

ZONDERVAN

*Hope for Humanity Guidebook*

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

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*Written by Matthew Sleeth, Nancy Sleeth, and Michael Colletto.*

*Edited by Michael Colletto.*

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# ***Session 12***

# ***Hope***

# Session Summary

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“ [T]hose 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. ”

—Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)

When Christians talk about “going green” or “saving the planet,” they bring something unique to the discussion: hope. Not just hope for a better future someday in heaven, but hope for today through the power of God’s Holy Spirit at work in His church. We hope and pray for a better world, and then we act as if it will become a reality. Combine faith, hope, and love, and things get done. Change happens.

The real proof of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is its power to change lives.

As believers in Christ, we are in the life business—life today, life tomorrow, and life the next day. Yes, at the resurrection you will get a new body. Yes, one day there will be a new earth. But these vessels and this planet are not disposable or worthless. We aren’t supposed to do just anything we want to them; we are God’s assigned caretakers.

As imperfect as we humans are at the practice of faith, hope, and love, we have all experienced their ability to transform us. Our theology and, more importantly, our relationship with Jesus, drives us to care for our Father’s planet and all His children.

The body of Christ was redeemed to be the hands and feet of God at work in the world, and where the hands and feet of God are at work, there is hope for creation and for all of humanity.

# Reflections on Hope

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*One of my favorite children's books is The Little Engine That Could. The story is about a big train that breaks down while carrying a load of toys and other good things to children who live on the other side of a mountain. The broken-down engine asks several other passing trains for help, but they are either unable or unwilling. Finally, he sees a tiny blue engine, and asks that (much smaller) engine if he'll pull the shipment of good things to the children on the other side of the mountain. The little train looks up at that huge mountain and the heavy shipment, and isn't sure he's up to the task. But finally he decides to give it a go. And all the way up the hill, our little hero puffs, "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can."*

*Like that little train, we may feel like there's a huge mountain standing between us and the greener, cleaner world we long for. But Jesus had a few words for us about mountains. In Matthew 17:20, He says, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." With faith in God, nothing is impossible.*

*Living a green life is within the reach of every one of us. I think you can. God thinks you can. When the children from the next "valley"—from the next generation—see us and the world we pass on to them, my hope is that they'll see a generation that was green. My hope is that they'll see a generation that took its choices seriously, that placed its faith in God, and found the strength to climb the highest mountain. My hope is that they'll see a little generation that did.*

**—Emma Sleeth, daughter of Matthew and Nancy**

Adapted with permission from *It's Easy Being Green* (Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 2007)

# Session Notes: Hope

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As you watch the final session film, **Hope**, use the following page to jot down notes, thoughts, and questions.

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# Hope Begins with a Changed Heart

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1

*“We see highways that get wider, more crowded, and more numerous. There are fewer and fewer flocks of birds in the sky. And if that doesn’t get you down, just listen to predictions about the world’s dwindling rainforests or freshwater supplies. All of this can be overwhelming—it can be depressing.”*

—Dr. Matthew Sleeth

Hope isn’t the first reaction most people have when considering the world’s problems. Do the world’s environmental problems seem overwhelming to you? How do you typically react when problems seem overwhelming? How does hope change your attitude?

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2

Dr. Sleeth suggests that, as Christians, “We hope and pray for a better world, and then we act as if it will become a reality.” Why are hope and faith so crucial to the environmental movement? What environmental changes do you hope and pray for? Do you act as if they will become a reality? Explain.

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Dr. Sleeth states: “Combine faith, hope and love, and things get done. Change happens.” Give an example of a situation that seemed hopeless, but when God and/or His people stepped in, change happened.

3

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**“** *The power of the Bible doesn't lie in its ability to be proven scientifically, logically, or archaeologically. The real proof of the gospel is its power to change lives.* **”**

—*Dr. Matthew Sleeth*

How could changing our lives to take better care of the environment serve as a witness for the gospel?

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5

Dr. Sleeth suggests “the church brings unique contributions to creation care.” What contributions can the church bring to resolving environmental problems?

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6

Dr. Sleeth is often asked, “How do we move from worrying about problems to being part of the solution? How can we go from caring about God’s creation to doing something to help?” How would you respond? How do we move from faith to action?

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**“** *You will get a new body—and the earth will be renewed. But these vessels are not disposable or worthless. We aren't supposed to do just anything we want to them.* **”**

—Dr. Matthew Sleeth

In what sense do we act as if our bodies are disposable? In what sense do we act as if the earth is disposable? Why must we be good stewards of both?

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**“** *During our time on earth, we act as the body of Christ, as the hands and feet of life on the planet. If it means calling 911 when someone is having a heart attack, we should help. If it means feeding the hungry or clothing the naked, we do it. If it means cleaning up the water so the fish don't have mercury or dioxin, the body of Christ is called to action.* **”**

—Dr. Matthew Sleeth

In what sense is caring for the planet intertwined with our call to feed the hungry and care for the poor? If we would call 911 to save *a* life, why aren't we (metaphorically) calling 911 to save *all* life?

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9

What environmental legacy are you leaving for your grandchildren? What current actions can bring hope to future generations?

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**“** *We shall awaken from our dullness and rise vigorously toward justice. If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion.* **”**

—*Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179)*

What factors have contributed to our “dullness” toward the environment?  
 How can the church help us awaken and “rise vigorously toward justice”?  
 How can “falling in love with creation deeper and deeper” help us  
 “respond to its endangerment with passion”?

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**“** *In a time of ecological emergency, the church can offer to the world a hope that is rooted in the power of God to bring new life into all that has been created.* **”**

—*Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (1945– ), Ecology and Life*

How can you help “bring new life into all that has been created”?