



ALIVE! BIBLE STUDY
STUDY AND REFLECTION GUIDE FOR SESSION 6
“FORGIVENESS and RECONCILIATION/HOPE and JOY”
(1 Peter 3:10 – 16; Isaiah 40:28-31)

Objectives:

- To encourage attitudes and behaviors that will bring hope and joy to the Christmas season as you further your journey in the ALIVE! Initiative
- To learn the meaning of the Advent season in the Christian church and the four themes of the season and their relationship to your participation in ALIVE!
- To explore why friends and family members may fear your engagement in ALIVE!
- To grasp the Christ-centered behaviors that project love, peace, joy, and hope to others who may be struggling with your new attitude about food and exercise.

INTRODUCTION:

The Christmas season is upon us. On the Christian church calendar for 2014, it is the Advent season, November 30th through Christmas Eve, December 24th. **The word Advent is derived from the Latin word “adventus” which means “coming.” It is a season in which Christians rejoice with expectation, preparation, and waiting for the birthday of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ over 2000 years ago. The Advent season is a time of celebrating new life, new beginnings, and new hope.**

There is a theme for each of the four Sundays of Advent; they are Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. It is the tradition in many churches and in some Christian homes that a Christmas wreath with five candles is placed at a prominent place near the dais/altar at church and in a dominant place in the family home where a wreath is placed on a table with four or five candles are placed in the center. A candle is lit on the first Sunday of Advent with a subsequent candle lit each additional Sunday including the Sunday before Christmas. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning. With the lighting of each candle there is a theme, a scripture, and a prayer offered. These themes of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace will be for foci of our Session 6 and 7 Study and Reflection.

You may wonder what the Advent themes have to do with ALIVE! Program. **When you have these four spiritual gifts in your heart, your mind, and your spirit, you are well armed for the spiritual discipline you need to push past your barriers to claim health and well-being for yourself.** In Session 5 you learned about the pitfalls that can occur during the festive season between Thanksgiving and the New Year.

In Sessions 6 and 7 you will look at what behaviors are needed to gain the attitudes and spirit that will help to build the discipline you need to sustain your resolve for better nutrition and movement through the holiday season. These attitudes and behaviors may make you a light for others to see as well, especially for those who are new in Christ or who are

looking to you to see if the Christian walk is what they can embrace. For example, people who have not grown up in church may have a worldly attitude that has not served them well. They may make cutting remarks or try to minimize your joy. When you know what you know, that Jesus, who came from God, who together with the Creator God is all wisdom and rules over all, then you don't have anything to prove. When you rest in the sweet assurance of God with you, of Jesus as your Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit of God in you, then you need not fear their haughty looks or their mean-spirited remarks about you. You can speak softly to them and love them despite their unknowing ways. **When you walk in the light of Christ, you know Who it is that pulled you out of the darkness of sin and earthly pleasures that were life-taking, you can smile or stand silently because you know that God knows the truth and will bring all that is hidden into the light in due time.**

Session 6 is a study of HOPE and JOY. Hope and trust that what Peter tells the churches in Asia Minor through this letter can resonate with the Spirit of God in you and bring you joy beyond your understanding. Walk, speak, and behave with hope and joy as you walk with others through this Advent season into New Life that starts with the birth of Jesus the Christ from eternity into humanity. To God be the glory!

BACKGROUND for 1 PETER 3:10-16:

The epistle/letter of 1 Peter is not written to one church or to one person as many of Paul's letters were. Rather, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, Jude, and then the Book of Revelation, which was sent to the seven churches in Asia. Many biblical scholars suggest that 1 Peter was not written by Peter, the fisherman and apostle of Jesus. Peter was fluent in Hebrew or Aramaic but not Greek. Scholars suggest that the Greek language in 1 Peter is too sophisticated and schooled for the fisherman from Galilee. **It is suggested that followers of Peter wrote these in honor of Peter as their teacher, and to assure that his teachings were passed along to the churches in Asia Minor.** Because Paul's letters to the churches often discussed the Jewish and Gentile theological issues, while 1 Peter does not seem to contain any of the controversy or concerns noted in Paul's letters, it is suggested by biblical scholars that that 1 Peter was written at least in the **last** quarter of the 1st century after the fall of Jerusalem.¹

The First Letter of Peter to the churches in Asia Minor is a letter of encouragement that brings strength and hope to the new followers of Jesus Christ. He encourages them to hold onto Godly actions and attitudes so that they may be found faultless before the God of their creation. With Jesus as their model for how to live and care for one another, they will have the hope and joy, forgiveness and reconciliation that would bring hope to others and broaden their sphere of people living in the New Life that was brought through the birth, death, and

¹ *The Interpreter's Study Bible (NRSV with Apocrypha)*, Abington Press, Nashville, 2003, The Introduction of The First Letter of Peter, Senior, Donald. Professor of New Testament Studies/President, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL, p. 2181

resurrection of the Savior that is Jesus the Christ. May you experience a deeper understanding of hope and joy as you embrace a healthier life and as you study and reflect on the passages chosen for this session.

STUDY AND REFLECTION ON 1 PETER 3:10-16

- **1 Peter 3:10-12 – Forgiveness and Reconciliation -- Jesus was a reconciler. He reconciled all of humanity to the God of all creation by his death on the cross. Likewise, as a follower of Jesus Christ, it is important that you walk and act a certain way so that you, too, will be a reconciler in the name of Jesus Christ. This is particularly important during the holiday season** because family and dear friends gather to celebrate, have food and libations, remember old times, and get encouragement for the future. It would be nice if every gathering was like that, but you may have experienced in your family or in the family of someone who confides in you, that **this can also be a very difficult time for families and loved ones when there is unresolved hurt, pain, and disenfranchisement of family members.** You, just as the members of the early churches, cannot change the mean and degrading or mean-spirited words or actions that have already come from someone's mouth. Peter, however, wants to encourage the new Christians to stand in the righteousness that is found in a loving, forgiving, hopeful way of life Jesus offers. Likewise, people in your family may look to you for consolation and reconciliation since they know that you are becoming a stronger believer in the way, truth, and life that Jesus taught.

The other side of that same coin is that you may be the one ridiculed because those close to you do not understand or have not accepted your new conquest for a more abundant, healthier lifestyle. No one likes to be ridiculed when they know that what they are doing is life-giving and life-sustaining. Likewise, as you are getting used to new ways of fixing your favorite meals and trying new and healthy recipes, nay-sayers may tease you and recall for you all of the times before you wanted to make life changes and fell back into old patterns of behavior. Consider this, however: **when you walk humbly with your Lord, you need not fear what others say or think about you because you are doing God's will for your life. Your example may help someone else to claim their abundant life as well.**

- **If, however, any part of what is said has some truth in it,** examine yourself and develop the strategy necessary to prevent yourself from falling back into old patterns of behavior that did not serve you well. **Make the necessary changes you need, even, or especially if, their truth hurt your ego or pride. It takes humility and wanting to live a life that approaches the worthiness of the price Christ paid to ransom you from Satan.** Honor God with your humility and your discipline to make the changes you know are yours to make.
- If none of what they say is true, simply stay on your path.
- If this friend or family member continues to be non-supportive by saying very negative things about you or your approach to your new life, ask someone who is

supporting you to meet with you and that family member/friend to learn why he or she is so negative about your new stance on life. Often there is simply a misunderstanding of your motivation for changing. If unkind words, bad attitudes, or jealousy persists on his or her part, however, then you may consider finding friends who are better yoked with you for the life journey you are now pursuing.

- **1 Peter 3:13-14 – “Do not fear what they fear...” There will be friendships you will not want to lose as you work on your new way of abundant living.**
 - You may have already experienced that the moment you decided to change your behavior to live more abundantly, to mend a broken relationship, or to eat using the “Plate of Life” as your guide to portion sizes, the negative forces get busy and the wagging tongues of the nay-sayers start their mission to derail your efforts. The reasons for these happenings may be many:
 - **When you change the way you prepare your food, others will reel** because the texture and taste of your nutritious recipes are different from what they are accustomed. **Remember, they may not have decided yet that better care of their temples of God’s Spirit is what they need. They may feel that you will force your changes on them.**
 - **When you change and start to have more energy, they may fear the loss of your friendship because they cannot keep up with your new energy level.** It will be important to still make time for them.
 - **They may fear the loss of your friendship because it might be the end of the Friday night fish fry, French fries, and coleslaw – or the triple cheese and sausage pizza -- you always shared** as you watch movies together after a hard week of working. It will be important to appreciate their concern and let them know that *your relationship is so much more than what you eat.* **Make movie or game night a “Bring Your Own Plate” occasion with whatever each of you now chooses to eat, and still enjoy the feast and the movies together.** Show that it is the relationship, not the food that matters.
- **1 Peter 3:15-16 – Hope and Joy -- Let the spirit of God in you that is lifting you to new understandings and energy uplift and encourage others.** Call out their strengths and gifts so that they appreciate their own strengths and love themselves better. They, in turn, will then be able to appreciate what good things are happening through and to you as your energy and health improve. **When asked, with glad heart and sensitivity to those to whom you are speaking, share your hope for better health and new energy. For those who do not share your joy, bless them in your heart anyway.** When you go into your closet to pray (Matthew 6:6), pray that through their experience of seeing your improved health, **their negativity will be transformed into a positive attitude that supports a new life of health for them.** Be the hope and joy that will bring celebration to those you love this holiday season.

BACKGROUND for ISAIAH 40:28-31

Scholars' research suggests that the Book of Isaiah is written in three different oracles by different authors who are speaking primarily to the Jews living in the province of Judah, which includes the city of Jerusalem. According to Dr. Susan Ackerman, Associate Professor of Religion at Dartmouth College, **the first oracle (Isaiah, chapters 1-23 and 28-33)** was written concerning the attack of the kings of Israel's Northern Kingdom and of Aram (Syria), on the Southern region of Judah around c.735-732 BCE. The writer encourages King Ahaz, Judah's king, to put his trust in the Lord and not to form alliances with the powerful Assyrians against other mutual enemies. Isaiah asserts that God has dominion over Judah and the king must not put his trust in any other source. Later, between c. 715 and 711 BCE, Isaiah advised King Ahaz "not to get involved in the anti-Assyrian revolts of other vassal states" but to put his faith in God to protect Jerusalem. Finally, King Hezekiah did not follow the advice of Isaiah, and led a rebellion against Assyria c.705-701 BCE and was defeated. Although Assyria ravaged Judah, the Assyrians withdrew from the region before taking Jerusalem, which supported Isaiah's proclamation of God's protection of Jerusalem, the holy city.²

The pericope from Isaiah 40:38-41 is considered to be a part of **the second oracle (Isaiah, chapters 34-35 and 40-55)**. It is believed that this oracle dates from "c.540 BCE about 45 years after the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire and the subsequent deportation of many Israelites to Babylon."³ In this second oracle, the prophet of this oracle makes clear in a very bold fashion that God is God alone and that the God of the Israelites is indeed the Creator of all things. This Isaiah further asserts that even though the Jews are in exile, they will not be in exile long, and their return to Jerusalem will be a triumphant one. Their God is still seen as compassionate and faithful in bringing "imminent redemption both of Israel and the nations."⁴

Third Isaiah is said to be the author of Isaiah chapters 24-27 and 56-66. This is a more pessimistic Isaiah who witnessed the returnees after the exile in c.537 BCE. What this Isaiah witnessed is the hardship that the people had as they returned. Many felt that God had forsaken them and they prayed for God's compassionate and merciful restoration. (*Recall Nehemiah and his work to restore the wall and gates of Jerusalem in Nehemiah 1:4-2:20.*) This Isaiah, thought to be a single author or an "older and disillusioned Second Isaiah," even though he witnessed the despair of the people, still believed God to be both sovereign of the cosmos and compassionate regarding Israel.⁵

² The New Interpreter's Study Bible (NRSV with Apocrypha), Abington Press, Nashville, 2003, Ackerman, Susan, "Isaiah", p. 955

³ Ibid, p. 955

⁴ Ibid, p. 956

⁵ Ibid, p. 956

STUDY AND REFLECTION ON ISAIAH 40:28-31

Second Isaiah believed that God would soon return those in exile in Assyria to **Jerusalem**. The entire Chapter 40 is filled with affirmations about the Creator God and God's power, and God's compassion for His people -- the flocks of His fields: *"He tends his flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."* (Isaiah 40:11)

- **Is. 40: 28** – *"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God..."* It seems that Isaiah is saying, "Yes, I know that you are discouraged and feel that God has forsaken you because of your trials, but to not give up hope! He is all powerful and wise. We cannot understand His ways, yet He has not grown tired or weary. Remember the God who called us by name as His chosen people. He is the everlasting God and has not forsaken you."

How often have you felt forsaken by God – and others – as you pursue something good and life-giving for yourself? Look around at the others in your Bible study. Perhaps there are other sojourners who would like to have someone along with them for the journey and who understands the times of loneliness and forsakenness that you may be feeling. Just as those in exile held onto each other to support one another, perhaps there are those in your study group who would like a partner so that you can remind each other of God's ever presence and support for your ALIVE! goals for your new abundant life.

- **Is. 40:29** – God is your source of strength, energy, and power as you make your way to your new day of improved health and stamina. It is amazing how just saying the name "Jesus" can decrease your feelings of stress and your sense of being alone and lonely. God breathed into your body, your temple of God's Spirit, the will to do what must be done to achieve your ALIVE! goals and other goals. Jesus came to show you that you can depend on him for support – *"Come to me all you are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."* (Matt. 11:28), and God's Holy Spirit is the wisdom and discerner for what you must do. It is so helpful to learn to depend on your Holy Three-In-One! When you get weary and things don't seem to be going well, turn to one of the other sojourners on the journey and ask for prayer or a word of encouragement. You are not meant to be on this journey by yourself.
- **Is. 40:30** – The victory is not necessarily to the young and strong for they, too, get weary and stumble.
- **Is. 40:31** – **Here in lies the wonderful encouragement and the truth so powerfully stated!** *"...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength."* A great burden will be lifted from the returnees with this hope. They will feel light, as though they could fly. They will be able to do what must be done and won't feel so weary because they are keeping their eyes on the goal. They will feel stronger with every step rather than feel worn out. Have you experienced this yet as you explore new vegetables, increase the number of

vegetables you are eating, or increase physical activity? If you are consistent, have you noticed your enjoyment of them increasing? Remember, you are *“fearfully and wonderfully made”* (Psalm 139:14). **The more you practice the discipline of healthy behaviors and keep the hope, the more determined you will become. Sharing your triumphs and slips with your other sojourners will help to build your stamina and resolve to reach your goals.** Have you yet picked someone inside the group to partner with for encouragement?

In summary, this particular scripture of Isaiah 40:28-31 is included for your discussion because it speaks so clearly to the **hope and consequent joy that comes when you put your hope in the Lord.** Your strength, discipline, courage, and humility will be bolstered and you will find yourself feeling lighter and stronger because you know the source of all help and health. **The more you practice your new, healthy behaviors, the more you will learn that you can overcome the temptations that are not life-giving to you. You will appreciate afresh how fearfully and wonderfully you are made and rejoice that you have said “yes” to the new abundant life. With this new hope and joy you will learn how to release love and hope to others as they see what “new thing” God is doing in and through you. Rejoice!**

REFLECTION:

Identify two or three people with whom you would like to continue a close relationship with for the remainder of your participation in the ALIVE! program. What about your relationship might change because you are embracing your ALIVE! goals for abundant life through healthy behaviors? What will you need to do to keep the relationship viable and receive the support that you need during this time of your personal transformation? How will you help each of them to understand that you are not trying to force any changes on them but that, if they want information, you are happy to share with them what you are doing? Who in your ALIVE! group might be a good person(s) for you to partner with to mutually support your journey?

CLASS DISCUSSION (Small groups of 2 or 3 participants)

1. What is your biggest concern going into the holidays with your ALIVE! goals in mind?
2. Have you decided how you are going to handle negative remarks about your new venture in vegetables and the “Plate of Life?”
3. How will you explain this new glow you have because you are treating your “temple” of God’s Spirit with more respect by the way you are caring for it?
4. How easy or difficult is it to ask someone to partner in support of your and their ALIVE! goals? What makes it so?
5. What do you hope for those you love regarding healthy behaviors? How can you support this hope without infringing on their right to their free will for their lives?

FEEDBACK FROM SMALL GROUPS

CLOSING REMARKS AND PRAYER



ALIVE! BIBLE STUDY SERIES
Scriptures for Session 6

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

1 Peter 3:10-16 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁰ For, “Whoever would love life
and see good days

must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful speech.

¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil”

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

HOPE AND JOY

Isaiah 40:28-31 New International Version (NIV)

²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.