

LENT HOUSE GROUPS LEADER GUIDELINES

Do

- **Do begin with prayer** – Start with a short prayer to set a spiritual tone and invite God's presence into the discussion.
- **Do create a safe, welcoming atmosphere** – Encourage openness by letting people know it's a space where everyone can share without fear of judgment.
- **Do encourage everyone to participate** – Invite quieter members to share their thoughts in a gentle and non-pressuring way, also share the reading of the materials.
- **Do set ground rules for respectful listening** – Establish at the beginning that everyone should listen attentively without interrupting.
- **Do maintain eye contact with the group** – This helps people feel seen and acknowledged, fostering deeper engagement.
- **Do gently redirect when someone dominates** – If one person monopolizes the conversation, thank them for their input, then invite others to share.
- **Do be aware of time** – Keep an eye on the clock to ensure the conversation stays within the allotted time without rushing or cutting discussions short. With agreement, do feel free to adjust the suggested timings to something that works for the group.
- **Do allow for moments of silence** – Silence can give people time to reflect and can encourage deeper contributions.
- **Do use open-ended questions** – Ask questions that encourage discussion and deeper reflection rather than simple yes/no answers.
- **Do affirm contributions** – Acknowledge and affirm each person's input, making them feel valued and heard.
- **Do foster a prayerful environment throughout** – Keep the tone of the discussion focused on God's guidance and maintain a spiritual atmosphere.
- **Do ensure that people feel comfortable not speaking** – Let the group know it's okay to pass if they don't feel like sharing.
- **Do allow space for prayer requests** – Offer time for group members to share prayer needs and pray for one another, enhancing the spiritual connection.

Don't

- **Don't rush through the discussion** – Allow enough time for meaningful reflection and sharing, without pushing too quickly to the next point.
- **Don't allow side conversations** – This can make others feel excluded or distracted. Keep the group focused on the main discussion.
- **Don't let discussions stray too far off-topic** – Steer the conversation back to the theme if it begins to wander away from the purpose.
- **Don't allow one person to dominate** – If someone is speaking too much, gently redirect the conversation to give others a chance.
- **Don't force anyone to speak** – Avoid pressuring people to share if they are uncomfortable. Respect their personal boundaries.
- **Don't interrupt people** – Let everyone finish their thoughts without cutting them off, even if the conversation feels slow.
- **Don't dismiss anyone's contribution** – Avoid making anyone feel their input is irrelevant or unimportant, even if it's off-topic.
- **Don't over-correct or criticize** – If someone shares something incorrect or sensitive, gently guide them rather than publicly correcting them harshly.
- **Don't let the group go over time** – Respect everyone's schedule by finishing at the agreed time, unless there's a consensus to extend.
- **Don't dominate the conversation as the leader** – Your role is to facilitate, not lecture. Make sure others have ample opportunity to share.
- **Don't let the conversation become a debate** – Keep the environment respectful and focused on spiritual growth, avoiding arguments or divisive discussions.
- **Don't allow cliques to form** – Make sure no one feels left out or marginalized by encouraging everyone to engage with one another.
- **Don't forget to check in with participants** – If you sense someone is struggling with the conversation, follow up with them privately to offer support.
- **Don't make the conversation too formal** – Keep the tone relaxed and approachable, so everyone feels comfortable contributing.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a rusty, weathered anchor resting on a large, light-colored rock. The anchor is positioned in the middle ground, with the blue, rippling ocean in the background. The rock is in the foreground, showing some texture and small plants.

WE DARE TO HOPE

A resource for faith-sharing groups
on the theme of Christian Hope

WE DARE TO HOPE

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Cover image: Anchor on the rocks on the Amalfi coast (2019) by Tanja Cotoaga

'We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure' (Hebrews 6:19)

The Song of Zechariah (Benedictus)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel!
He has visited his people and redeemed
them.

He has raised up for us a mighty saviour
in the house of David his servant,
as he promised by the lips of holy men,
those who were his prophets from of old.

A saviour who would free us from our foes,
from the hands of all who hate us.
So his love for our fathers is fulfilled
and his holy covenant remembered.

He swore to Abraham our father to grant us,
that free from fear, and saved from the
hands of our foes,
we might serve him in holiness and justice
all the days of our life in his presence.

As for you, little child,
you shall be called a prophet of God,
the Most High.

You shall go ahead of the Lord
to prepare his ways before him.

To make known to his people their salvation
through forgiveness of all their sins,
the loving-kindness of the heart of our God
who visits us like the dawn from on high.

He will give light to those in darkness,
those who dwell in the shadow of death,
and guide us into the way of peace.

The Song of Mary (Magnificat)

My soul glorifies the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
He looks on his servant in her lowliness;
henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

The Almighty works marvels for me.
Holy his name!
His mercy is from age to age,
on those who fear him.

He puts forth his arm in strength
and scatters the proud hearted.
He casts the mighty from their thrones
and raises the lowly.

He fills the starving with good things,
sends the rich away empty.

He protects Israel, his servant,
remembering his mercy,
the mercy promised to our fathers,
to Abraham and his sons for ever.

The Benedictus can be found in the first chapter of Luke's gospel (Luke 1:68-79). It is sung daily at Morning Prayer. You can also find the Magnificat in Luke's account, earlier in chapter one (Luke 1:46-55). It is sung daily at Evening Prayer.

Why Share Your Faith in Small Groups?

In St Luke's account of the Early Church we hear that three thousand were baptised following Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Guided by the Holy Spirit, the newly baptised 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42). In a similar fashion thousands of people have found spiritual nourishment in faith-sharing, in reflecting on Scripture and prayer as part of a small group.

This resource feeds such small groups drawing on the Scriptures with each session clearly rooted in a passage from the Bible. As the Second Vatican Council Fathers emphasised 'in the sacred books the Father comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them' (Dei Verbum, 21).

Fellowship is a vital part of small group participation. In these small groups you are able to get to know your fellow Christians better and to form strong, mutually supportive bonds. We are a living community: 'God does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link ...' (Lumen Gentium, 9).

Members of small groups are encouraged to share and gain confidence in talking about their faith. It is this confidence building in a trusting environment that helps participants to 'love in all the circumstances of ordinary life' (Gaudium et Spes, 38). Our prayers together help us to become the dwelling places of the Holy Spirit that we are called to be (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 2).

Foreword to **WE DARE TO HOPE**

Lent is often thought of as a time for giving something up, in order to engage with a penitential practice. The liturgy reminds us, Lent is also a season for the Lord to pour out his grace and blessing upon us. The renewal within our lives which we seek, is the fruit of God's saving grace, and not something we may achieve by ourselves. It is good for us to keep these things in mind, as we receive the gift of this five week Lenten programme during this Jubilee Year.

Our thanks go to Mark Nash of the Archdiocese of Southwark for producing the booklet and to Sr Hyacinthe OP and the Dominican Sisters for preparing these five sessions and reflections on the mystery of Christian Hope.

During our journey through Lent, these reflections invite us to enter five familiar Gospel moments. Through these stories of Hope; the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the return of Our Lady and St Joseph for the Finding of Jesus in the Temple, the encounter of Jesus with the Canaanite Woman, the meeting of the repentant thief with Jesus at Calvary, the journey of two disciples to Emmaus and their meeting with Jesus, we discover much about the virtue of Hope. We too are pilgrims of the good news, engaged with a journey into missionary discipleship.

Whether we are following these resources in a group or on our own, may these beautiful prayers and reflections help us to encounter the Hope which Christ Jesus offers each and very one of us. And please remember me in your prayers.

Rt Revd Dr David J Oakley

Chair of the Department of Evangelisation and Discipleship
Bishop of Northampton

About this Resource

Artwork

A choice of art intended to illustrate the theme for meditation and contemplation

Theme Box

A short paragraph outlining the broad theme of each session, useful for preparation

Opening Prayer

The same prayer is used in all five sessions and participants are invited to pray for one another and for the needs of the world

Read the Word

The Scripture passage around which the session is built. Here you will also find a brief introduction. A selection of prayers before reading the passage is on p.46

Meditate on the Word

A series of questions to encourage prolonged meditation on the Word of God in the pages of the Bible

Explore and Reflect on the Theme

A reflection, containing references to the Church's teaching and to Scripture, designed to unfold the theme



Jesus Among the Doctors - stained glass by St. Martin Church, Chelmsford, Essex

WE DARE TO HOPE

We join together in praying our Father.

Read the Word Luke 2:41-51 (1-5 min)

Now Luke's account of the finding in the Temple is the only Gospel passage to depict Jesus as a teenager. It is an event of joy mixed with sorrow. (St Luke, *Passion & Resurrection*, Virgins Marie, 30), where the hope of Mary and Joseph, experienced in anxiety, is fulfilled in the joyful finding of Jesus.

A variety of short prayers before the reading of scripture can be found on page 46. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Meditate on the Word Luke 2:41-51 (10-15 min)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group. Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider to whom the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

Additional Material for reflection, from the Saints and Catechism, are signposted throughout in gold/green text boxes

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SESSION 2 / THE DECISION TO HOPE

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:3-5).

Theme: Hope is a gift of God, but it is also a human act, a decision to trust God and rely on Him, especially in moments of anxiety, when the absence of God is felt. These are opportunities to grow in hope.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (1-5 min)

O God, send forth your Holy Spirit into our hearts that we might persevere, into our minds that we might remember, into our souls that we might meditate, inspire us to speak with love, boldness, tenderness and mercy. Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses from beginning to end. May your grace help us to see with your eyes and to act with your love and light in our hearts. May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high for the sake and glory of your kingdom. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

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What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life? In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me? How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days? You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, resolving these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (10-15 min)

Why did the 12-year-old Jesus stay in Jerusalem without telling his parents, causing them unseparable distress during these days of frantic search? This mystery reveals to us that not even Mary and Joseph were spared the experience of the absence of God, of the pain of searching for Jesus, their own son placed under their care by the Father.

On finding Him, Mary His Mother says: "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." In the original Greek, the word for 'great distress' can also be translated as 'pain', physical or mental, 'acute suffering', 'grief', or 'torment'. Indeed, losing Him must have been, for them, an experience of unimaginable anxiety.

Without denying or understating the permanent feeling of distress they experienced during the three awful days, their action – who they chose to do – reveals to us their hope. They chose to search for Him and did not give up. They kept going, in hope of finding Him, in distress, and whether they felt hopeful or not, they hoped because they acted, and moved forward until who they hoped for – Jesus – was found. Hence, there is not a feeling, but a decision that it can be made even while experiencing the worst feelings of pain and anxiety. Hope is the decision to act by moving forward, placing our total trust in God.

In their situation, Mary and Joseph could have been tempted to fall into the two attitudes which are contrary to hope and destroy it: despair and presumption. In despair, they could have given up the search, thinking it was impossible for them to find Jesus. In presumption, they could have decided that everything would turn out fine without even looking for Jesus, relinquishing their responsibility.

The three days search of Mary and Joseph is an image of our own pilgrimage of hope in this life. In hope, we are called to keep going, to keep searching for

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Jesus, to keep walking each day, one step at a time, until we find Him, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the Father's house. We are called, each day, to make decisions of hope, even in the midst of suffering and anxiety, even when we experience the darkness of the apparent absence of God.

The temptations to despair and presumption are a constant threat to us. We can despair by deciding that God's call of holiness is not for us, and that the happiness He wants us to enjoy in Him is beyond our reach. We can also presume by deciding that we will obtain from God all the happiness we want without searching for Him and striving to do His will.

Both despair and presumption place us in a state of spiritual paralysis, putting an end to our pilgrimage to God, making it impossible to order.

What does the decision to hope look like for us? It is the decision, every day, to trust God, to follow Jesus intently in prayer, to receive faithfully the grace He gives us through His Church, in His Word and Sacraments, and to strive to live according to His commandment of love in the decision to return to Him every time we fall away through sin, no matter how often we have to do it. It is the decision to keep going in our relationship with Him even in the midst of pain, suffering and anxiety, until we are united forever to Him in Heaven.



We are called, each day, to make decisions of hope, even in the midst of suffering and anxiety, even in the apparent absence of God.

Responding to what has been heard
By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make hope resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Explore and Reflect on the Theme

Our reflection, continued with references to Church teaching and Scripture, unfolding the theme

Responding to what has been heard

A short paragraph with an encouragement to make the explicit connection between what has been heard in the Scripture, reflection and in daily living

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Hope is the decision to trust God even in anxiety

My God, I believe most firmly that, you watch over all who hope in You, and that we can wait for nothing when we rely upon You in all things. Therefore I am resolved for the future, to cast all my cares upon You.

St. Charles de la Colombiere

He Who tests our hearts wishes us to win crowns of righteousness after long and protracted trial. Only let our spirits be kept unbroken, the firmness of our faith in Christ be maintained unshaken, and ere long our Champion will appear. He will come and will not tarry. Expect tribulation after tribulation, hope upon hope yet a little while, yet a little while. Thus the Holy Choke knows how to comfort His servants by a promise of the future. After tribulations come hope, and what we are hoping for is not far off, for a man made the whole of human life. It is but a tiny interval compared with the endless age which is laid up in our hopes.

St. Basil of Caesarea

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away. God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone suffices.

St. Teresa of Avila

O Lord our God, under the shadow of Your wings let us hope, defend us, and carry us. You will carry us both when silent, and even to pray hairs will You carry us, for our firmness, when it is, Thou, there is it; firmness; but when it is our own, then it is infirmity.

St. Augustine

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord

To conclude the session we invite you to slowly pray the session's psalm together and end with the blessing

Text Box

Quotes from Saints and Catechism references are included for group or personal meditation with each session

Visio Divina

An optional opportunity to reflect on the pictures used to illustrate each section of *We Dare To Hope*, with questions to support your reflection. This mode of prayer is becoming increasingly popular

Timings

Timings for each of the different sections have been suggested. They are intended as a guide only.

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Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10-15 min)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 62 (61). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: In God alone is my soul at rest; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock, my salvation, my fortress. I shall not greatly falter.

B: In God alone be at rest, my soul, for my hope is from Him. He alone is my rock, my salvation, my fortress; never shall I falter.

A: In God is my salvation and glory, my rock of strength; in God is my refuge. Trust Him at all times, O people. Do not let your hearts become vain.

B: Do not put your trust in oppression, nor vain hopes on plunder. Even if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

A: For God has said only one thing: only two have I heard: that the Lord alone belongs power; and to you, Lord, merciful love; and that you repay each one according to his deeds.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing psalm from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here. May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

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Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina

Describe what you see. Which exact moment does the artwork capture?

What do the bodily attitudes of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus portray? What do they tell us about human emotions and the choice to trust God in hope?

Why is trusting in God difficult in times of incomprehension, distress, and anxiety?

Remember an anxious time in your life and ponder on it in light of Christian hope.

Christ Discovers in the Temple (1162) by Simone Martini

Introductory phrases before reading Scripture

Let us listen carefully to the Word of the Lord, and attend to it with the ear of our hearts. Let us welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. *St Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.547) adapted*

Merciful God, anoint me with your Holy Spirit. As I read your Word, let me hear your voice speaking to me from within. Give me the wisdom to understand your message to me. Give me strength to build my life on your Word. May I rejoice in hearing your Word and keeping it. *Fr Augustine Vallooran V.C.*

Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort me and restore me. *att. St Patrick (c.387-c.460)*

Let us pray with great confidence, with confidence based upon the goodness and infinite generosity of God and upon the promises of Jesus Christ. God is a spring of living water which flows unceasingly into the hearts of those who pray. *St Louis de Montfort (1673-1716)*

Lord, inspire me to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. I beg you to give me real understanding of what I need, that I in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet, I know that understanding and good intentions are worthless, unless rooted in your graceful love. So I ask that the words of Scripture may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into my heart. *Origen (184-253)*

O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear Thy word and understand and do Thy will. On Thee do I set my hope, that Thou shalt enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of Thy knowledge, not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them; that in reading the lives and sayings of the saints I may not sin, but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting. *St John Chrysostom (347-407)*

Let us speak of the God whom we love, listen to the God who wishes to speak to us. 'Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening'. *EG, 146 and 1 Samuel 3:9*

Let us go forward in peace, our eyes upon heaven, the only one goal of our labours. *St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897)*



**WE DARE
TO HOPE**

