

Operation 180

Session 1: Hope

Home Group Edition

Introduction

Welcome to Session 1 of Operation 180! I am so excited to bring you this series. Operation 180 is a deep Biblical dive into God's plan of redemption for all of us, especially you! I pray that this series increases and deepens your personal relationship with Jesus, allowing you to have life abundantly, just as Jesus intended.

To frame our journey, we will be focusing on two books of the Bible written by Luke the Evangelist, namely the Gospel that bears his name and the Book of Acts. We will see that Luke intended to bring the hope and healing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all through his writings.

Let's look at the hinge passage of the two Books, a passage called the Lucan Commission, where Jesus addresses his disciples immediately before the Ascension. This passage provides a compact and concise overview of Jesus' mission statement for the early church. As we unpack this passage, we will see it contains the essential elements of recovery present in traditional 12-step programs.

Overview

Let's look at our theme passage for this series:

44 He told them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

46 He also said to them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, 47 and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high." (Luke 24:44–49)

Let's unpack this passage and see how it provides an outline for this series:

- ❖ Verses 44-45: Here we see Jesus “opening their minds to understand the Scriptures” in such a way that the disciples see the Old Testament as being *fulfilled* in Him. As we will see in this session, *hope*, as defined in Old Testament terms, was seen as *waiting* for God to act. With Jesus being the fulfillment of Scripture, the *waiting was over*. This is cause for great hope!
 - These verses correspond to Step 2 of a 12-Step program.
- ❖ Verse 46: In this key verse, Jesus teaches that Scripture foreshadowed that He, as God's chosen agent on Earth to make all things new (the Messiah), would be a suffering servant and resurrected from the dead. As we will see in the next session, this is the centerpiece of hope in the New Testament - the Resurrection Power. We will see the Apostles preaching the power of the resurrection as proof of Jesus as Messiah throughout the Book of Acts.
 - This verse corresponds to Steps 2 and 3 of a 12-Step program.
- ❖ Verse 47: This verse forms the center for the bulk of this series- the healing power of repentance and forgiveness *for all*. Luke, a physician, makes a great effort to document how Jesus had the authority to forgive sins on Earth and how much of that healing involved forgiveness. We will also see that we must do the hard work of repentance. But through this hard work, we will reap the benefits of hope and healing that only Jesus Christ can provide.
 - This verse corresponds to Step 1 (powerlessness over sin, our “bottom”), Steps 4 (a sin inventory), Step 5 (confession), Steps 6 & 7 (sanctification), and Steps 8 & 9 (forgiveness and amends).
- ❖ Verse 47-49: These verses describe discipleship under the Lucan Commission. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have a message to proclaim to all nations: *The Good News of forgiveness in the repentance of sins*. We are to proclaim and witness this message to all *under the power of the Holy Spirit*. Of the four Gospels, the Gospel of Luke speaks most about Jesus and the disciples operating under the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Book of Acts, the Apostles are seen operating under the power of the Holy Spirit as the new church is expanding against resistance. We will end this series by seeing how God has gifted each of us in different ways through the Holy Spirit to carry the message of Good News to different people in different places.
 - These verses correspond to Step 10 (perseverance and resisting temptations), Step 11 (desiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit), and Step 12 (carrying the message).

One detail to notice in the above description is that the Lucan Commission lays out a program of recovery and restoration that is *substantially in the same order as a traditional 12-Step program*.

This is no coincidence, and the original 12 Steps came from a Christian group called The Oxford Group. The only difference in Operation 180 is that we will begin with the concept of hope and discuss our powerlessness over sin and the need to repent when we address repentance and the concept of Godly grief.

What, then, is hope? Let's take a look.

Hope

Aimee Semple McPherson, the founder of the Foursquare denomination, defined and championed hope like this:

O hope! Dazzling, radiant hope! What a change thou bringest to the hopeless; brightening the darkened paths, and cheering the lonely way.
—Aimee Semple McPherson

What a beautiful tribute to hope, a light to our darkened paths, and a cheerleader for the lonely. Hope brings us out of the dark and back into community. It is in community that there is healing. In fact, I say that there is *only* healing in community. We cannot heal alone and separated from God and others.

As we will see throughout this series, this hope will cheer us on through the difficult internal work we must do.

A more practical definition of hope is found in a Biblical dictionary, which provides the Biblical sense of hope as follows:

Hope: Confident trust with the expectation of fulfillment.

The writer of Hebrews describes hope as:

“Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.”
(Hebrews 11:1)

A closely related concept is faith. I will define faith in this series this way:

Faith = Risk + Direction.

When we have faith, we are willing to step out in a direction that involves risk. When we step out in hope, we are moving in faith in a direction that often involves a goal or destination that cannot be seen.

When we are filled with a confident, expectant hope, we will risk moving in faith. As we will see later, moving out of the dark and into the light can trigger fear and shame for many people,

causing them to remain in hiding. It takes real hope to begin our recovery process. But hope does not operate alone.

Notice the connection between *hope* and *faith*. According to the Apostle Paul, from hope springs faith and love:

“for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel” (Colossians 1:4–5)

Hope is rooted in an expectant trust that something we cannot see will come true or be fulfilled. As Christians, we have hope in heaven even though we cannot see heaven because of the truth we can see and hear in the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray this series increases your hope as you walk through the truth of God as recorded in the Bible.

Sometimes we go through seasons where we cannot see God moving in our lives. As a result, we lose hope, and our faith suffers. When we lose hope, we withdraw from God’s presence, as well as the presence of others. Our love for others dwindles away. We live in the dark, existing alone in fear and shame.

What proof do we have that God exists if we cannot see any results? Why should I continue to hope?

The Spirituality of the Psalms

These questions often vexed the Israelites, and they expressed their frustrations throughout the Psalms. *Where was God when empires conquered them? Where was God during the Exile? Did God allow this all to happen? Did God make this happen?* As we will see in a moment, the Psalms document the Israelites' *experience* as God’s chosen people in a fallen world.

The Psalms were considered prophetic writings in ancient Israel. This is because the Psalms document what God *has done*. The prophetic attribute comes from the Israelites' belief that *what God has done before, He will do again*. And this is why Jesus sees the Psalms as being fulfilled in Him.

We will examine how the Books of Moses and the Prophets are fulfilled in Jesus later in this series, but in this session, we will examine the concept of hope as expressed in the Psalms. This is because the Psalms pose a most significant question: *Where is God during hard times? If I can't see Him, and I am not experiencing Him, is He really there?* The Psalms continue to be so relevant to the Christian life because these very questions continue to be asked every day.

Let's look at contrasting examples from the Psalms:

*“You answer us in righteousness, with awe-inspiring works, God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the distant seas.”
(Psalm 65:5)*

In this first example, everything seems to be going OK for King David. He experiences God as answering him through “awe-inspiring works.” But David experiences the pain of waiting for God to act in Psalm 39:

“Now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.” ... “Hear my prayer, LORD, and listen to my cry for help; do not be silent at my tears. (Psalm 39:7,12)

King David perfectly expresses hope in the context of the Old Testament - hope is waiting for God to act. Why does David wait? Because he is depending on God's covenant love. What God has done before, He will do again.

God's love is the divine attribute that indicates God's disposition to be self-giving and for the good of the other. God will act because He said He would.

God tells us about his love throughout Scripture. It is this fact that the Psalmist depends on throughout Psalm 119:

*“I long for your salvation; I put my hope in your word. My eyes grow weary looking for what you have promised; I ask, “When will you comfort me?””
(Psalm 119:81–82)*

The Psalmist cannot see God's promises coming true, but he keeps looking in Scripture while asking, “When will you comfort me?”.

But notice that all of these excerpts have the word “hope” in them. How can that be? How can we hope in God in the good times and in the bad times? Because our hope is based on the fact that because He said He would act, He will. We just need to wait. And hope. And wait...

To see the hope in waiting for God to act is to get to the essence of the “Spirituality of the Psalms.” Throughout the 150 Psalms, we are provided with a record of ancient Israel's lived experience in waiting with hope for God to act, both in good times and bad times.

The Psalmists ask, “*Where are you, God?*” We ask, “*Where are you, God?*”. We have all gone through times when we ask those same questions. And to see Jesus as the answer, the fulfillment, to all these questions is to see the Psalms fulfilled in Him. Jesus said:

“*I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.*” (John 14:18)

Jesus said he will not leave us as orphans, and to hope in Jesus is to believe that He will do what He said.

In hard times we ask, “*Where are you, Jesus?*”

But Jesus asks us, “*Where are you?*”

Sin as separation

All of these questions get at the underlying issue of addiction in general - *separation from God*. In Operation 180, we will address sin *as* separation from God because sin *is* separation from God. Whatever compulsive, self-destructive behaviors (sin) we engage in, we end up separated from God. We will also end up separated from family, friends, and community.

This is a result of The Fall. Let’s see how this happened.

When God was finished with creation, He was delighted! In fact, He was so delighted that He declared all of creation “*very good!*”

“*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed.*” (Genesis 1:31)

When God was finished with creation, everything was in a state of *shalom*, the Hebrew word meaning “*a state of tranquility or wholeness.*” In this state, creation was *thriving*, just as God intended. This state is like summer; in fact, God Himself presents as a summer breeze in the Garden of Eden.

A key feeling when we are in a state of tranquility is a feeling of *safety*. In the Garden, surrounded by the Spirit of God, Adam and Eve would feel safe in their environment.

But seasons change. In comes temptation in the form of doubt about God’s word:

“*Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’*” (Genesis 3:1)

Adam and Eve fell for the temptation and sinned, and two important consequences follow that are at the center of this series.

First, shame enters the Garden, and Adam and Eve hide from each other:

“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Genesis 3:7)

Sin causes us to be *separated from each other*. When we do not feel safe, we separate.

Next, we see Adam and Eve hide from God:

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. So the LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”” (Genesis 3:8–10)

Adam and Eve’s sin caused them to hide (and be separated) *from the presence of God*.

This prompts God to ask, “Where are you?”

Notice that nothing in the Garden has changed *except for Adam and Eve’s mental state*. They have gone from *shalom to shame*. God is still where He was, moving like the evening breeze. Adam and Eve’s sin have caused *them* to separate from each other and from God, not the other way around. They no longer feel safe.

When we feel *unsafe*, we can end up in *despair*, the feeling that everything is wrong and nothing will turn out well. Philosophers tell us that despair can result from having no apparent options left to choose from, or too many and being overwhelmed. In either case, we will freeze and do nothing. Feeling unsafe, we are unwilling to take any risk and choose to remain in the dark.

As a result of sin, God’s creation was not as intended because the *connectedness* designed into creation by God had been severed. Connectedness is an essential part of creation and a key factor in feeling safe. The breaking of connections, like a married couple getting divorced, is an actual piece of creation being severed. As a result of the Fall, creation has been *de-created* or *uncreated*. Adam and Eve are now *surviving* as separated beings, apart from each other and God.

We all go through periods where we are simply struggling to survive in a fallen world, feeling unsafe and in despair. We may reach for anything or anybody that numbs these feelings or makes us feel connected, even for a brief moment. Thus begins the cycle of addiction.

Adam and Eve have now experienced a change of seasons, much like moving from summer to fall or winter. Their sin has forced them indoors for the winter to survive, feeling unsafe to go outside.

What caused this? Adam's answer to God's question gives us the answer: *Fear*. Adam answered, "*I was afraid.*" Fear drives separation.

The Cycle of Addiction

Adam's answer reveals the cycle at the heart of all addiction, a cycle of *fear*, leading to *shame*, that results in our *hiding*.

The cycle looks like this:

| Fear -> Shame -> Hide

Always keep in mind that *shame* is different from *guilt*. Guilt says, "I did something bad." We will deal with what you did and the resulting guilt in the forgiveness section of this series. God forgives guilt.

Shame says, "*I am bad*". Shame is a public emotion that we feel when we believe we are a bad person. There is no place for shame in the Bible or our lives.

It is in the darkness and separation caused by sin that fear breeds shame. A great saying about fear is this:

| Fear is the darkroom that develops all our negatives

You might ask, "Fear of what?" Jesus addresses this issue in one of the most memorable passages in the Bible, beginning with John 3:16:

"For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed." (John 3:16–20)

Jesus makes two points relevant to today's session in this passage.

First, Jesus states that He was not sent to condemn the world, but “*to save the world through Him.*” This is the answer to the Psalmists asking “I long for your salvation...when will you comfort me?” The answer is *now*, Jesus came to save us and to comfort us in and through the forgiveness of our sins. The waiting is over - the longing for God’s presence expressed throughout the Psalms is fulfilled in Jesus. In this, there is great hope!

Secondly, Jesus directly addresses why it is so hard for many people to repent and come out of the darkness. Jesus states that our fear of our past being exposed causes us to avoid the light. To go public with our recovery is to expose ourselves to shame. Fear keeps us stuck in the dark of our past. We fear that others will reject us for what we have done in the past. We fear that we will be labeled a “bad person.”

In other words, fear turns into shame, and we keep hiding. And the fear -> shame -> hiding cycle repeats, again and again. We are frozen in the dark in the worst version of ourselves. We are barely surviving, merely existing in this dark winter of our lives. This is not what God intended in His creation.

To break this cycle, we will be examining hope in these first two sessions to build a firm foundation upon which to *move in faith* out of the darkness and into the light.

Through hope and faith in Jesus Christ, we must “*come to believe*” that Jesus Christ can “*restore us to sanity,*” paraphrasing Step 2.

Come to Jesus

Jesus never asks us to do anything alone. He does not ask us to come out of the dark on our own power. Jesus asks us to *come to Him* and leave the burden of fear and shame at his feet:

“*Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” (Matthew 11:28–30)

The word “rest” implies more than a 15-minute break. The word *rest* means being in a state of *repose and refreshing*. Another state that is implied is *tranquility*, which is another way of saying *shalom*. In other words, Jesus wants to take us back to the Garden of Eden before the Fall. This is His whole plan of redemption for all who believe in His name.

This offer from Jesus is made from His grace. There is nothing we can do to deserve it, nothing we can do to earn it. All we must do is humble ourselves and accept it.

Jesus offers us an opportunity to be *recreated* and move into a new season of our lives. Through His grace, we can experience a *reviving* in our lives, like moving from winter to spring. Jesus offers to *teach us*, meaning we will possess new knowledge and skills for a new season in our lives.

And we will *find rest for our souls*.

Are you ready to remove the yoke of sin, the yoke of fear and shame from your shoulders? Why are you waiting? The Apostle Paul says the time is now:

“Working together with him, we also appeal to you, “Don’t receive the grace of God in vain.” For he says: At an acceptable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!” (2 Corinthians 6:1–2)

The waiting is over! Now is *your* time of salvation!

One final quote from Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers to ever grace a pulpit. His take on this process is as follows:

It was not the light that made this place so horrible, but it was the light that showed how horrible it was before. So let God’s grace just open a window and let the light into a man’s soul, and he will stand astonished to see at what a distance he is from God. - C. H. Spurgeon

Let’s get to work!

Operation 180 materials Copyright © 2023 Timothy A. Brisson. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

The Scripture quotations marked NRSV herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Daily Meditations

Theme: Hope in the context of the Old Testament as God the faithful deliverer, restorer of all creation; waiting.

Day 1

“Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.” (Psalm 33:18–22, NRSV)

Notes: _____

Day 2

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

Notes: _____

Day 3

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Psalm 42:1–2, NRSV)

Notes: _____

Day 4

“My vows to you I must perform, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of life.” (Psalm 56:12–13, NRSV)

Notes: _____

Day 5

“For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.” (Psalm 62:1–2, NRSV)

Notes: _____

Day 6

“By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.” (Psalm 65:5, NRSV)

Notes: _____

Day 7

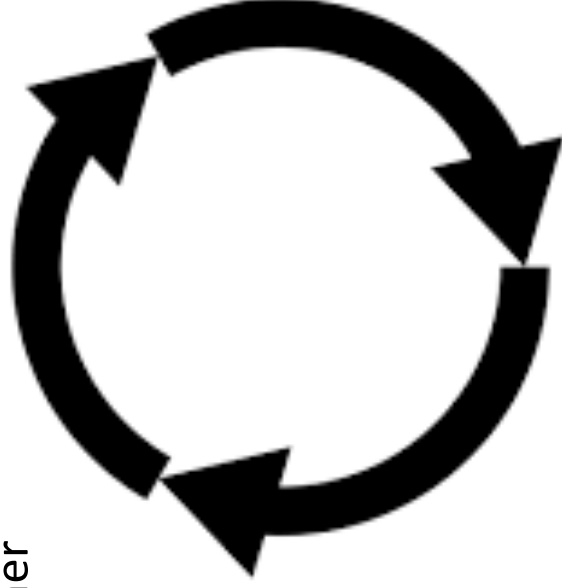
“My soul languishes for your salvation; I hope in your word. My eyes fail with watching for your promise; I ask, “When will you comfort me?”” (Psalm 119:81–82, NRSV)

Notes: _____

Spiritual Cycle of the Psalms

God's action in creation, our experience, our season

- 1) Creation
- 2) Thriving
- 3) Summer



- 4) De-creation
- 5) Surviving
- 6) Fall/Winter

- 7) Re-creation
- 8) Reviving
- 9) Spring

Life moments snapshot worksheet

10 life moments of great hope and safety	Hope level (0 to +10)	10 life moments of hopelessness and despair	Despair level (0 to -10)
1)		11)	
2)		12)	
3)		13)	
4)		14)	
5)		15)	
6)		16)	
7)		17)	
8)		18)	
9)		19)	
10)		20)	