

LEADER RESOURCES

Leader Tips - Week One

- Create a group roster with everyone's name and contact information so that you can easily connect with your group throughout the semester. Focus on building relationships with your group and getting to know their stories.
- Encourage your group to begin processing any questions they may have about who God really is and what it means to be in relationship with Him. Transparency at this stage will lead to transformation later.
- Encourage group members who have not had a significant, post-decision baptism, to consider being water baptized. Water Baptism is available on the first Sunday of the month at every location, as well as the third Sunday of the month at the West Houston location.

Common Questions - Week One

Check out the Hope City Statement of Faith, especially the section on the "Trinity" as an added resource to prepare for this week. hopecity.com/about/beliefs

How can God be three persons at one time?

That's a great question. God is Father, Son, and Spirit. This is one of the great mysteries of the faith. We know that it's true because the Bible makes it clear over and over again, but we can't fully understand how it works. One of the greatest proofs of the reality of God is that there's much about Him we can't understand. Isaiah 55:8 tells us that "His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways."

How can I trust God if I don't fully understand Him?

There are lots of things in life that we trust but don't completely understand. To trust God is to have faith in God. Faith is defined as "trust or confidence in something or someone." When you sit in a chair for the first time you are showing faith that the chair will hold you. Until you sit, you really don't know if the chair will stay together. We trust God based on His history, character, and promises. Over time, as you grow closer to God, trusting Him will become more natural.

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I don't have a good relationship with my father, so how am I supposed to trust God as a father?

Sometimes, our experience with our biological father doesn't match up well with the standard that God sets, and that can be really difficult. God models the role of "father" as it should be, not the other way around. God is the father who loves fully and unconditionally. He will never leave, and He will always forgive. He builds up, equips, frees, and empowers. God sets the standard for fatherhood. The critical thing to remember is that God was the first Father, and He always fills that role perfectly.

Why does God love us so much?

He chooses to - He freely loves us. More than a feeling, love is a choice. The Word tells us in 1 John 4:8 that God is love, so He is really the embodiment of that choice in action. It's even more beautiful when we understand that God isn't forced to love us because of a feeling. He chooses to love us, unconditionally and always, out of His own free will.

Leader Tips - Week Two

- The material covered in this Connect Group can potentially lead to lengthy or off topic discussion. Quickly guide the discussion back to the topic when those instances arise. Offer to stay late or meet outside of the group to continue any helpful conversation that didn't fit within this week's topic.
- Remind your group members that their identity is found in Christ alone. Encourage them to keep focusing on the small steps they're taking in faith.
- Recommend that they start the Hope City Growth Track this week if they haven't already completed it. If several people in your group haven't been, encourage them to attend together.

Common Questions - Week Two

Check out the Hope City Statement of Faith, especially the section "Salvation" as an added resource to prepare for this week: hopecity.com/about/beliefs

Does God still love us when we mess up?

Yes! Romans 5:8 says that “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Think about that for a moment. God loves us so much that even while we were doing wrong, He sent His only Son to die on a cross so that we could be forgiven and free. That’s how much He still loves us when we mess up. His love is unconditional!

I want to do right, but I keep sinning. Is being a “good Christian” supposed to be this hard?

None of us are perfect. Jesus lived the only perfect life that the world has ever seen. We should always strive to be like Jesus, but it’s a process, and sometimes we will fall short. Every Christian struggles and is faced with temptation and difficulty, but there are practical steps we can take to help us. Find an accountability partner, make spending time in the Word a habit, and pray regularly. As you grow, you’ll find your walk with the Lord feels more and more natural as you move forward on your journey of faith. Keep going!

If I’m God’s son, does God punish His children?

No. Jesus took all the punishment for us. Romans 8:1 tells us that “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The difference now is that God gives the bad in our lives purpose. He does not cause the disaster, but He works through it to shape and help us grow.

(Genesis 50:20)

What can I do to earn God’s love and approval?

Nothing. You don’t have to earn it and you wouldn’t be able to even if you tried. Fortunately, you can just receive it. Ephesians 2:8 tells us that “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” You don’t have to do anything except put your faith in Jesus to receive God’s love and approval.

Leader Tip - Week Three

- If your group has room for more people, encourage your members to invite someone to come with them.

Common Questions - Week Three

Check out the Hope City Statement of Faith, especially the sections on “Salvation” and “The Son” as an added resource to prepare for this week: hopecity.com/about/beliefs

How do I help lost people that are far away, or out of my reach?

Pray, go, give. Pray for the people to experience God and for the safety of the teams who are in the mission field. Go get involved by reaching the lost in your sphere of influence, joining an outreach Connect Group, or taking short or long-term mission trips. Give your time, money, and giftings to support local or global outreach and mission efforts.

What happens if sharing my faith doesn't work?

The truth is, our responsibility is to share our faith and trust God to take care of the results. Ideally, you want the person to accept Jesus and enter into a vibrant relationship with Him. That may not happen right away every time. Whenever you share, you move the ball down the field some. You plant a seed. Someone else may come along later and water it. You may never see that person come to Christ, but you played a role.

Do I have to share my faith?

Yes, we are ambassadors for Christ. It can sound intimidating, but it's really just telling your own story. Tell them about what God has done in your life and share the hope you have as a result.

Leader Tips - Week Four

- Encourage your group members to invite the Holy Spirit into their daily life and listen for His voice as He teaches and guides them. Whether their relationship with the Holy Spirit is new, or they've known Him for a long time, encourage them to continually grow closer to Him.
- Share any misconceptions or fears you may have had about the Holy Spirit even after you trusted Christ. How did you come to understand His true identity and purpose?
- Let your group members know about any church conferences or events that are coming up and encourage them to attend.

Common Questions - Week Four

*Check out the Hope City Statement of Faith as an added resource to prepare for this week:
hopecity.com/about/beliefs*

How do I know if I am hearing from God?

We can try to answer this in two parts. First, one of the best ways to discern whether or not you are hearing from God is to dive into His Word. God will not contradict Himself, so if you feel like the Spirit is telling you something, check it with God's Word. On top of that, you can know that The Holy Spirit always offers hope, while the enemy beats down. The Holy Spirit calms, comforts, convicts, leads, and encourages, while the Enemy obsesses, worries, condemns, and confuses.

On an even more practical note, you can ask yourself these 4 questions:

- Does what I'm hearing line up with scripture?
- Is it consistent with God's character?
- Is it being confirmed through messages I'm hearing at church or studying in my quiet times?
- Would it please God?

What is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a person. He is, more specifically, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of God. The Spirit is not a feeling, a force, or an energy. For some additional Scriptural resources, look at John 16:13-15, and Romans 8:27. If someone in your group would like to learn more about the Holy Spirit, encourage them to read the Gospel of John and, after New Believers,, join a Freedom group!

What are spiritual gifts?

Spiritual Gifts are what God equips you with to serve the Church and build up the Kingdom of God. There are many different kinds of gifts. If you haven't discovered the areas where you are uniquely gifted by God, then check out Hope City Growth Track. For more about spiritual gifts, read 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:12.

How do I grow in my relationship with the Holy Spirit?

If you would like a closer relationship with the Holy Spirit, a great next step for you would be to join a Freedom Connect Group. The Bible talks about the Spirit-led life, but we realize this kind of living can feel hard to reach. Freedom Connect Groups explain the principles of spiritual order and how to let the Spirit take the lead in your life. The hope is that through a Freedom group you'll be able to grow in your relationship with the Holy Spirit by:

- Removing any barriers in life (like unforgiveness, sinful nature, misperceptions, etc. In other words, anything that is holding you back from getting right with God).
- Requesting the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Receiving the Holy Spirit by faith.
- Releasing His power into your life.

Leader Tips - Week Five

- Encourage your group members to identify people in their sphere of influence who need to know Jesus and begin to develop relationships with them.
- As a leader, it is important that you are growing also. For resources to help you develop as a leader, go to

<https://hopecity.churchcenter.com/groups/virtual-free-market-connect-groups/sunday-morning-leaders-hip-development>.

- Now that you are halfway into the semester, this is a great time to reemphasize completing the Growth Track. If they have completed the Growth Track, encourage them to join the Dream Team.

Common Questions - Week Five

Check out the Hope City Statement of Faith, especially the sections on "Mankind" and "Salvation" as an added resource to prepare for this week: hopecity.com/about/beliefs

Is there suffering in Heaven?

No. Heaven is the place of perfect happiness; it holds no fear, sorrow, or pain.

Is Jesus the only way to Heaven?

In John 14:6, Jesus says that "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus is the only way to Heaven. He lived, died, and rose again so that everyone could have a path to freedom and salvation through Him

Is Hell real?

There is a Heaven and a Hell. The Scriptures don't leave any gray area here. The important thing to remember about Hell is that God doesn't send anyone there. In fact, He sent His only Son to live a sinless life and die on a cross to make sure that no one had to go to Hell. Hell is a place where people can pay their own debt if they want to, but nobody has to. Jesus has paid it. It's done. All that's required of us is to turn and accept His sacrifice on our behalf.

Leader Tips - Week Six

- Your experience reading and understanding the Bible can be a big help to your group members. Share what has worked well and what hasn't worked well for you. Give them ideas on how to start. Explain that there are different versions and translations of the Bible available (i.e. NIV, the Message, Amplified, etc.) as well as parallel Bibles, one-year Bibles, Bible reading plans, apps, and so on. The One Year Bible plan and devotion is a great place to start. You can find it at bible.com/reading-plans/60-the-one-year-bible.
- Encourage your group members to be praying the full armor of God from Ephesians 6 over themselves each and every day. Show them how to do so.

Common Questions - Week Six

Check out the Hope City Statement of Faith, especially the section on "the Bible" as an added resource to prepare for this week: hopecity.com/about/beliefs

What is the Bible?

The Bible is the living Word of God, and is our guidebook to life. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says it best, "The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone."

How do I get more from my Bible?

There are three great steps to take towards getting the most out of your Bible. First, accept its authority by receiving God's Word with an open heart and respond to His Word with obedience. Second, absorb its truths by hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on God's Word. Third, apply its principles. James 1:22 tells us plainly, "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Why are there different translations/versions of the Bible?

The Bible was originally written in ancient Greek and Hebrew. Different translations exist because language is alive, constantly developing and changing. The truths in God's Word stay the same, but the words we use to communicate them effectively change along with the language. In the King James Version, you find a lot of "thees and thous." Those are fine, and accurate, but they aren't words we use anymore. The different versions of the bible are all just trying to communicate the exact same truths in ways that match up well with our modern language. God told His prophet in Habakkuk 2:2 to "write down the revelation and make it plain." The different translations are all taking the same truths and trying to make them plain.

What is the difference between the Old Testament and New Testament?

The Old Testament is the foundation. The New Testament is the fulfillment. God made promises in the Old Testament and keeps His promises in the New Testament. The Old Testament is about God making the world. The New Testament is about God saving the world. God's people in the Old Testament were Israel. God's people in the New Testament are the Church.

Leader Tips - Week Seven

- Share the link to the Pray First Guide (hopecity.com/prayerguide). Establishing a prayer plan before you begin can help your prayer time be more effective. Talk about some plans that have been effective for you. Get your group thinking of a place they can go to pray that is private and free of distractions. Tell them when and where you pray. It may be a closet in their home, a patio, or even their parked car. Explain how you can create a holy environment in an everyday space.
- This is a great week to encourage your group members to attend a Saturday Morning Prayer service. Tell your group what 21 Days of Prayer is and when it starts.

Common Questions - Week Seven

Check out the Hope City Statement of Faith as an added resource to prepare for this week: hopecity.com/about/beliefs

Does God heal the sick?

Yes, God is still the Great Physician. Healing the sick is illustrated in the life and ministry of Jesus, and included in the commission of Jesus to His disciples. Healing is also one of the gifts of the Spirit. For some examples, check out Matthew 8:16-17, Acts 8:6-7, and especially James 5:14-16.

Why doesn't God answer all of our prayers?

He does! Sometimes we get stuck on the idea that "yes" is the only answer that counts. God may answer with "not right now," or "I have something better for you." Often, when we look back over time, we are able to see how God was moving and realize His plan was better, and although He removed an opportunity, or closed a door, it ended up leading us to more joy, freedom, and life.

How often should we pray?

1 Thessalonians 5 gives us an answer. It says, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Essentially, pray anytime there's an opportunity — no matter where you are or what you're doing. Use every occasion, every season, and every possible moment to pray. It doesn't have to be formal. Make talking with God a part of your everyday habits.

What is God's will?

It is the Father's will to see the lost saved and the saved become whole, healthy, and successful in all areas of life — spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, and financially. He wills that the whole then be equipped, and the equipped be sent out to spread the Gospel to the nations.

Leader Tips - Week Eight

- Get your group thinking about how they can build healthy relationships with other like-minded believers. Ask your group if there is an activity in their life that God has been calling them to turn into a Connect Group, and if so, encourage them to attend a Connect Group Leadership Training.
- Have each group member pray for another person in the group. Have them all write a prayer request on an index card or piece of paper (give them the choice to remain anonymous or write down their name). Then, gather all the requests and have each person pick one of the cards/pieces of paper and pray for that request outside of group.

Common Questions - Week Eight

Check out the Hope City Statement of Faith, especially the section on “The Church” as an added resource to prepare for this week: hopecity.com/about/beliefs

Why do I need to forgive someone when they are the ones that wronged me?

In order to experience the fruit of our own forgiveness, we need to forgive others. Forgiving others allows us to overcome feelings of anger, bitterness, and revenge. Forgiveness can heal spiritual wounds and bring the peace and love that only God can give.

What do I tell people who knew the “old me”?

Just be honest. Your story of life change can have a tremendous impact on the people in your sphere of influence. You can tell them that God has changed you on the inside. Some people will understand, some won't. Remember 1 Corinthians 1:18, which says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Can I still be friends with people who aren't Christians?

Absolutely. God's light in you will be attractive, so don't be surprised if people are drawn to you - especially people who are far from God. Jesus had a wide range of friends and ministered to them on a daily basis just by being Himself.

Leader Tips - Week Nine

- Encourage your group members to spend some time this week discussing their personal financial values and giving strategies with their spouse and family. Make sure to suggest that they commit to these principles by writing them down.
- Encourage your group to ask God daily, “how would you like to use me today?” and listen for His response.
- Encourage your group to join and serve on the Dream Team if they are not already.

Common Questions - Week Nine

Check out the *Hope City Legacy Report* as an added resource to help prepare for this week: It is available hopecity.com/legacy

How much should I give?

Financial giving can be divided into two categories: tithes and offerings. The Bible teaches us that we worship the Lord with our tithe, which is ten percent of our income contributed to the church on a regular basis. When we feel called to give over and above our tithe, we do so as an offering.

I don't have any money and I don't have any talents. What do I have to offer God?

Everybody is a "10" at something and has plenty to offer. It sounds like you haven't discovered your areas of strengths and spiritual giftings. You can discover how your design reveals your purpose in life and your best fit in ministry at the Hope City Growth Track, which takes place over the first four Sundays of every month.

It's hard for me to wrap my head around the idea of "giving." How can I become a more generous person?

Start with the tithe, which involves giving a percentage of your income regularly. Have you ever heard the funny fact about smiling and feeling happy? Studies show that if you don't feel very happy, but you'd like to, one of the best things you can do is start smiling. By behaving like a happy person, you start actually feeling happy. Obedience to God is a lot like that. The best way to feel more generous is to do what a generous person would: give. When you see the impact your giving has, and experience your relationship with God grow deeper as you walk in obedience, you will become a confident, cheerful giver. As in so many things, actions lead and feelings follow.

How do I benefit from giving?

- Giving draws us closer to God. Matthew 6:21 tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also." Giving is the antidote to materialism. See 1 Timothy 6: 17-19, which says "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."
- Giving strengthens our faith. Proverbs 3:5, 9-10 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty."
- And giving is an investment in eternity. See 1 Timothy 6: 18-19: "Give happily to those in need, and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this, you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven - it is the only safe investment for eternity."

Where does that money go?

At Hope City, you can view a full financial report that shows where all of the money we receive goes. Visit our website to check it out. In general, Hope City grows at the pace of your giving so that we can give more people the opportunity to respond to the life-giving message of Jesus and have an impact for the Kingdom of God. Every dollar we spend is to make us more effective in reaching people. hopecity.com/legacy

Leader Tips - Week Ten

- Help your group members identify some practical ways that they can start building a legacy.
- Encourage your group members to join or lead a Connect Group next semester! Joining a Freedom group in particular might be a great next step.

Common Questions - Week Ten

Now that group is over, what's next?

- Help your group identify their next steps and have everyone share that step.
- Encourage the group to go all in with the One Year Challenge.
- Tell your group what your plans are for next semester.
- Connect them to another Connect Group (especially a Freedom group).
- Stay in contact over the break.
- Encourage your group to complete the Growth Track if they haven't already.
- Pray over everyone in the group.