the valley. We want to encourage each Connect Group to choose 1-2 of these service projects to participate in together as a group. Your group can agree upon which one best fits the dynamics and needs of your group (location, day, time, family-friendly...etc), and then your group leader can reach out to Seth Kravig in the office to sign up. Of course, you don't have to only choose one...if your group would like to do more than that, we highly encourage it. And if you or your family want to participate in any of these service projects outside of your Connect group, we welcome you do so as well. The sky's the limit as we serve our community around us with the HOPE that we have in Jesus!

Campaign Schedule:

This Campaign is ideally meant to be studied in sync with the Hope sermon series. Typically, the Connect Group would meet the week following the sermon that is presented on Sunday morning, so that the sermon is fresh in the minds of the hearers and you can engage both with the small group study guide and material as well as with any illustrations that the pastors used in the sermons, or any notes or questions that came to you while you were listening to the sermon. We encourage you to bring those with you to your Connect group and engage with your group members together.

However, if your group is unable to meet during the timeframe below, that is just fine. You can do this study whenever you want to and are able to do so. You can watch all of the sermons on the website and YouTube channel prior to your group's meeting.

Here you will find the schedule for our Small Group Series, including the service project that we are encouraging you and your group to participate in together.

Date:	Sermon/Study Title:	Topic:	Service Project:
August 18th	He Gives Us A Second Chance	Forgiveness	Service project: Bags of Grace (Available all week)
August 25th	He Hears Our Prayers, He Hears Our Cares	Prayer	Service Project: Harvest Compassion. (Available all week)
Sept. 1st	He Comforts Us In Our Times Of Need	Comfort in our discouragement	Service Project: Community Cleanup. (Available all week)
Sept. 8th	He Heals Our Hurts	Healing From Past Hurts	Service Project: Foster Alliance (Available all week)
Sept. 15th	He Helps Us Overcome Our Doubts	Comfort and Doubt	Service Project: Feeding the Homeless (Sept. 14th) Women's Retreat Weekend!
Sept. 22nd	Hope For The Heart Of Phoenix	Sharing Hope with others.	Service Project: Feed My Starving Children (Sept. 21st)

Group Expectations and Guidelines:

OUR PURPOSE

To transform our spiritual lives by cultivating our spiritual health in our Connect group community through developing relationships with God, others in our church family and our community through prayer, fellowship and acts of service.

OUR VALUES:

Group Attendance:	To give priority to the group meeting. We will call, text or email if we are late or absent.
Safe Environment:	To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. (Please, no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes.)
Respect Differences:	To be gentle and gracious to people with different spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments, or imperfections. We are all works in progress.
Confidentiality:	To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group, and avoid sharing improper information about those outside the group.
Encouragement for Growth Welcome for Newcomers	To keep an open chair and share Jesus's dream of finding a shepherd for every sheep. To be not just takers but givers of life. We want to spiritually multiply our lives by serving others with our God-given gifts.
Shared Ownership	To remember that every member is a minister and to ensure that each attender will share a small team role or responsibility over time.
Rotating Hosts/Leaders and Homes	To encourage different people to host the group in their homes, and to rotate the responsibility of facilitating each meeting.

OUR EXPECTATIONS

Refreshments/mealtimes _____

Childcare _____

When we will meet (day of week) _____

Where we will meet (place) _____

We will begin at (time) _____ and end at _____

If our group tries to attend worship together, our primary worship service time will be

Date of this agreement _____

Date we will review this agreement again _____

OUR SIGNATURES

Resources:

You do not need any special resources to participate in this study other than this study guide. The Bible verses that your group will be discussing will all be included and printed in the body of the text.

However, here are some resources that we would encourage you to pick up if you do not already have them in order to help you grow and take this study deeper.

Bible:

If you do not already have a Bible, we encourage you to purchase a Bible, and/or download a Bible App onto your phone or tablet.

We recommend purchasing the Concordia Study Bible, which is available from Concordia Publishing house, and can be purchased at www.cph.org

You can also download the Concordia Study Bible app from your app store, however it does have in-app purchases to utilize the study guides and study note features.

You can also download many free versions of the Bible through the YouVersion Bible app. If you simply type “Bible” into your app store and look for “You Version Bible” (*it’s usually the first one that comes up*) you can download that, and it has many free Bible resources at your fingertips, including study notes, commentaries, sermons and other free resources.

Prayer Journal:

On August 25 we will be giving out prayer journals on Sunday morning. Or you can use any notebook, binder or note-taking app on your phone or tablet to journal your prayers.

Luther’s Small Catechism:

If you do not already have a copy of Luther’s Small Catechism, we would highly recommend that. There are several references to Luther’s Small Catechism in this study guide that you could dig more deeply into if you have a copy of this book on your bookshelf.

You can also download a free copy of Luther’s Small Catechism with explanations from most app stores as well. Just search “Luther’s Small Catechism” and find the edition whose publisher is Concordia Publishing House. This is the edition from which the references in the study guide came from.

HOPE

WEEK 1

He Gives Us A Second Chance

Scratching The Surface:

now each other as we begin this new sermon and Connect Group Series:

- 1. How long have you attended St Mark? What brought you here, and what do you like most about St Mark?**
- 2. Have you ever participated in a small group Bible study before? If so, where at? How was the experience?**
- 3. What do you hope to get from this group?**

Background: We believe that we are sinners. What God made perfect in the Garden of Eden has been broken and tainted by sin. Sin brings failure, struggles and pain into our lives. Sometimes other people cause us pain, sometimes we cause our own pain. When we fail, it's easy to lose hope. Today we are going to learn how God gives us second chances, even in the midst of failures, mistakes and times when we have caused our lives to go a different direction than we originally thought they would go.

Opening Prayer: Lord, today we ask that as we begin our time together, let us get to know each other and draw closer to You over these next 6 weeks. We ask that You would give us open hearts and minds to hear Your word and let it change our hearts, our lives and actions.

Digging Deeper:

Accept Responsibility For Your Own Failure.

1 John 1:6–10 (ESV): If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1. **Why is owning up to our failures and faults so hard?**
2. **What does 1 John say happens to us when we refuse to admit our faults and our failures?**
3. **What does John say happens when we do confess? How are we forgiven?**
4. **Why does Jesus say we live in darkness when we don't practice the truth?**

Proverbs 28:13 (ESV): 13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

James 5:15–16 (ESV): And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Acts 3:19–20 (ESV): Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,

5. **Why do these verses say it's so important to confess our sins to God and each other? What do Proverbs, James and Acts say is the result of confession?**

6. **Confession can be hard. Have you ever thought confession can have these positive results described above? How do these verses affect your outlook on confession?**

Forget the Former And Focus On The Future.

Read: Luther's Small Catechism

280. Does forgiveness mean that I must "forgive and forget"?

Forgiveness does not mean having no memory of past wrongs. But we ask our Father in heaven to free us from the anger and resentment that may accompany those memories. We relinquish them into His merciful hands and trust Him for healing over time.

1. **Many people feel guilty when they can't forgive and forget. Have you ever struggled with this?**

2. **What does the Catechism say is the answer to perfect forgiveness?**

3. **Do you have a harder time accepting that God has forgiven your own failures? Or do you have a harder time forgiving others for theirs?**

Philippians 3:12–14 (ESV): 12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

7. **Where does the Apostle Paul say that he finds his hope? Based on that, where can we find our hope today?**

8. **Why is it important for us to forget our past mistakes and failures and focus on the future rather than to dwell on them?**

Reaching The Core:

Trust God To Work It All Out.

Romans 8:28–32 (ESV): 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

9. **Verse 28 says; “28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose...31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” When you read these verses how do they give you hope?**

10. **How does Paul say we can have confidence that God works things out for our good, according to these verses?**

11. **Why is it so hard to Trust God to work it all out?**

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we've all failed. None of us have perfectly lived the lives that You have called us to live. So today, we ask for Your grace, mercy and forgiveness, both for ourselves and for others in our lives today. In the name and power of Jesus, Amen.

3 Challenges:

1. **Daily:** Pray and journal what's on your heart and mind as you talk to God.
2. **Weekly:** Meet with your Connect Group and pray and grow together.
3. **Monthly:** In your Connect group, participate in one of the 6 service projects we have scheduled during each week of this campaign.

****Note: All references to Luther's Small Catechism, were copied from the Luther's Small Catechism App available from Concordia Publishing House.*

Week 1 - Prayer Journal:

Day 1:

Your prayer journal journey can change your faith life! To make this commitment, you most likely will need to do a little planning.

Answer the following questions to get started...

1. When can I plan to pray?
2. Where can I pray (a place that is quiet where you can concentrate and be able to give God your time with no interruption)?
3. How often will I use my prayer journal to pray (daily, once/week, etc.)?
4. What method will I use to pray (whatever comes to mind, ACTS -Adoration, Confession, Thanks, Supplications, etc.)?
5. Will you meditate on given Scripture verses before or after your prayer time?

Now that you've got a plan, today is the day to put it into action! Today, journal about what you would like to get out of your prayer time over the next 6 weeks.

Day 2:

In our small group discussion, we talked about “original sin”. As humans (and sinners) we have an intense desire to have CONTROL in multiple areas of our lives.

*Why do you think we desire control?

*Why is control a sin?

*How can you personally change your desire for control?

In your prayer journal, talk/write to God in prayer about control. If needed, confess the sin of control. In your supplications, ask God to help you manage the desire for control. You have become more aware of the sin of control so lean on God to free you from this sin.

Day 3:

In our small group study, we talked about CONFESSION. Here’s a few ideas to think about before your confession time in your prayer journal.

*What is your attitude going into confession?

*Why are some sins very difficult to confess?

*How do you feel after confession?

*Look at page 2 in your packet for Part 1. Reread the verses (Proverbs 28:13, James 5:15-16, Acts 3:19-20). These verses tell of the positive results of confession.

Underline the positive results in each passage.

In your prayer journal, write your confession. Then thank God for His forgiveness and the relationship you are developing as you share with Him the most difficult parts of your heart.

Day 4:

This small group study and current sermon series is about HOPE.

When considering both hope and prayer, think about these two statements you might say to someone:

“I hope your surgery goes well tomorrow.”

OR

“I’m praying that your surgery goes well tomorrow.”

One word in the above statements is different. How does the word “praying” give “hope”?

As you write your prayer in your prayer journal, praise God for the hope we have in Him. Then add thanks for the hope we have in Jesus and the gift of salvation He has won for us.

Additionally, if you have the opportunity to tell someone you’re praying for them, you can add another statement, “Remember to put your hope in the Lord.”

Day 5:

Use your prayer journal today to use what you have learned in Part 1 of this small group study.

Here’s some parts you might want to include:

*Praise to God for how He is using this special time with Him to further develop and nurture your faith life.

*Write down some observations you have about God from this Part 1. Praise God for who you see that He is and for wanting this relationship with you.

*Thank God for hearing your confession and forgiving your sins. Ask Him to continue creating in YOU a clean heart with daily renewal.

*Thank God for the specific areas you have learned about this week and ask Him to help you continue to put this new learning into practice.

* Be AWARE of how God is working in you!

HOPE

WEEK 2

**He Hears Our Prayers,
He Hears Our Cares**

Scratching The Surface:

1. Do you have a favorite part of the Lord's Prayer?

- Our Father in Heaven, Holy is your name.
- Let Your Kingdom and will be done on Earth and in Heaven.
- Give us our daily needs
- Forgive me and teach me to forgive others that way too.
- Protect me from evil and temptation
- I trust that You are powerful and able to keep your promises.

2. How did you learn to pray?

- My Pastor or a church leader taught me
- My parents taught me
- I learned in Sunday School
- I learned from sermons in church
- I took a class or a Bible study about prayer
- I never formally learned how to pray

3. How do you feel about praying in public?

- Super comfortable, let's pray right now!
- Pretty comfortable I tend to volunteer.
- Comfortable, I will pray if someone asks me to
- I'm a little nervous.
- Please don't ask me to pray in front of anyone.

4. What are the top 2 or 3 fears, worries or concerns you have, or maybe you've heard others share about praying in public?

Background: Today we're looking at the Lord's prayer. We see the Lord's prayer in Matthew chapter 6 and Luke chapter 11. It is both a prayer that we pray as well as a model on how we should pray. If you notice how your pastors pray, most of the time their prayers follow the same template as the Lord's Prayer:

1. Opening praise and adoration of God
2. Ask for His will in our lives
3. Ask for our daily needs
4. Ask for forgiveness and the ability to forgive others

5. Ask Him to protect us from being tempted. And deliver us when we are tempted or suffering.
6. Closing with praise and adoration.

Opening Prayer: Lord, thank You for being close to us. Thank You for Your willingness to hear us and listen to our needs, our fears and our concerns. Today, let us see just how much You love us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Digging Deeper:

False Belief 1: *“I don’t pray very well.”*

Matthew 6:5–6 (ESV): 5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

1. **Do you ever feel like you have to pray a certain way to impress others? What does Jesus say about that here? What is wrong with their prayers?**

False Belief 2: *“If I just say the right things...”*

Matthew 6:7–8 (ESV): And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

2. **Do you ever feel like you have to pray a certain way to convince God to give you what you want? What does Jesus say is wrong with these prayers?**

Read: Luther's Small Catechism

239. Do my prayers need to be in a polished form or in a set pattern of words?

As dear children of our heavenly Father, we pray through faith in Christ, even if our words are simple and unadorned.

- 3. According to Luther's Small Catechism, how should we pray? And how does this affect your outlook on prayer?**

False Belief 3: *"I can't talk to God because I'm not good enough."*

Matthew 6:14–15 (ESV): 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV): If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

- 4. Why is it so important that we humble ourselves and seek God's mercy?**
- 5. What 4 things does 2 Chronicles 7:14 tell God's people to do when they pray?**
- 6. Why is forgiveness such an important part of prayer?**

False Belief 4: “I’m afraid I won’t get what I need.”

Matthew 6:19–21 (ESV): 19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them...32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

7. What types of needs do you tend to worry about the most? (Health? Finances? Career? Family?...others?)

8. Why do you think you struggle to trust God in these areas more than others?

9. What promises does God make in these verses?

Reaching The Core:

Read: Luther’s Small Catechism Explanation of the Lord’s Prayer says; “Our Father in heaven.’ What does this mean?: With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

10. In the world of identity politics that we live in, where people can choose their own genders and pronouns, why is it wrong to refer to God as “our mother” or “mother-god” when Jesus calls Him “Our Father”?

11. Why does God want us to see ourselves as God’s children and see Him as our Heavenly Father and not a judge or a police officer or a president or a King?

Matthew 6:9–13 (ESV): 9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

12. Recently a friend pointed out that in the Lord’s Prayer, we pray for God’s Will and God’s kingdom before we pray for our wants and our needs. Why is that important?

Conclusion: Luther’s Small Catechism says; “As Christians, we confess that God welcomes us with open arms so that we can always approach Him in complete confidence as our dear Father on account of Christ, our Brother.”

Prayer: Father, thank you for loving us as Your children, for providing all that we need, for showing us mercy and Grace every day. Let us take Your love and Your grace that You have given us and may we share it with others this week. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

3 Challenges:

1. **Daily:** Pray and journal what’s on your heart and mind as you talk to God.
2. **Weekly:** Meet with your Connect Group and pray and grow together.
3. **Monthly:** In your Connect group, participate in one of the 6 service projects we have scheduled during each week of this campaign.

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Week 2 - Prayer Journal:

Day 1

In our small group discussion, we talked about the Lord's Prayer. Many of us learned this prayer and recite it weekly. However, as we recite the Lord's Prayer together it is often said so quickly that it may be difficult to focus on each petition as it is recited. Then, sadly, we are just reciting the words. In the chart below, read each petition and write what it means to you. For example, the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." This may remind you to trust God for His daily provisions (think of the Israelites collecting too much manna which would then spoil).

Petition	What does this mean to me?
Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.	
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven	
Give us this day our daily bread	
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us	
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil	
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen	

Lastly, use your prayer journal to write and pray the prayer you have created using your ideas for each petition.

Day 2

In our small group study, we discussed excuses we make to not pray. For example, "I don't pray very well." OR "I don't say the right things in my prayers." Experts disagree on how long it takes to develop a habit. Generally, it takes four weeks. If you've never journaled your prayers before, you are now in your second week of this incredible journey!

Do you ever make excuses for not taking a devoted time for prayer? If so, write down some of your excuses so you can be aware of them and create better ways to make use of your prayer journal and prayer time. Journaling and praying at a consistent time each day and being aware of your excuses will help to make your prayer life a priority. Enjoy this special communication time with God!

Day 3

“Worry” – the word alone can create unpeaceful thought in our minds. Worry is an unsettling feeling that all humans have felt. As Christians, it is important to remember our feelings of worry are really signaling that we don’t trust God.

In your prayer today, remember to praise our perfect God for WHO He is - the One who is in control and nothing is too difficult for Him. In your confession, ask God for forgiveness for the time you have not trusted Him to take care of your worries in His perfect way. This confession will remind you about trusting God the next time you want to control your worries. In your supplications ask God for help and wisdom in dealing with your worries.

You may want to write this Bible verse, spoken by Jesus, in your prayer journal, “In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world.” - John 16:33

Day 4

Toward the end of Part 2 in our small group study, we talked about God as our true Father who we can approach with confidence.

Here is a great Bible verse to write in your prayer journal to further help you understand how God is a loving and approachable Father.

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” - Hebrews 4:16

Today in your prayer journal write at least 5 characteristics of God. As you pray, use these characteristics to praise God for who He is and give thanks to your perfect Father who walks with you daily, knows you inside and out, and loves you without fail.

Day 5

Take some time during this day to reflect on your prayer journal journey.

Think about the following questions:

- *Have you carved out consistent time in your day to journal your prayers this week?
- *How do you think your journaling is leading you closer to God?
- *Have you made any excuses not to use your prayer journal?
- *What are two concepts you learned in the small group lesson this week?

If you choose to, use your reflection ideas as you journal your prayer today.

HOPE

WEEK 3

He Comforts Us In Our Times Of Need

Scratching The Surface:

Read: Alan Trammell, of Detroit Tiger fame, once made a statement at a baseball clinic that I've never forgotten. "Winners never give up in a slump. They just keep on keeping on and ride it out." Life has its ups and downs. There are times in our lives when we find ourselves in a slump. Everybody has their off days. Sometimes you actually feel like giving up. But you're not a failure if you feel this way. You're just a human.

1. What do you think about the paragraph above? What stands out to you?

2. Have you ever felt so discouraged you wanted to give up or quit?

Prayer: Lord, we know that we've all struggled. In fact, some of us are struggling here right now. Be with us and give us comfort in our times of need, as we continue to face the difficulties of life and find Hope in You and Your Love for us. In Jesus name. Amen.

Digging Deeper:

Biblical Background: The Book of Nehemiah was written to a group of exiles who had been forcibly taken from their home in Jerusalem and taken to Babylon after the Kingdom of Israel was devastated and destroyed. However, in 445 b.c. the Persian King Artaxerxes sent Nehemiah, an Israelite and a trusted official, to help rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. However, as you can imagine, there were politics involved and not everyone was happy, so there were those who tried to thwart their plans. In today's study you will see those attempts and how God's people overcame them.

Read the Full Text:

Nehemiah 4:10-14: 10 In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." 11 And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them

and kill them and stop the work.” 12 At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.” 13 So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

Fatigue:

Nehemiah 4:10 (ESV): 10 In Judah it was said, “The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing.

1. **How does fatigue affect our ability to pursue a goal or accomplish something that is hard?**

Frustration:

Nehemiah 4:10 (ESV): There is too much rubble.

2. **The people who were rebuilding the wall felt overwhelmed by the amount of work that was ahead of them. It felt like they would never get it done. Have you ever felt frustrated by a task you had to do that caused you to lose hope that you would be successful?**
3. **How did you respond to that feeling? Why did you respond that way? How did it work out for you?**

Failure:

Nehemiah 4:10 (ESV): By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.”

- 4. They were afraid that they weren't big enough for the task. Have you ever looked at your job or something in your life that God has called you to do and you thought; "I'm not cut out for this". Or "I'm not the right guy/gal for this job." Did you give up? Looking back, how do you feel about that experience?**
- 5. There's an old saying; "God doesn't call the equipped, but He equips the Called." What do you think that means? Have you ever seen that play out in your own life?**

Fear:

Nehemiah 4:11-12 (ESV): 11 And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work." 12 At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us."

- 6. What does the voice of fear look or sound like for you? Do you have any things you usually say to yourself when you feel afraid? And what are some ways that you deal with and overcome your fears when they come?**

Reaching The Core:

Reorganize Your Life:

Nehemiah 4:14 (ESV): 13 So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

- 1. Nehemiah had a plan. He didn't just go into this project half-hazardly, He made a plan to succeed. How have you seen the old adage "failure to plan is a plan to fail" play out in your own life?**
- 2. Notice, Nehemiah put the workers with soldiers. They weren't alone. So as they worked, they were protected and they were together. Have you ever found support from other Christians who have walked with you through discouraging times? Maybe your pastors, your small group, a counselor, etc...?**

Remember The Lord and Resist Discouragement:

Nehemiah 4:14 (ESV): 14 And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

- 3. Where does Nehemiah encourage the workers to look to in order to find their hope?**
- 4. Why does anchoring our hope in the power of the Lord, and remembering that we have something to fight for help with discouragement?**

Closing Prayer: Lord, so often we lose hope when the rubble of our lives and our decisions pile up around us. Sometimes it can be hard to go forward and to take that next step. That's when we need Your strength, Your comfort, Your peace and Your wisdom. Help us share that same love with others we know who need encouragement today as well. In Jesus' name, Amen.

3 Challenges:

1. **Daily:** Pray and journal what's on your heart and mind as you talk to God.
2. **Weekly:** Meet with your Connect Group and pray and grow together.
3. **Monthly:** In your Connect group, participate in one of the 6 service projects we have scheduled during each week of this campaign.

Week 3 - Prayer Journal:

Day 1

This week's small group lesson was on Nehemiah 4:10-14 and we see how **DISCOURAGED** the Jewish people were when they had the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

God dearly loves each one of us and wants to hear from us through our prayers. He knows what we need before we ask Him, but He still desires us to ask. Why? He wants us to know that He hears our prayers, He acknowledges that we trust Him to act on it, and that He appreciates that we will see Him at work.

Your prayer journal journey is a personal and private way for you to feel the closeness and work of God. Think back on the last two weeks of journaling and contemplate:

*Something you shared with God that was difficult to tell Him.

*A time you felt downhearted (and maybe wanted to give up).

*Your feelings when you pray to God about difficult things.

*How you have seen God at work providing comfort to you.

Use your prayer journal time today to include thanks to God who knows you inside and out, loves you without fail, and never gives up on you!

Day 2

Before you begin your prayer journal time today, you may want to reread Nehemiah 4:10-14. We discussed FATIGUE.

It's normal in our busy lives to feel fatigue. It's important to have work-life balance. As part of your life balance, time developing and nurturing your relationship with God through scripture and prayer time is of vital importance.

Sometimes when we feel fatigued, we backslide in our prayer time. It's harder to backslide on our prayer journal commitment when we have a specific time for prayer.

This week assess the time you set aside for your prayer life. Is it a good time of day for you or are you fatigued from your day. Make any necessary change to make this very important commitment to your relationship with God.

Day 3

The FRUSTRATION was increasing for those building the walls in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4:10-14). They were overwhelmed by the amount of work they had to do. Specifically, there was "too much rubble" (verse 10) in rebuilding the wall.

You are certainly not alone if you feel frustration in some part of your life.

Jesus told us in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

This is an open, clear invitation from our God to come to Him with our personal frustrations. No part of your life is a secret from God, including your frustrations. Today, in your prayer journal, be honest with God regarding your frustrations. As you unburden yourself, you can look forward to peace that only God can give and the help He will lead you to in finding solutions.

Day 4

When we discussed FAILURE in our small group study, we learned in Nehemiah 4:10 that the people stated, "By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.

Have you ever felt the same way in thinking that you have to solve your problems by yourself? Some tasks and expectations seem overwhelming. This truth we hear in Nehemiah teaches us that nothing is too formidable when we call on God for help.

Do you remember the quote “Failure is not an option” from the movie Apollo 13? Well, God would say the same thing to us!

Jeremiah 32:27 states, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?”

In your prayer journal today, bring those areas of frustration to God. As you pray, pray believing that nothing is too difficult for God. He will NOT fail you!

Day 5

Studying this passage from Nehemiah has shown us many difficult components such as: discouragement, fatigue, frustration, failure, and fear. But through all the difficulty, Nehemiah didn't give up. He created a PLAN for success in building the wall.

When assessing a difficult situation for yourself or someone you know seeking advice and help, use your prayer time to:

*Ask God for who can help with the situation

*Resist feeling discouraged

*Seek HOPE in God through His Word and prayer

*Open your heart to see God at work. Then thank and praise God for His goodness in hearing your prayer and acting according to His Will.

Journaling your prayers becomes a great way to look back on how God has helped you with difficult parts of your life such as those listed above. In the future, you may want to highlight or circle in red the responses from God that you have seen from Him in answering your prayers.

HOPE

WEEK 4

He Heals Our Hurts

Scratching The Surface:

Read: “Life’s greatest disappointments come from other people, -- people who let us down, who are unreliable, who are ungrateful, who tell you one thing and then do another, people who hurt you either intentionally or unintentionally.” -Pastor Mike

- 1. Respond to this quote. Have you experienced this in our own life?**

- 2. Do you think that our greatest disappointments in life come from other people? Why or why not?**

Prayer: Lord, we have been hurt and we have hurt others throughout our lives. Today we ask that You would help us to see that you provide hope and healing in the midst of our most painful relationships and experiences. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Digging Deeper:

Biblical Background: We’ve likely all seen the Charlton Heston “Ten Commandments” movie. God sends Moses to Pharaoh and He says; “Let my people go!” And after 12 plagues that devastate the Egyptians, they finally let the Hebrews go. After they’re released, Pharaoh and his army chase them down to destroy them at the Red Sea. God miraculously rescues them by parting the waters and destroying the armies of Egypt (the most powerful army of the world at that time).

What we don’t see in the movie is that for the next 40 years, God’s people failed to trust God over and over and over, and because of that they wandered in the desert before they could enter the promised land. Whenever things didn’t go their way, they complained that God didn’t know what He was doing. They constantly said that things were better in slavery to Egypt than freedom with God and they constantly wanted to go back (imagine how much of a slap in the face that would be to God).

Today we see that the Hebrews have a “water problem”. They come to the Red Sea and they don’t know how to get past the water. Then they’re wandering in the desert

and they can't find any water. Then when they finally do find water, it's bitter and they don't want to drink it. And once again, they complain.

Read the Whole Text:

Exodus 15:22–27 (ESV): 22 Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. 24 And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, 26 saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer." 27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

The Greatest Successes in Life Are Often Followed By Failures.

Exodus 15:22-23 (ESV): 22 Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah.

- 1. Notice, they came to a place with water that matched their attitude towards God. Did they have a good reason to be bitter or angry toward God? Why or why not?**
- 2. Can you recall a time when you showed bitterness toward God when something was out of your control, or you were lacking something you needed?**

The Greatest Services in Life Are Often Followed By Forgetfulness.

Exodus 15:24 (ESV): 24 And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”

Exodus 16:6-9 (ESV): 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?” 8 And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

3. **When they are complaining to Moses, who are they actually complaining about?**

4. **Verse 7 says; “In the morning you shall see the Glory fo the LORD, because the LORD has heard your grumbling against the LORD.” How did God respond to their complaining? (See verse 8 to see how he responds)**

5. **How do you respond when people complain to or accuse you of failing to care for or help them?**

Read: “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things, and therefore gladly seek to keep all of His commandments. When we fear, love, and trust other things more than God, we break all the other commandments as well.”—Luther’s Small Catechism

6. **See the above quote from Luther’s small Catechism’s explanation of the 1st commandment, when they complained, how were they breaking the 1st commandment?**

Job 19:6-8, 6 know then that God has put me in the wrong and closed his net about me. 7 Behold, I cry out, 'Violence!' but I am not answered; I call for help, but there is no justice. 8 He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths.

Job 19:23–27 (ESV): 23 "Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! 24 Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! 25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, 27 whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

- 7. Is it ever ok to grumble, complain or be frustrated with God? Is it possible to faithfully complain or be frustrated with God? How did Job grumble to God? How does Job's complaint show that he still trusts in God, even though he doesn't agree with or like what God is doing?**

Exodus 15:25 (ESV): 25 And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them,

- 8. Did God leave them there to suffer with bitter water? What did He do to solve the problem? Did they deserve this solution?**
- 9. What does this tell you about how God treats His children? About how He treats us?**

The Greatest Shortages in Life Are Often Followed By Fullness.

Exodus 15:26-27 (ESV): 26 saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer." 27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

Note: God brought them to Elim. It wasn't the promised land, but it was a place of blessing almost like the promised land, that they needed in that moment. God provided what they needed. Even though it wasn't their final home, it was a good pit stop so they could be refreshed for their journey.

- 1. Was Elim a reward because they were so good and faithful? Or was it God's blessing and Grace that they didn't deserve?**
- 2. How do we break free from bitterness when we don't feel like God is good or when we feel God has failed us and we don't know if the end of our suffering will ever come?**
- 3. Many non-Christians, when they are going through suffering and pain say things like "it's always darkest before the dawn", or "every cloud has a silver lining" in order to find hope and meaning in their suffering. How can we as Christians respond to our hurts?**

Reaching The Core:

John 20:24–31 (ESV): 24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. **Do not disbelieve, but believe.**” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “ Have you believed because you have seen me? **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**” 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and **that by believing you may have life in his name.**

1. **(See verse 27) Does Jesus condemn Thomas for not believing? If not, how does Jesus treat Him?**
2. **How did the wounds of Jesus give Thomas and the other disciples hope in the midst of their hurts (grief, fear, anxiety, etc...)?**
3. **How do Jesus’ wounds bring you Hope when you are suffering, like they did for Thomas and the apostles?**

Closing Prayer: Lord, as we walk through this valley of the shadow of death, we know that we have all lost loved ones. We all face difficulties and struggles and pain. Give us your comfort and peace so that we can bring your light and hope to others who are living in the darkness of hopelessness today. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

3 Challenges:

1. **Daily:** Pray and journal what’s on your heart and mind as you talk to God.
2. **Weekly:** Meet with your Connect Group and pray and grow together.
3. **Monthly:** In your Connect group, participate in one of the 6 service projects we have scheduled during each week of this campaign.

****Note: All references to Luther’s Small Catechism, were copied from the Luther’s Small Catechism App available from Concordia Publishing House.*

Week 4 - Prayer Journal:

Day 1

The Israelites witnessed each plague that Almighty God placed upon the Egyptians. As their exodus from Egypt began and they started their journey to the Promised Land, they continued to see the power of God on display. However, God's incredible miracles were usually not enough to convince the Israelites of God's blessings and power.

We often look at the Israelites and think, "How could they question God and not constantly see His gift of blessings upon them?" The truth is that we may treat God in the same way.

Do you ever find yourself questioning the power of God? The willingness of God to help you? Thinking of God in human terms? Complaining to God and about God?

In your prayer time today use your prayer journal to make right the above issues with God. Try to include:

*A specific time of praise for WHO God is.

*A time of confession for times you have not honored and trusted God.

*Thanks to God for the amazing miracles He has blessed you with and provided in your life.

Day 2

The Israelites were feeling bitterness toward God and the situation they were in as they wandered in the wilderness. Even the water was bitter!

Have you ever thought of what the feeling of bitterness involves? Bitterness is feeling anger, disappointment, and resentment. Carrying bitterness in your heart often leads to unforgiveness toward the person whom you feel bitterness.

It's important to guard your heart from feeling bitter toward God when something is out of your control. Instead focus on knowing that God is in control of all situations, even those that seem impossible.

Take some time as you pray today to confess any feelings of bitterness from the past or those you currently feel. Focus on the HOPE that God gives to relieve bitter feelings.

Day 3

This week in small group, we read Exodus 15:22-27. In verse 26 God says, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your HEALER."

Think about those you have asked God to heal. It's very common that we instantly think of bodily healing but healing may also include healing of the heart bringing someone closer to God. Also healing of the mind. In your prayer journal, make a list of those you've asked God to heal in these various ways. Write a note beside each name regarding how God has been at work. Use your prayer time today to give thanks for God's faithfulness in hearing your prayers for healing.

Day 4

The disciples felt HOPELESS in the aftermath of Jesus' death. They were worried, scared, and grieving.

All humans have felt hopeless at one time or another. Maybe you currently are facing a problem that makes you feel hopeless. Use your prayer time to journal your feelings. Maybe you are at a point, past hopelessness, where you can think how God changed the situation and your feelings. Additionally, ask God to guide you to helping others you know who might be struggling with hopelessness and include them in your prayers.

Day 5

Reread John 20:24-31. In verse 29, Jesus says, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Those are beautiful words that encourage your prayer life for you are praying to the One, true God who you cannot see, but your prayers show your belief in Him.

As you consistently pray, you are developing a deeper relationship with God. Reflect on these parts of your prayer life using the following questions:

*Is your prayer time growing your faith? If so, how?

*How do you think God speaks to you?

*Where do you see God's faithfulness?

In your prayer time today, talk with God about your faith life and your answers to the above questions.

HOPE

WEEK 5

He Helps Us Overcome Our Doubts

Scratching The Surface:

1. **Do you consider yourself to be a skeptical person by nature? Or would you say you tend to believe what you hear and take people at their word?**
2. **Who do you find yourself doubting more often: yourself, other people, institutions, the government, God? (pick one or two)**
3. **What is the worst part of experiencing doubt?**

Opening Prayer: Lord, we live in a world of doubts, a world of skeptics and cynicism. It is so easy for us to doubt ourselves and to doubt You as our God, our Lord and our Savior. Today, let us see in Your word how we can combat the effects of doubt in our lives, and grow closer to You in the process. Amen.

Digging Deeper:

THREE THINGS THAT CAUSE US TO DOUBT GOD

Critics:

Psalm 73:8-11: "They scoff at God... How proudly they speak! And so God's people are dismayed and confused and drink it all in. 'Does God realize what is going on?' they ask."

Psalm 42:10-11 (LB): "... again and again they scoff, 'Where is that God of yours?' But O my soul, don't be discouraged. Don't be upset. Expect God to act!"

- 1. Why do these Psalms say that people choose to be critical of God?**
- 2. Have you ever doubted God after hearing a persuasive argument from a non Christian or after reading a book by an atheist?**
- 3. How did you overcome those doubts?**

Conscience:

1 Tim. 1:19: "... For some people have disobeyed their consciences and have deliberately done what they knew was wrong. It isn't surprising that soon they lost their faith in Christ, after defying God like that."

- 4. What does 1 Timothy tell us about how sin can cause me to doubt God? Why would my decisions have any effect on if I trust God or not?**
- 5. Our conscience is actually given to us through the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin. Did God give us a conscience in order to make us feel bad or ashamed of ourselves? If not, why did He give us a conscience according to this verse?**

Circumstances:

Mark 4:35-41: 35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 39 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

6. Have you ever had a storm in your life (death, diagnosis, divorce, destruction...etc) cause you to doubt God? When you did, what sorts of thoughts and emotions did you struggle to believe?

7. How does Jesus answer the doubts of the apostles on that boat?

8. How does Jesus answer your doubts and fear today?

HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR DOUBTS

Admit Your Doubts:

Luke 7:18-23: 18 The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, 19 calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" 20 And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" 21 In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. 22 And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not

offended by me.” (In this reading, John the Baptizer was in jail waiting to die, and he was starting to have some doubts that maybe Jesus wasn’t actually the Messiah and he had made a mistake believing in Him. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus personally.)

9. Does Jesus condemn John for questioning or having doubts in Him?

10. What does Jesus point to in order to give John hope that He hasn’t tied himself to a sinking ship?

Doubt Your Doubts:

Prov. 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

11. Do you often let your doubts or negative voices in your head run rampant? If so, what does this verse say the solution is?

12. Why is trusting someone outside of your own mind so important?

Begin With The Faith You Already Have:

Mark 9:17-24: 17 Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 18 And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.” 19 And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.” 20 And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. 22 And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” 23 And Jesus said to him, “ ‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.” 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

13. Have you ever wondered if you had enough “faith” or if you “trusted” God “Enough”? Have you ever felt like this man?

14. Can you believe in God while still struggling to fully trust God? Or is trust and doubt black and white? (you either trust or you are doubting)

Reaching The Core:

John 20:25-31: 24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

1. **Does Jesus condemn Thomas or call him “Doubting Thomas”? How does Jesus treat Him?**
2. **Where does Jesus point Thomas to in order to give him hope?**
3. **How can that give you hope today?**

Prayer: Lord, we are no different from the disciples we’ve read about in the Bible today. Even though we look at them as “Giants of the faith”, they had some of the same doubts we have, even while they walked with you and saw your miracles. When we feel like a hopeless mess and we don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel and we wonder if you are even there, we also ask that you would strengthen us in our faith through Your word and the many signs of your faithfulness you have shown us in the Bible. Restore our hope and let us take comfort that as You cared for them, you also care for us today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

3 Challenges:

1. **Daily:** Pray and journal what’s on your heart and mind as you talk to God.
2. **Weekly:** Meet with your Connect Group and pray and grow together.
3. **Monthly:** In your Connect group, participate in one of the 6 service projects we have scheduled during each week of this campaign.

Week 5 - Prayer Challenge:

Day 1

In our small group this week we talked about three things that cause us to doubt God. In your prayer journal write:

Three things that cause me to doubt God are: critics, conscience, and circumstances. Now think about about/review each one.

Critics: The end of Psalm 42:10-11 says, "Expect God to act!" There's so much wisdom in this! When we pray, it's important to remember that prayer is not just words but also BELIEF that God will act according to His perfect will.

Conscience: We learned that our conscience is given to us by the Holy Spirit.

Circumstances: We discussed some of the storms of life. Think about or reread question #8: How does Jesus answer your doubts and fear today?

Use your prayer journal to write a prayer to God about the way that causes you to doubt God the most. Perhaps your prayer might include: Praise to God for growing your faith and taking doubt away. Also, how the Holy Spirit makes you more aware of doubt. Confession time to admit specific times you've doubted God.

Thanks to God for walking with you through a variety of emotions you deal with. Also, how you are learning how to draw closer to Him.

Supplications are a time to ask God for help when you doubt. Be specific with God about which cause of doubt is most difficult for you.

Day 2

This week we learned how to deal with our doubts. You can:

*Admit your doubts

*Doubt your doubts

*Begin with the faith you already have

Question #13 in the study guide encourages us to “Hide God’s Word in your heart” through daily devotions or memorizing scripture.

Write Proverbs 3:5 in your prayer journal, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” Commit to memorize this verse and where it is found in the Bible.

Next, use this verse to guide your prayer today. This is called praying scripture. One idea is to focus your prayer on TRUST and leaning on God for understanding.

Day 3

Yesterday you wrote a Bible verse in your prayer journal to memorize. Test yourself! Can you say it for memory? Today write this verse from Mark 9:23 in your prayer journal and commit it to memory, “And Jesus said to him, ...’All things are possible for one who believes.’”

After you’ve written this memory verse, write and pray a prayer to Jesus telling how He gives you HOPE in specific situations you face. Come to Jesus asking Him to strengthen your FAITH and TRUST in Him. Ask Him to show you how He is working in your life causing you to have a growing belief in Him.

Day 4

This week you have memorized two verses and where they are found in the Bible.

Today you are going to add another memory verse to your prayer journal from John 20:29, “Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

Your faith journey is blessed through your prayer life. As you connect daily with God through a concentrated prayer session, you will probably agree that you've become closer to God as you see and understand Him more clearly.

Today in your prayer journal focus on the faith God has placed on your heart, the work He is doing in you, the growth of your faith life, and Jesus special blessing to you, His dear child, who believes even though you have not seen Him.

Day 5

Wrap up this week by reviewing the memory verses you learned this past week. Continue to practice them!

Use your prayer time and prayer journal to pray about the concepts you learned this week:

*What causes doubt in your life?

*How are you dealing with your doubts?

*The HOPE you have in Jesus.

*God's faithful acts you know from the Bible and are seeing in your own life

HOPE

WEEK 6

Hope For The Heart Of Phoenix

Scratching The Surface:

1. **Tell your group about a mission trip or a service project you've done and what you enjoyed most about it?**
2. **What part of our world most breaks your heart? (Ie. Homelessness, addictions, divorce, abortion, end of life, dementia...etc?) Have you ever volunteered or served in any of these areas?**

Opening Prayer: Lord, You have placed us here to shine your Light into the darkness of our world and to bring Your hope to the hopeless. We ask that You would enlighten us with Your word and show us how to share Your love with a hurting world around us today. Amen.

Digging Deeper:

He gives us second chances: *We forgive others.*

Matthew 18:15 (ESV): If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

Matthew 18:21–35 (ESV): 21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. 23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken

place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

- 1. What does Jesus say is the purpose of confessing our sins to one another?**
- 2. What does Jesus want us to learn from the parable of the unforgiving servant?**
- 3. Does Jesus tell us to forgive our brother 77 times so that we would count to that number and then stop forgiving them after that? If not, what is His goal?**

He Hears: *We pray for others.*

1 Timothy 2:1,3–4 (ESV): 2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people...3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Read: Saint Augustine said; 'If I pray for the body from which the soul has departed, why should I not pray for the soul from which God has departed?'

I heard a modern pastor say; "We often spend most of our time praying to keep people out of heaven (when we pray for people to be healed from their diseases) but we spend a lot less time praying for people to enter into heaven, (praying for our non-Christian friends and relatives)"

4. **React to the Augustine quote and Pastor Tim’s quote above. Do you spend more time praying for people to be healed and to be kept out of heaven (and stay here on Earth with us) than praying for people to know Jesus and enter into heaven?**

5. **How can prayer be a form of evangelism? Have you ever prayed with/for a non-Christian friend or family member? If so, how did it feel?**

He Answers Doubts: *We share our hope with others.*

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV): always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

6. **Do you feel prepared to make a defense for your faith? If you were confronted by someone questioning your faith and beliefs, what would you tell them?**

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 (ESV): “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time.

7. **Why does the apostle Paul make a point to say that Jesus died “in accordance with the scriptures” and was raised on the third day “in accordance with the scriptures”? Why does it matter that His death and resurrection was prophesied before he was born?**

8. **Why is it important that Paul points out that Jesus’ resurrection wasn’t a secret? Why does Peter point out that he appeared to Peter, the 12 apostles and more than 500 people? How does this bolster our faith in the resurrection?**

1 Corinthians 15:17-19 (ESV): And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

9. Paul also says that if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, our faith is futile and we should be embarrassed. Why is that? And why is the cross the central focus of Paul's preaching?

10. I've heard some people who don't believe in God say that; "Well, at least believing in God and trying to live a good life makes a you a better person, so even if God doesn't exist, then at least Christians are trying to be good people." What does Paul say about this argument for "being a Christian" ("if in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied")?

Reaching the Core:

Acts 1:8 (ESV): 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

1. Over the past 6 weeks we have been challenged to practice 3 things: 1. Daily talk to God in prayer. 2. Weekly meet with our Connect groups and 3. Monthly perform a service project with our Connect Group. How do these three practices mirror Jesus' call to His disciples in Acts 1:8? (hint: Judea and Samaria are the wider region around Jerusalem)

2. Notice, the topics we've discussed during this sermon series have been spiritually focused (forgiveness, prayer, offering comfort, encouragement

and teaching the faith), what does that tell you about the role the church plays in serving our community? What is the primary role that Jesus has called His church to perform in serving our community?

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, today as we wrap up our HOPE sermon and Connect Group Series, we ask that You would give us a heart of compassion, love and desire for our community and those who live in it to come to know You as the Way, the Truth and the Life. Use us as your beacons of light to shine in the darkness of the world around us in all that we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

3 Challenges:

1. **Daily:** Pray and journal what's on your heart and mind as you talk to God.
2. **Weekly:** Meet with your Connect Group and pray and grow together.
3. **Monthly:** In your Connect group, participate in one of the 6 service projects we have scheduled during each week of this campaign.

Week 6 - Prayer Challenge:

Day 1

In the beginning of this week's lesson, we discussed how God gives us second chances through His forgiveness and therefore, we forgive others.

In your prayer journal write this verse about forgiveness, "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Colossians 3:13

*Think about forgiveness and why, at times, it can be difficult.

*Think about how CONTROL can affect forgiveness.

*Think about how BITTERNESS can affect forgiveness.

*Think about how forgiveness can be freeing to all who are involved.

Use your prayer journal in writing and praying a prayer that uses your thoughts in the above areas to pray to God about the blessed forgiveness He gives to you and also how you can bless others with forgiveness.

Day 2

Another concept we discussed this week is “God hears and so we pray for others”. In 1 Timothy 2:1, 3-4, we learned that we should:

*Pray for all people

*Prayer (supplications, thanksgiving, intercessions) is pleasing to God

*God desires all people to be saved and know the truth

In your prayer journal today, make a list of people you can pray for. Include some people from the prayer list in the bulletin that you don't personally know.

As you pray today, include areas of thanksgiving and supplications for those on your list you created.

Day 3

Have you ever had great news to share? Maybe you got engaged, were going to have a baby, received an amazing job opportunity, or some other blessing came into your life. Most likely, whatever the good news was, you wanted to share it with someone.

As Christians, we know great news about our God! We know we have a loving God who didn't want to be separated from His children so He sent Jesus to come and free us from our sins through his horrific death on the cross and glorious resurrection! Now that's great news to share!

When the opportunity presents itself to share this great news, what do you do? Take some think time and ponder this and your response.

In your prayer journal, write a statement of your faith. Sometimes people who don't know God well, don't understand His amazing qualities (perfect unconditional love, forgiveness, faithfulness, His grace and more) so this might be a good place to start. Explain who Jesus is and His great gift He gave to all people. Discuss how knowing these facts has changed your life for the better giving you peace and releasing your anxiety to God knowing that He cares and acts on your behalf. Many people believe that living a “good life” will “get them to heaven”.

Share the Bible verse from Ephesians 2:8-9, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Share the HOPE we have in God.

You may want to write your faith story in your prayer journal. Your faith story is personal and unique and the above ideas are just a starting point to you sharing it. The Holy Spirit will bless your words and lead you to someone who needs to hear it. All you need to do is ask Him!

Day 4

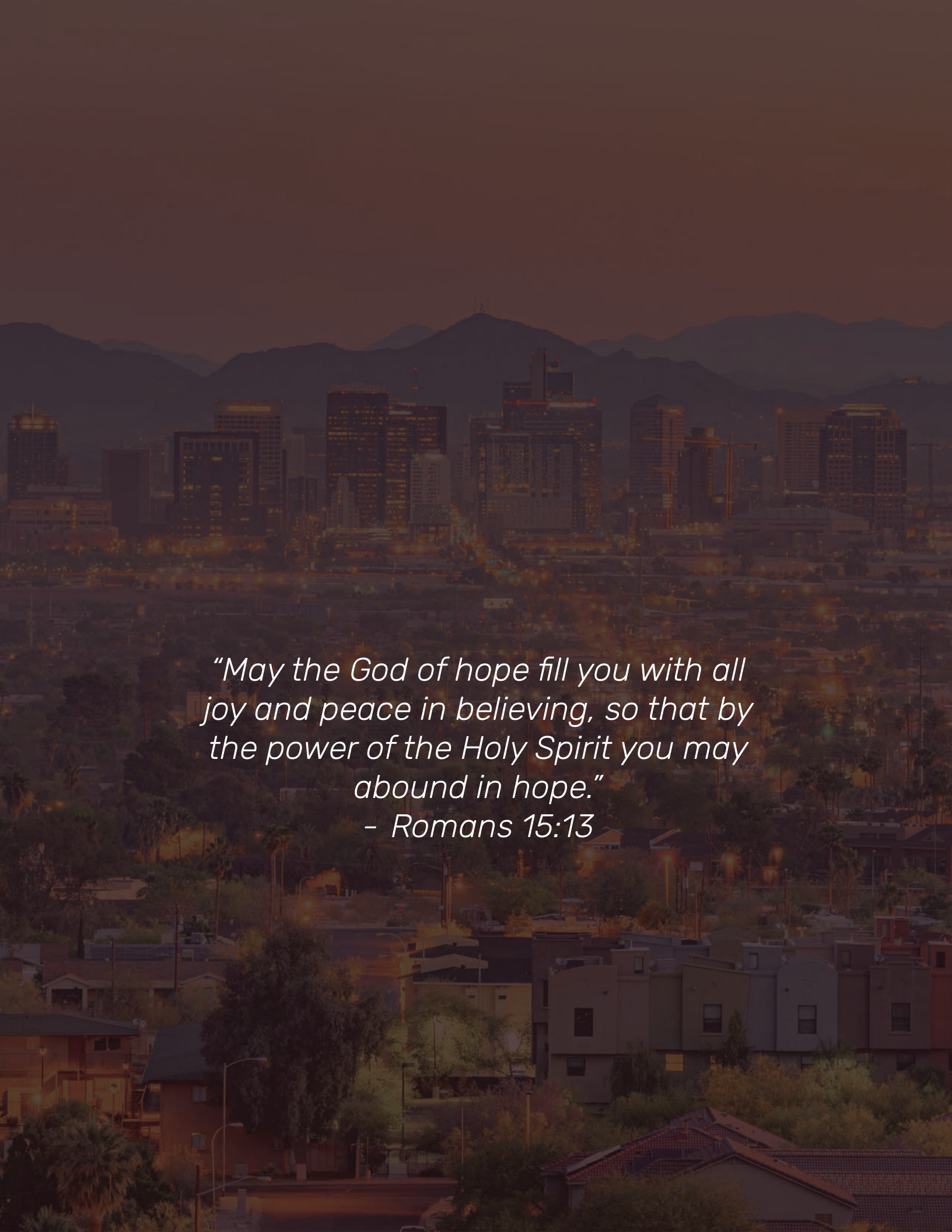
Sometimes we can look at those we consider Biblical heroes and we see how God uses all types of people to accomplish His goals. You are no different than those “heroes” for you have a beautiful story of faith to share with others.

Reread the statement of faith that you wrote yesterday. Use your prayer journal and prayer time to thank God for the relationship He has developed with and in you. Ask Him to lead you to the person/people that need to hear your faith story. Ask God to bless your efforts in furthering His Kingdom! It’s a little overwhelming, but remember that you are here...at this time...to lead others to God.

Day 5

You may have been someone who journaled your prayers prior to the HOPE sermon series and study. You may have just learned about journaling your prayers and are on board with continuing this great journey you are on. Either way, our prayer is that you have been blessed by a time to think deeper about the small group lessons. You have developed a habit of spending more concentrated time with God in a personal way.

In your prayer journal today, use your time to tell God how you have felt about the changes in your relationship with Him. May your prayer life be changed and grow as you move forward in your prayer journaling! God’s blessings!

A city skyline at dusk with mountains in the background and residential houses in the foreground. The sky is a deep orange and red, and the city lights are glowing. The mountains are silhouetted against the sky. The foreground shows a residential area with houses and trees.

*"May the God of hope fill you with all
joy and peace in believing, so that by
the power of the Holy Spirit you may
abound in hope."
- Romans 15:13*