

Indestructible Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 38–41, Isa. 41:8–14, Jer. 29:1–10, Hab. 1:1–4, Heb. 12:1–13.*

Memory Text: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (*Romans 5:5, NIV*).

When in church surrounded by smiling people, how easy it is to talk and sing about hope. But when we find ourselves within the crucible, hope does not always seem so easy. As circumstances press around us, we begin to question everything, particularly the wisdom of God.

In one of his books, C. S. Lewis writes about a make-believe lion. Wanting to meet this lion, a person asks if the lion is safe. They're told that he's not safe, “but he's good.”

Even though we don't always understand God and He seems to do unpredictable things, that doesn't mean that God is against us. It simply means that we don't have the full picture yet. But we struggle with the idea that for us to have peace, confidence, and hope, God must be understandable and predictable. He needs to be, in our thinking, “safe.” As such, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

The Week at a Glance: How does our understanding of the character of God help us maintain hope in the crucible?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 17.*

The Big Picture

When we are hurting, it is very easy to presume that what happens to us is the only thing that matters. But there is a slightly larger picture than just “me” (*see Rev. 12:7, Rom. 8:22*).

Read Habakkuk 1:1–4. What did Habakkuk face?

You might expect that God would say something like “That’s really terrible, Habakkuk; let Me come and help you immediately.” But God’s answer is the opposite. He tells Habakkuk that it is going to get worse. Read this in Habakkuk 1:5–11.

Israel had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians, but God promises that worse is coming: The Babylonians will now carry away the people of Judah. Habakkuk cries out again in verses 12–17, and then waits to see what God is going to say.

How does God’s introduction to the promised destruction of Babylon in Habakkuk 2:2, 3 bring hope?

Habakkuk 2 is God’s promise of the destruction of the Babylonians. Hebrews 10:37 quotes Habakkuk 2:3, hinting of a messianic application to this promise in the future. With the same certainty that the destruction of Babylon was promised, so we also have the certainty of the destruction of “Babylon the Great” (*Rev. 18:2, NIV*).

Habakkuk was trapped between the great evil surrounding him and God’s promise of worse to come. Yet, this is precisely where we find ourselves in salvation history. Great evil is around us, but the Bible predicts that much worse is to come. The key to Habakkuk’s survival was that he was brought to see the whole picture. Therefore, in chapter 3 he is able to pray an incredible prayer of praise because of what God will do in the future.

Read Habakkuk 3:16–19. What does Habakkuk identify as his reasons for hope? What is the hope of God’s people as we wait for the last prophetic scenes to unfold? How can you make this hope your own?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

▶ **Key Text:** *Romans 5:5*

▶ **Teach the Class to:**

Know: God may not seem immediately responsive to even legitimate needs and desires.

Feel: God never forsakes us and has a plan for us in all circumstances.

Do: Look to God for our hope, rather than to other people, things, or events.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Who Our Father Is (*Job 38*)

A Do you ever feel that God is working against you? Are there circumstances in which this might actually be the case? Why?

B How do we distinguish God's *waiting* from absence or indifference?

C Why are we often unable to discern God's hand in our affairs?

II. Hope in Things Not Seen (*Isa. 41:13*)

A When Job asks God why he's suffered all he has, God responds by overwhelming Job with evidence of His own grandeur. Was this really an answer?

B Given that God doesn't need us as such, how can we know that we are important to Him and have a place in His plan?

C Do you find it at all paradoxical that God is so big and yet so concerned with you as an individual? Why is this yet more evidence of His greatness?

III. A God of Hope (*Jer. 29:1–10*)

A In normal life, we have many things in which we can place our hope other than God. In adversity, God often regains our attention. Is this true for you? What can you do to change?

B How can we help others—and let others help us—to continue to place our hope in God first?

▶ **Summary:** Hope, as a quality second only to love, is a defining characteristic of true, vital Christianity. As Christians, hope is something we must cultivate in a world that often doesn't seem to provide much reason for it.

Who Our Father Is

Oswald Chambers writes, “Have you been asking God what He is going to do? He will never tell you. God does not tell you what He is going to do; He reveals to you who He is.”—*My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour & Company, Inc., 1963), Jan. 2.

What do you think Chambers means by this idea?

As we know, the book of Job begins with great personal tragedy for Job. He loses everything, except his life and his wife, and she suggests that he “ ‘curse God and die!’ ” (*Job 2:9, NIV*). What follows is a discussion in which his friends try to work out why it has all happened. Throughout all of these discussions, God remains silent.

Then suddenly in Job 38 God appears and speaks: “ ‘Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?’ ” (*vs. 2, NIV*). Without pausing, God asks Job about 60 jaw-dropping questions. Open your Bible and scan through these in Job 38 and 39.

After the last question, Job replies, “ ‘I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more’ ” (*Job 40:4, 5, NIV*). But God is not finished. He then begins again and asks another set of “big” questions in succession.

Read Job’s final response in Job 42:1–6. What was God trying to tell Job, and what was the effect on him?

God never answers any of the “why” questions of Job’s friends. But God does paint a picture of His unparalleled greatness as revealed through the astonishing works of creation. After this, Job certainly does not need any answers. The need for explanations has been eclipsed by an overwhelming picture of the magnificence of God.

This story reveals a fascinating paradox. Hope and encouragement can spring from the realization that we know so little. Instinctively, we try to find comfort by knowing everything, and so we become discouraged when we cannot know. But sometimes God highlights our ignorance so that we may realize that human hope can only find security in a Being much greater than ourselves.

Are things that you just can’t understand happening now? If so, focus on the character of God. How can doing that give you the hope that you need to persevere through what’s for now incomprehensible?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

Place Yourself in One of These Situations:

- At the bedside of a loved one, you hear the physician say, “There’s nothing more we can do except keep the patient comfortable.” The patient says, “I’m so discouraged. I have nothing to look forward to except death.”
- A colleague says, “I’ve just been fired. I have so many bills. I’m not sure where I’ll find another job. I’m dreading the future.”
- A friend confides in you that his or her spouse has been discovered having an affair. “I’m not sure the marriage will last,” your friend says, in tears. “I have nothing to live for.”

These may be your friends or relatives—or perhaps you. In each situation, people have lost hope. The argument of Scripture is that God has a will and a purpose in all things and that trust in Him will not go unrewarded. God doesn’t fix our immediate needs always. But our long-term prospects—even beyond death—are marvelous. Trust in God is the foundation of an indestructible hope.


► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God’s Word?*

Bible Commentary

I. The Big Picture

Read Habakkuk 1:1–4. Habakkuk’s complaint concerned widespread corruption during the reign of King Jehoiakim (*2 Kings 23:34–24:7*). The rich prospered, while common people were taken advantage of. Habakkuk takes the side of the common people (and this is characteristic of the prophets) against the powerful.

CONTINUED 

Our Father's Presence

“**For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you**” (*Isa. 41:13, NIV*).

Someone once said, “When God seems far away, who is the one who has moved?” When problems strike, we presume that God has deserted us. The truth is that He hasn’t gone anywhere.

God’s presence seemed very far away to the Jews in exile. Yet, through Isaiah God assures them of future deliverance. However, while the actual return to Jerusalem was still many years in the future, God wanted His people to know that He had not moved away from them and that there was every reason for hope.

Read Isaiah 41:8–14. What reasons for hope can you identify for people waiting eagerly for future deliverance? How does this promise help us as we wait for our exile on earth to end?

One of the most powerful images in these texts is found in verse 13. The sovereign God of the universe says that His people do not need to fear, because He is the One who takes “‘hold of your right hand’” (*NIV*). It is one thing to imagine God guiding events on earth from a big throne light-years away from our earth. But it is an altogether different picture to realize that He is close enough to hold the hands of His dearly beloved people.

When we are busy, it can be hard to remember that God is so close to us. But when we do remember that He is Emmanuel, “God with us,” it makes such a difference. When God’s presence is with us, so are His purposes, His promises, and His transforming power.

Over the next few days, try an experiment. At every moment possible, try to remind yourself that the God of the universe is close enough to you to hold your hand and is personally promising you help. Keep a record of how this changes the way you live. Be prepared to discuss your experience in class on Sabbath.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: Are we Seventh-day Adventists prophetic in the sense that the book of Habakkuk was about how powerful people treat the less powerful? How do we as a church deal with questions of the rich oppressing the poor?

Read Habakkuk 2:2, 3. Habakkuk is told he will have to wait for God to act. *Wait!* is one of God's frequent responses to our prayers. We are to wait for the end of sin (*Rom. 8:23*), for a restored relationship with God (*Ps. 62:5, 1 John 3:2*), for answers to our prayers (*Ps. 40:1*), for justice to be done (*Ps. 37:7, Isa. 30:18*), and for the coming of Jesus (*James 5:7*).

II. Who Our Father Is

While most Christians seem to pray for what they want, the preponderance of Scripture's best prayers seem to have a deeper goal: to help the one praying to know God.

Read Job 42:3.

Consider This: Job realizes that there are many things about God that he cannot properly understand. How might we overstep our bounds in trying to understand the things of God?


III. Our Father's Presence

Theologians speak of God as either *transcendent* (that is, above and independent of the material world) or *immanent* (that is, present and within the natural world, and therefore intimately familiar with us). In Isaiah 41:8–14, God assures His people that He is both: Even when they are in a distant land—when they feel especially alienated from Him—He is spiritually no less accessible to them.

Consider This: Do you feel closer to God in some places than in others?

IV. Our Father's Plans for Us

Jeremiah 29:1–10 is a good example of how God's purposes and ours are not infrequently at cross-purposes. Israel's purpose seemed to be to create a great nation, as evidenced by the single-minded pursuit of a monarchy like the surrounding nations had (*Judg. 17:6*).

CONTINUED 

Our Father's Plans for Us

Everyone is looking for hope. But from where is it found? For some people, hope is found in the smile of a friend. For others, hope grows from financial security or a stable marriage. Where do you normally look for hope and courage?

In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is writing to people who had lost hope in their exile. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion” (*Ps. 137:1, NIV*). But even though they are heartbroken, Jeremiah lays out reasons why they should not give up hope.

What reasons for hope are given in Jeremiah 29:1–10?

In this passage, there are three important sources of hope worth highlighting.

First, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because their situation is not the result of chance or unpredictable evil. For God Himself says, “I carried [Judah] into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon” (*vs. 4, NIV*). Though evil seems to surround them, Judah has never left the center of God’s hands.

Second, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He can work even within their present difficulties. “ ‘Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper’ ” (*vs. 7, NIV*).

Third, God tells His people that they should not give up hope, because He is going to bring an end to their exile at a specific time. “This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place’ ” (*vs. 10, NIV*).

After God explains how He was in charge of their past, is in charge of their present, and will be in charge of their future, He then beautifully conveys His tender care for His people (*see vs. 11–14*).

Read verses 11–14, saying your name after the word *you*, as if God is making these promises to you personally. Apply these promises to yourself in whatever your present struggles might be.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

God's purpose was to grow them into spiritual maturity, with their eternal destiny in mind. Why else would He show so little regard for their national aspirations that He had them exiled to a foreign country and encouraged them to be good citizens there (*Jer. 29:4, 7*)?

Consider This: How do Christians balance patriotism with the truth that earthly kingdoms have no importance in God's eternal plan?

V. Our Father's Discipline

The word *discipline* in Hebrews 12:7, NIV, is the Greek *paideia*, which comes from *pais*, meaning a child or pupil. *Paideia* is not retributive punishment but a teacher's evoking skills and understanding in students by pushing them to study and learn. A better translation might be *instruction*, or *training*, as it is rendered in 2 Timothy 3:16.

Consider This: Can you share a hard experience that turned out to be spiritually instructive to you?

► STEP 3—Practice!

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**


Thought Question:

How do we find the balance between a faith-filled anticipation of God's response to our needs, while patiently, and perhaps even resignedly, waiting for it?

Application:

Many Christians want to encourage those who feel hopeless but don't know what to say—and may even say unhelpful things. What follows are some difficult situations people encounter. Ask your class to suggest a hope-filled response we could make to the people in these situations.

As you go through the list, attend especially to those in the class who have experienced similar problems. What words or actions encouraged them? Be sure to stress the importance of being available and listening attentively—which is often better than anything you can say!

CONTINUED 

Our Father's Discipline

Read Hebrews 12:5–13. What's the message to us here, and how does it fit in with what we have been studying this quarter?

In Hebrews 12:5–13, the author describes trials in the context of discipline. In the NIV Bible translation, the word *discipline* appears nearly ten times. In the Greek world, this word was the most basic word for *education*. So to understand *discipline* is to understand how God educates us in the school of faith that the author has been describing before in Hebrews 11.

Throughout Hebrews 11, the author has been painting pictures of men and women of faith. Their faith was what kept them going when they were faced with all sorts of trying situations. As we enter chapter 12, the author turns to us, the readers, and says that since so many people have persevered against incredible odds before us, we also can run and finish the life of faith. The key is to fix our eyes upon Jesus (*vs. 2*) that He may be an example when times are difficult (*vs. 3*). Reading chapter 12 is like being given a set of reading glasses. Without these glasses our vision or understanding of hardship will always be fuzzy. But if we look through these glasses, it will correct the blurred explanation of suffering that our culture presses upon us. Then we will be able to understand clearly and be able to respond to trials intelligently.

Read through the “glasses” of Hebrews 12:1–13. Now concentrate on verses 5–13. What is

the source of discipline?

our response to discipline?

the goal of discipline?

Read through Hebrews 12:1–13 again. Make a list of all the reasons you can identify with as grounds for hope. How have you experienced this hope in your own times of spiritual “education”?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

- Divorce in a family with young children
- Loss of a spouse after more than fifty years of marriage
- A biopsy disclosing a malignant lump
- Loss of a job at a crucial time
- Loss of a home from fire or natural disaster
- A bankruptcy

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

Nowadays we use the word *adamant* to refer to someone who is especially stubborn. In ancient literature, *adamant* was a mythical mineral so hard as to be indestructible. *Adamant* was the only substance hard enough to harm the Greek gods. In Roman mythology, the underworld was sealed with columns of solid adamant. Adamantine chains are the only bonds strong enough to imprison Satan in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and Jonathan Swift, in *Gulliver’s Travels*, gives it as the element supporting the machinery that makes his fictional island of Laputa fly. Adamant even shows up in modern fiction, such as in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Marvel Comics.

Though adamant is a mythical substance, it makes a good metaphor for the kind of hope that we Christians seek. God’s promises are sure and indestructible; it isn’t always easy, though, to incorporate them into our lives as living truths by which to live our lives with courage and certainty.

Consider This: How do we develop an indestructible, adamantine hope—an expectation of God’s faithfulness so sure and certain that no event in our lives or in the world around us will ever alter it?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The School of the Hereafter,” pp. 301–309, in *Education*; “Help in Daily Living,” pp. 470, 471, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Ellen White says that “all” of us experience times of “keen disappointment and utter discouragement.” How well do we notice each other as we go through such times? How can we better learn to be agents of hope for each other when we experience such bitter disappointments?
- 2 As a class, go over your answers to Tuesday’s final question. What difference did it make in your life as you kept the reality of God’s nearness ever before you?
- 3 In class, read aloud sections in Job 38–41. What kind of picture of God does it present? What do you learn that gives you hope and encouragement? How does the Sabbath fit into this picture? How does it help keep before us the nature and character of God?
- 4 Hope that transforms comes from heaven. This means that we can pray for hope to be brought into each other’s lives. Spend some time praying for those whose hope has been faltering recently, that their hope may be renewed. More than that, what can you do for others who are in a losing struggle with hope?
- 5 If someone is willing, ask that person to recount a time when despair and trials caused him or her to lose hope and faith. What turned that person around? What can we share with one another that can help when we are in times of doubt and despair?