



# See Hope

GENESIS 1:1-5, 31; JOHN 1:1-14



## GOAL

In this session, young people see hope in Scripture and through media, music, light, and Christian practices. These will point youth toward opportunities to lift up hopeless situations to God's light and shine God's light in the world.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



## PRAYER

Shine your light upon me, O God, that I may glimpse your hope and find ways to help these young people see hope. Amen.

## THIS SESSION

Christian hope is in the good news that God has come to us. We are not alone. Christ dwells among us, and in him is life, and that life is the light of all people. As John writes, the light shines in darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it (John 1:4-5). Jesus is the light of the world, the one who helps us to keep going, even on our most difficult days and darkest nights.

## THE BIBLE STORY

Light is an important metaphor for Jesus in the Gospel of John. In his prologue (John 1:1-5), John uses light as a metaphor to show the hope made incarnate in Jesus Christ. The first words of this prologue may sound familiar to you: "In the beginning" (John 1:1). These three words also begin the story of creation: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth. . . . Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:1-4). It is helpful to note that God called both light and darkness *good*, a welcome affirmation in a society that generally associates *dark* and *darkness* with badness.

John's prologue squarely places Jesus in this first account of creation in Genesis. Jesus is the Word through which everything came into being. Jesus was in the beginning with God, and was God. In Jesus, Christians see a light that shines through the darkness and gives hope.

## CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Part of cognitive development is transitioning from the concrete thinking of a child to the abstract thinking of older youth and adults. This change generally happens in early- to mid-teen years. For some, equating the abstract concept of *hope* with the image of light may be hard to imagine. Depending on the age of your group, you may choose to select the more concrete activity options to help ground students' learning in this session.

## SESSION PREPARATION

- Use a different color marker from session 1 to write these phrases on the graffiti sheet for this session: Hope is light. / "I am the light of the world." / "In the beginning. . ."
- Depending on the options you choose:
  - "The Light Shines in the Darkness" (p. 15): Write questions on newsprint for the two teams to discuss.

# GETTING STARTED

- Copies of Resource Page 1 from session 1 (p. 11)
- If using during Advent: copies of Resource Page 2 from session 1 (p. 12), Advent wreath and candles (optional)


## OPENING RITUAL C

Welcome young people as they arrive. Check in briefly with each person. Invite youth to talk about examples of when they knew they were not alone since the last session. If you choose to include an Advent candle lighting ritual, do it here. Distribute copies of Resource Page 2 from session 1. Light the candle used in the last session and a second one. Leave them lit during the session. Invite a volunteer to read the leader part for Advent 2.

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 from session 1 and lead the opening litany. Collect the resource pages to be used in sessions 3 and 4.

## INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Prepared graffiti wall
- Internet-connected device
- Markers

 An alternative to having youth find stories and images on their smartphones is to provide magazines and newspapers and have them clip out images and headlines of hope and attach them to the graffiti wall.

## WHERE HOPE IS SEEN CT M C

Call attention to the graffiti wall where you have written phrases for this session. Read the new phrases aloud and encourage youth to pay attention to activities in the session that will reveal the significance of these phrases.

Show the YouTube video “‘Gospell’ Assembles to ‘Light Up the World’” ([bit.ly/FMLightUpWorld, 2:23](https://bit.ly/FMLightUpWorld,2:23)) and invite youth to pick out phrases they have heard from the Bible in the clip. Invite them to browse their phones to find images or headlines of news stories where they see hope in the world. Play the video again for lively background music as they are working.


Come back together and invite youth to write phrases or draw images on the graffiti sheet that reflect what they found. Use either black markers or the same color marker you used for this session. Invite youth to explain what they posted.

## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

- Copies of Resource Page 1
- Bibles
- Flashlights

## LET THERE BE LIGHT (GENESIS 1) D C

 For this and the following activity, if all youth have charged phones with flashlights, they could use them instead of flashlights. They can turn on the flashlight and keep it pressed to their leg, hiding the light, until the appropriate time.

Distribute Bibles to participants. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1–5, 31, while others follow along in their Bibles.

Distribute flashlights to all participants and copies of Resource Page 1. Invite volunteers who are willing to be animated in reading to take one of the speaking parts: Narrator, God, Helper 1 (Hildegard), and Helper 2 (Joan). Encourage the readers to really ham up their parts.

Dim the room. The four readers use their flashlights to read their parts. Tell other youth to be ready to turn on their flashlights when cued. Begin the reader's theater.

Compare the read presentation with the creation account in Genesis 1.

Ask:

- ➔ How does the skit reflect what you imagine happened at creation? How do the two scenes differ?
- ➔ What does it mean that, after God made "light" and "dark," they were each called good?
- ➔ What do you think is good about light? What is good about darkness?
- ➔ What do these two stories tell you about seeing hope?

## LIGHTING IT UP (JOHN 1:1–14)

CT QC

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- Bibles
  - Flashlights

Lead the youth in *lectio divina*. Explain this is a form of reading Scripture in which you listen closely to the verses read aloud and pay attention to the words or images that have meaning for you. Share that you will experience a modified version of this ancient spiritual formation practice.

In the first reading, we will simply listen. In the second and third readings, we will pay close attention to each word or phrase. Notice what stands out for you. In the final read-through, we will use flashlights to illuminate particular words.

Tell the youth to sit comfortably, close their eyes, and limit their distractions. Dim the room lights. An adult leader reads aloud John 1:1–14. Pause briefly after the reading.

Invite a youth to read the same text. Pause briefly after the reading and ask the youth to think silently about what stood out for them in the verses. Invite another young person to read the text. Pause again.

For the final reading, ask the youth to listen, turning on and off their flashlight each time they hear *Word* or *light*. Caution them to not shine their lights in people's eyes.

Invite youth to talk about the words or phrases from the passage that have meaning for them. Discuss:

- ➔ What do you think is significant about the words *Word* and *light* in this passage?
- ➔ Who could be the *light* and the *Word* in this passage?

## THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

AT C X

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- Bibles
  - Prepared newsprint

Point out that light is an important metaphor for Jesus in the Gospel of John. The first words of the Gospel read, "In the beginning" (John 1:1). These three words also begin the story of creation found in Genesis, the first book of the Bible: "*In the beginning*, when *God* created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1, emphasis added). The beginning of both books tie together the idea that God is with us, in both God's work in creation and the coming of Jesus.

Form two groups and have one group read John's prologue and the other read the Genesis passage. Each group will respond to the questions on newsprint prepared as follows:

Newsprint 1: Read John's prologue (John 1:1–14) and notice phrases or images that stand out to you.

- ➔ Where do you see hope in this passage?
- ➔ Why do you think John uses the metaphor of light?

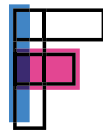
Newsprint 2: Read Genesis 1:1–5, 31 and notice phrases or images that stand out to you.

- ➔ Where do you see hope in this passage?
- ➔ Do you think God was surprised when God saw light for the first time? Why or why not?
- ➔ When has hope surprised you?

Bring the groups together to present their assigned passage and their responses to the questions. Ask:

- ➔ What is the connection between light in Genesis 1 and John 1?

Close discussion, noting: The image of light, both in the story of creation and also calling Jesus the light of the world, is meant to convey hope to us that God is present with us. We are not alone in the dark. God's light shines in the darkness.



## FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

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- Copies of Resource Page 2
  - Pens

### WISE WORDS ABOUT HOPE



Explain that, across centuries, Christian thinkers and leaders have wrestled with seeing and understanding hope. Many have written wise words to guide our understanding. Distribute copies of Resource Page 2 and pens. Have youth read the quotations and select one that helps them understand hope.

Invite each person to identify their selected quotation and describe what hope means in their chosen quotation. Ask:

- ➔ Where do you see hope in this quotation?
- ➔ What new insights about hope did you discover?

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- Internet-connected device

### HOLDING OTHERS IN THE LIGHT



Explain that the Religious Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers, often pray for others by “holding them in the light.” For this group, the practice can take many forms, including silently praying for a person by imagining the warm, gentle light of God's love surrounding them, rather than using words.

Have youth use internet-connected devices to read more about this Quaker practice ([bit.ly/FMHoldInLight](https://bit.ly/FMHoldInLight)).

In the description, the people describe images of holding people in the light in different ways:

- Holding people “in our hearts” or “in prayer”
- In the warm light of God's love
- A visual, bright light
- Wrapped in eagle's wings
- A light illuminating the whole person, including places of need

- ➔ Discuss which of these images hold meaning for the young people. Ask:
- ➔ How do these images help you see hope?
- ➔ Who might you consider “holding in the light” this week?

## SIGNS OF HOPE IN THE WORLD

CT C

Explain that many families and churches in the United States and around the world shared hope during the coronavirus pandemic by putting signs of hope in their windows, turning on outdoor lights, or lighting candles. These signs included messages like, “You are not alone.” In France, Christians and non-Christians lit candles in their windows to pray for essential workers and to honor those who had died from the virus.

- Invite youth to talk about where they saw hope displayed during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Tell about other of signs of hope in the world today.
- Tell about a time when someone or something served as a light during a difficult time.
- Tell how these experiences help to see hope.



## PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

### A LIGHT OF HOPE

QC CT AT X

Distribute slips of paper and pens. Ask youth to think of where they see darkness and pain in the world. They may also identify pain, grief, or struggle in their own lives. Write these on separate strips. Have them fold their paper strips and hold them.

Place the lit candle in the middle of the container. Ask a volunteer to read Isaiah 14:2. After the reading, have the youth respond: “Shine your light, O God. Shine your hope.”

Ask the youth to add their slips, one by one, into the container and repeat these words to themselves: “Shine your light, O God. Shine your hope.”

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- Bible
  - Strips of paper
  - Pens
  - Container like a bowl or box
  - Battery-operated candle

### SIGNS OF HOPE

CT A

Discuss with youth what they have seen, whether in person or on social media, as signs of hope.

Set out art materials. Invite youth to create colorful signs with hopeful messages and hang them in the windows of your church or homes. Consider writing, “You are loved,” “You are not alone,” or “You matter.” As you create these signs, pray for your neighbors and the people who will see them, especially those who might be struggling.

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- Half-sheets of poster board or card stock
  - Crayons
  - Colored chalk
  - Markers
  - Scissors

### CANDLE LIGHTING AND PRAYER

QC

In the Roman Catholic tradition, people can enter churches, light votive candles, and offer a prayer for themselves or others. This is a personal way of seeing hope through prayer and light.

Work together to set out battery-operated candles on a table. Dim the room lights and enter into a time of silence and prayer.

Tell youth to think about people in their lives: relatives, friends, themselves. Think about each of these people with hope. Think about prayers that can be offered for them.

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- Small, battery-operated candles

When individuals are ready, approach the table and light a candle for each person they want to pray for. Say a silent prayer for each person, then return to their seats and notice the flickering lights of prayers offered by their peers.

In closing, pray the Lord's Prayer together.



## FOLLOWING JESUS

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□ Flashlights

### CLOSING PRAYER



Challenge the youth to look for places where they see hope this week as they go into the world.

For your closing prayer, distribute flashlights and dim the room lights. As each youth names something they see that gives them hope, they turn on their flashlight. After each youth speaks, the adult leader will say, "I see hope." Close the prayer, saying, "Jesus is the Light of the World. Amen."

# Let There Be Light

*(Narrator turns off lights in room. The four readers use their flashlights for reading.)*

**Narrator:** God and God’s helpers were busy getting creation started. But it was only the first day and, as usual on anyone’s first day, things got off to a rocky start.

**God:** All right, y’all, who is here today? Let’s get started. It’s the first day of Creation and we have *lots* of work to do. Who is here?

**Helper 1:** Um, God, I’m here. Wait, what do I call you? Sir? Ma’am?

**God:** I’m all of that actually and everything in between. Just *God* is fine for now. My Jewish friends will call me this really important Hebrew word they aren’t supposed to say aloud, so they say, *Heshem*, which just means “the name.”

**Helper 1** (*excited and eager*): OK, so, God. Heshem, I’m Helper 1. I don’t have a name yet—*would love to have one by the way*—and I like long walks on big sandy areas. Are we creating those later? I love those. I’m brand new to existing, so I’m not sure what all of my hobbies are yet, but I’m excited to be here on the First Day . . . Ever . . . Oh, and as I’m a celestial helper, I am all the astrological signs.

**Helper 2:** Hi, God. I’m Joan. I named myself.

**God:** Um, OK. I usually do that, but that’s fine.

**Joan:** Sure, thanks! I’m Joan. I’m hoping we can create some things that swim, and some things that fly . . . but since we haven’t created sky or creatures yet, I guess first things first!

**God:** Yes. We’re doing order out of chaos here, Joan.

**Joan:** Got it! So I am a little nervous. It’s my first day . . . well, I guess it is *everyone’s* first day, it’s the **First Day** of Creation. So here I am. I don’t want to screw things up, so I’m ready to learn but also, am I really ready? I just don’t know what to do with my hands . . . what do I do with my hands. . . ? (*gestures wildly and voice trails off*)

**God:** OK, OK. So Helper 1, you’re going to be known as Hildegard. I have some big plans for someone later with that name.

**Hildegard:** Sounds good! Ready to go, boss!

**God:** All right, so you see this formless void here? And how it’s just all darkness right now . . . well, darkness and some waters?

**Joan & Hildegard:** Yes!

**God:** I’m going to create a thing called *light*.

**Joan:** God, I’m loving the concept. But what is light?

**God:** It’s going to be this bright thing, so everyone can see.

**Hildegard:** God, don’t want to get in the way here, but there is no *everyone*.

**God:** (*annoyed*) Yes, I know. Just . . . give it a few days and it will all make sense.

**Joan:** OK. So, what do you need here?

**God:** Can you send a wind over those waters?

**Joan:** On it!

**Hildegard:** God! God! What can I do?

**God:** Just hang on, I have some other projects for you to do.

**God:** And . . . Let there be LIGHT!

*(Narrator cues other youth to turn on flashlights.)*

**Joan & Hildegard:** Oooooooooo!

**God:** Yeah. This is good. The light will be called *Day* and the darkness will be called *Night*. It’s good. I like what we have done here. All right, well, that looks good, let’s call it a day. (*laughs*) Oh, the first pun of creation . . . that was a good one!

**Joan & Hildegard:** Wait!

**Hildegard:** That’s it? I thought we had more to do?

**God:** Nope, that’s good enough for the first day. Y’all get some rest. It’s going to be an intense week. (*leaves Joan and Hildegard to talk among themselves*)

**Joan** (*grumbling to Hildegard*): Should have signed up for the sixth day. I hear that one is going to be the best. Ugh.

**Hildegard:** (*disappointed*) Ugh. Just HAD to be the first one to sign up on the sign-up sheet. So stupid! OK, well, I guess we did some stuff. (*shrugs*) I wonder what’s on for tomorrow!

## Wise Words

Across centuries, Christian thinkers and leaders have wrestled with seeing and understanding hope. Many have written wise words to guide our understanding.

Instructions: Read the quotations and select one that helps you understand *hope*. Consider:

- ➔ Where do you see hope in this quotation?
- ➔ What new insights about hope do you discover?

**Psalms 23** is a well-known and often-quoted psalm from the Bible's Hebrew Scriptures. It is one that many turn to when seeking hope, support, or assurance.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

**Mystic Julian of Norwich** (1342–1416) shows us how to see hope by reminding us that God is present in the midst of darkness. Julian lived in the fourteenth century when the death of thousands from illness, war, and the plague surrounded her. She knew what it meant to live in a time of darkness. Yet she was anchored in the hope and presence of God.

Jesus wants us to understand four things: First, that He Himself is our ground, the soil from which we grow, the foundation on which we are built. Second, that He guards us and keeps us safe when we are in the midst of sin, when our own choices allow our enemies to surround us, when we do not even realize our own need. Third, that He guards us with care and kindness, showing us where we have gone astray. And fourth, that His presence is always with us, and His loving gaze never wavers, for He wants us to turn back to Him and become united with Him in love, as He is with us.

—Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*<sup>1</sup>

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu** (b. 1931), who has known the hopelessness of South African apartheid, professes:

Hope is being able to see there is light despite all of the darkness.

You see it wonderfully when you fly and the sky is overcast.

Sometimes you forget that just beyond the clouds the sun is shining.

—Desmond Tutu, *The New York Times Magazine*<sup>2</sup>

- ➔ What is helpful in calling light and dark *good* in God's creation?
- ➔ What limitations arise when we think that light and lightness are good or positive, and dark and darkness are bad or negative?
- ➔ What harm comes of thinking of dark and darkness in negative terms? How can we reduce the harm?

1. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing, Introduction: A.C. Spearing (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 38.

2. Archbishop Desmond Tutu in an interview in *The New York Times Magazine*, March 4, 2010. Deborah Solomon reporting. [www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07fob-q4-t.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07fob-q4-t.html)