



LIFEGROUP **STUDY GUIDE**

December 3 - December 24



ibf.church

LIFEGROUP STUDY GUIDE

by Dan Franklin

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

- *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
www.lbf.church/messages

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big. Contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

- *Contact Pastor Dan:*
danfranklin@lbfchurch.com

Lesson 1: Recovering Stolen Hope
Psalm 43:1-5 • pp. 4-5 • Dec. 3

Lesson 2: Recovering Stolen Peace
Philippians 4:6-7 • pp. 6-7 • Dec. 10

Lesson 3: Recovering Stolen Joy
John 16:16-22 • pp. 8-9 • Dec. 17

Lesson 4: Recovering Stolen Love
Romans 5:6-8 • pp. 10-11 • Dec. 24

RECOVERING STOLEN HOPE

Lesson 1 • December 3

MAIN POINT

When we lose hope, we choose to put our hope in God alone.

INTRODUCTION

Let's define hope. Hope is the expectation that better days are ahead. Hope is not just wishing for things to be better. Hope is confidence that things will be better. And this means that our hope has to have some kind of basis. We don't just cross our finger and hope. We identify something solid into which we can put our hope.

There are few things that are sadder than to see a person who has lost hope. When we lose hope we have nothing to look forward to. Our lives become mundane at best and despairing at worst.

Those of us who are believers in Jesus have all the reason in the world to live lives of hope. And the Christmas story ushers in this hope. When Jesus arrives, we now have hope that (1) God is with us, (2) our sins can be forgiven, (3) eternal life can be ours through faith, and (4) God is working all things together for our good. And those are just a sample of our reasons to be filled with hope.

But sometimes we lose hope. Sometimes it feels like hope has been stolen from us. We lose a job. We get rough news from a doctor. We experience a divorce. We don't get into the college of our choice. Our candidate doesn't win the election. And suddenly we find ourselves in despair, despite all the reasons that we have for hope.

In this lesson, we look at how we recover the hope that is so often stolen from us. And we will also look at how we can make choices about how to respond when we feel hopeless. Far from being victims of our temperamental feelings, we have the opportunity to do something to recover the hope that was stolen.

GETTING STARTED

1. We can define hope as the expectation of better days ahead. When you think of the Christmas story, what connections do you see to the idea of hope?

2. What can make you feel like you have lost hope?

DIGGING IN

Read Psalm 43:1-5.

**1 Vindicate me, my God,
and plead my cause
against an unfaithful nation.
Rescue me from those who are
deceitful and wicked.**

**2 You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?**

**Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?**

**3 Send me your light and your faithful care,
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you dwell.**

**4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God, my joy and my delight.
I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.**

5 Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. From what you read in verses 1-2, what sorts of problems are causing the psalmist to lose hope?

5. Focusing on verse 3, what does the psalmist ask God to do in order to address his problems?

6. As you read verse 4, does it seem more like the psalmist is making promises to God or talking about what the result will be if God acts on his behalf?

7. What is most significant to you as you look at what the psalmist says in verse 5?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. We often think of hope and despair as feelings that come upon us, but the psalmist tells his soul to put its hope in God. How can a person choose to hope?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. How does the gospel of Jesus bring hope into any situation, no matter how dark it seems?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. Psalm 33:17 says, “A horse is a false hope for deliverance.” The idea is that we might look to something other than God as our hope. Where—apart from God—are you tempted to look for hope?

11. In what area of your life do you need to tell your soul to hope in God? What is one practical way that you can purposefully put your hope in him?

RECOVERING STOLEN PEACE

Lesson 2 • December 10

MAIN POINT

God invites us to bring all our anxieties to him so that he can restore the peace that we've lost.

INTRODUCTION

At Christmas we sing about the idea of Jesus bringing “peace on earth.” While this feels nice when we say it, it is also confusing. How can we sing about peace when there is such conflict between Ukraine and Russia, between Jews and Palestinians, and between Democrats and Republicans. Not only this, but we have constant friction in our personal lives. Social media is often a platform for hateful and insulting remarks, and our families are often marked by conflict and alienation.

On top of this, we struggle to have peace within ourselves. Anxiety rates are sky high, especially among young people. We lack peace in our everyday lives. Even those of us who are believers in Jesus too often find ourselves to be without peace. Our peace has been stolen. It was stolen by social conflicts, by family strife, and by internal anxiety.

In this lesson we look to recover our stolen peace. And this is not done through our sheer willpower. We look to God to restore what we have lost. And Philippians 4:6-7 walks us through how we can pursue the peace that is already ours, and yet has been stolen from us.

GETTING STARTED

1. When Jesus was born, the angel announced “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14). Why, then, do you think so many of us lack peace today?

2. Give some examples of how peace might be stolen from your life.

DIGGING IN

Read Philippians 4:6-7.

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. Paul says not to be anxious about anything, but to pray in every situation. Why are those words so significant to people who have lost their sense of peace?

5. In verse 6, what stands out to you about what we are told to do when we feel anxious?

6. Verse 7 speaks of God's peace guarding our hearts. What sorts of threats does God's peace guards our hearts from?

7. If God guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus, then what words do you think God wants to say to us when we are not feeling at peace?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. What is an area of your life in which you need to recover stolen peace?

11. What keeps you from more regularly experiencing God's peace guarding your heart? What can you do to overcome those obstacles?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. What do you think is meant in verse 7 when Paul says that God's peace transcends all understanding?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. How does the gospel of Jesus provide the security needed for peace, no matter what chaotic situation we find ourselves in?

RECOVERING STOLEN JOY

Lesson 3 • December 17

MAIN POINT

When we find our joy in Jesus, we recover a joy that no one can steal from us.

INTRODUCTION

There are four seconds left in the game. The home team is losing by 5 points, but they are on the opponent's ten-yard line. The quarterback drops back to pass. As he looks to the left, he sees a receiver wide open. He softly tosses the ball and the receiver easily hauls it in. The referees signal for a touchdown. The crowd goes wild. But then the players and the fans notice something lying on the ground back near the line of scrimmage. The whole stadium goes deadly silent. The item on the ground is a yellow flag. The referee picks it up and then announces, "Holding, offense. Ten-yard penalty. Replay the down." The home team now lines up on the twenty-yard line. This time the pass is incomplete and the game ends. The fans silently make their way to the exits.

In one moment, there was intense joy. In the next moment, all the joy was gone. And all it took to steal away the joy was a yellow flag.

Sometimes it can seem like the joy we have in life is just as fragile as the joy the fans had in this hypothetical football game. In one moment, we feel great about life. In the next moment, all our joy is gone. And all it takes is one doctor visit, one phone call, one bad test, or one friend's comment. Our joy is fragile. As soon as we have it, it is under threat of being stolen away from us.

In the Christmas story, the angel announces that Jesus' birth brings "good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Because Jesus came as our Savior, all who place their trust in him can have joy. But many of us feel that our joy has been stolen. In this lesson, we look to Jesus to find joy that lasts. We look for that cannot be taken away from us.

GETTING STARTED

1. In Luke 2:10 the angel describes his announcement of Jesus' birth as "good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Why does Jesus' birth cause great joy for you?

2. Think of times when you feel great joy. What kinds of things threaten to steal that joy?

DIGGING IN

Read John 16:16-22.

16 Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."

17 At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father?'"

18 They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

19 Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? **20** Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. **21** A woman giving birth to a

child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. 22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. The disciples clearly don't understand Jesus' statement in verse 16. Based on what he says in verse 20, what do you think Jesus means by his statement in verse 16?

5. Why might a believer in Jesus grieve while the world rejoices?

6. What do you see as the main takeaway from Jesus' illustration in verse 21?

7. What is so remarkable about the kind of joy Jesus promises in verse 22?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. If we live with joy that "no one will take away," does this mean that we will never have times of grief? Explain your answer.

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. Read the words of Jesus in John 15:11. How do these words show Jesus' heart and intention toward those who respond to his gospel?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. In what unstable places have you been tempted to try to find lasting joy?

11. What do you think is the most effective way to fight against whatever threatens you to hold on to the joy that Jesus came to bring us?

RECOVERING STOLEN LOVE

Lesson 4 • December 24

MAIN POINT

In Jesus, God has given us the fullest possible assurance of his love for us.

INTRODUCTION

We are pretty free with the word “love” today. We “love” tacos and baseball and shopping and sunsets. And we also “love” people. “Oh, Tom’s so funny. I just love that guy.” And we are told by parents, teachers, friends, and sometimes even politicians, that they “love” us.

But how do you know that somebody loves you? And how would we know that a God we’ve never seen loves us? Especially when we often feel like we are not worthy of love?

On the very first Christmas, God sent us his ultimate love gift. He sent his Son to be our Savior. But just because God sent us his love doesn’t mean that we always live in the constant reality of God’s love. Just think for a minute about what it would be like if your constant reality was that you are deeply, fiercely loved by God!

In this lesson we will reflect on what state we were in when God sent Jesus to save us. And as we are reminded of this, we will be all the more secure in the fact that God loves us with a love that is never going anywhere.

GETTING STARTED

1. In what ways do you associate the Christmas story with love?

2. What makes it challenging for you to believe—and receive—God’s love for you?

DIGGING IN

Read Romans 5:6-8.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. **7** Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

3. What stood out to you in this passage? If you listened to the sermon, feel free to share something significant that you remember.

4. In these verses Paul describes those Jesus came to save as (1) powerless, (2) ungodly, and (3) sinners. Give what you think is a proper definition for what each of these terms mean.

5. Paul depicts Christ’s death here as very purposeful and not at all as a random act. For you, how does this connect to the Christmas story?

6. Read the following passages. What does each say about the idea of Christ dying for us?

1 Corinthians 15:3

1 Peter 3:18

1 John 4:10

7. Why is Christ's death such a powerful demonstration of what it means to love someone?

TAKING IT TO HEART

10. As you reflect on this past year, what are some ways that you have seen and experienced God's love in your life?

11. Jude 21 encourages believers to "keep yourselves in God's love." What are some ways that you can keep yourself in the constant awareness and experience of God's love for you?

WRESTLING WITH ISSUES

8. It can be discouraging to think of ourselves as powerless, ungodly sinners. Why do you think it seems important to God that we know about the state we were in when Christ died for us?

CONNECTING TO THE GOSPEL

9. Read Romans 8:38-39. For you personally, what threats do you fear might separate you from the love of God?