



Hoop

Leven in een onzekere wereld
IFES Jaarthema 2020-2021



Surprised by hope

Bible study 1 of 5 with the IFES-annual theme

Small group leader version

'If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.' (Seneca)

'People from every walk of life – doctors, academics, actors, politicians, business professionals, athletes, and plumbers – often struggle to achieve a higher income, more recognition or a certain degree of professional competence, only to find that their drive to achieve their goal blinded them to the things that really mattered most and now are gone.' (Stephen R. Covey, The 7 habits of highly effective people, 98)

'It's no good falling back into the tired split-level world where some people believe in 'evangelism' in terms of 'saving souls for a timeless eternity' and other people believe in 'mission' in terms of 'working for justice, peace and hope in the present world'. (...) If we want a 'mission-shaped church', what we need is a hope-shaped mission.' (Tom Wright, Surprised by Hope, 206)

A bible study by

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Introduction

To study is to invest in the future. By working hard we wish to ensure a good future. Success seems feasible. But no matter how well we plan – the future remains uncertain. There are many things that we do not control. Will I find nice work? A partner? Will my life be a success? Even greater and more threatening is the uncertainty in the world: will we be able to avert a climate catastrophe? What will happen to migrations flows? Can terrorism be stopped?

Where will it end? Will the world be okay? And I? Does it matter what I do? What do I wake up for?

These are deep questions about the future. But also about the meaning of life today. The future and the meaning of life are interrelated. These questions are as old as humanity, yet still very much alive in our time. Is life going somewhere? Does it actually make sense? Or is life some sort of big joke and we just have to make the most of it?

At the beginning of our era the apostle Paul writes a letter to a small group of people who have been overcome with *hope*. A surprising hopeful story about the world has turned their lives upside down.

Can we, while the optimism in our time seems to dwindle, like them be surprised by hope?

Connected to the annual theme of IFES Netherlands in 2020-2021 (Hope: life in an uncertain world) five bible studies will be released. This is part one of this mini series. The other bible studies are about “Hope in adversity” (part 2), “Hope for the world” (part 3), “Am I saved?” (part 4) and “And what about my neighbor?” (part 5).

Bible: 1 Peter 1:3-9

(New International Version)

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1. Prayer in C

Consciously or unconsciously we all believe (whether you are a believer or not) in a certain 'story' about the world and about life. This 'story' answers questions like: where do we come from? where are we going? and what is the purpose of life?

- Together watch the clip of *Prayer in C* by Robin Shultz. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fio9Z5iUg> Lyrics here below:

*Yeah, you never said a word
You didn't send me no letter
Don't think I could forgive you
See our world is slowly dying
I'm not wasting no more time
Don't think I could believe you*

*And see the children are starving
And their houses were destroyed
Don't think they could forgive you

Hey, when seas will cover lands
And when men will be no more
Don't think you can forgive you*

*Yeah, our hands will get more
wrinkled
And our hair will be grey
Don't think I could forgive you*

*Yeah when there'll just be silence
And when life will be over
Don't think you will forgive you*

- What are the lyrics of the song about?

In the Bible 'Yahweh' is an important name for God. The song starts with 'Yeah', which sounds like an abbreviation of Yahweh. Because the song is also titled '*Prayer in C*', it can be read as a sort of complaint to God. As such, it is a bitter complaint about the suffering in life, and the mortality of everything. 'When seas will cover lands and when men will be no more. Don't think we could forgive you! And when there'll just be silence and when life will be over, don't think you can forgive you...'

- Which emotions do you hear/taste/see in the song and in the clip?
- What is the 'story' we live in according to this song?

It is a story without hope. Finally everything will come to a dead end. The lyrics are quite depressing. The clip displays a sort of gloomy cheerfulness. The young people have painted their faces with bright colours, yet it are skulls. They skateboard and party, but perhaps rather to forget death than out of pure joy.

2. Meaningless

The 'story' of *Prayer in C* is a story without hope. Finally everything will come to a dead end. Our whole life plays out on this tiny planet in an arbitrary far corner of the universe and will once be forgotten. Everyone who has once lived will perish, after that our whole solar system will too when the sun burns out and finally even the whole universe when – as scientists think now – it will implode. Everything you love, everyone you love, everything you will ever strive for, everything you cherish, every memory, every kiss and hug, every smile and every tear, everything you wake up for in the morning. All of that will be lost with the death of yourself and then of all the people who still remember you.

- Get an A4 and some coloured pencils or markers. Take a few minutes in silence and draw what this worldview of *Prayer in C* evokes in you. A worldview without hope. Don't think too long about what you want to draw but follow your feelings/intuition (right hemisphere). Afterwards discuss what you have drawn. What do you see? What kind of feeling does it express?
- To what extent do you recognize this worldview?

Peter, of whom we just read a fragment, writes to a group of people who have made a great transition. From a life without hope, to a life full of hope (verse 3). The life they *had* was according to Peter 'empty' (meaningless):

'For you know (...) that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors (...)' (vers 18)

- What does that mean 'the empty way of life' or when is a life meaningless? How do you feel that? Do you recognize that in moments?

3. Optimism and hope

When we experience life truly as meaningless something goes wrong. We become depressed or reckless or no longer dare to connect with people.

That is why we *have to be* optimistic, according to all kinds of people. Rob Wijnberg, for example, argued that human being should remain optimistic "in order not to be terrorised permanently by the realization that we are¹ mortal.". According to Wijnberg, what we need is a story for the future, a new optimism. A view of the world, making us see and believe again how it can be better. Because if we as human beings can believe that things will be *better* here on earth, that will bring meaning to life and dispel the fear of our mortality.

But, in a sense, this kind of optimism is a form of self-deception. Of course, we can be optimistic about all kinds of developments, but *finally* – when we zoom out – it still stands that death will end everything.

¹ A translation of: "Om niet permanent geterroriseerd te worden door [het] besef [dat we sterfelijk zijn]." <https://decorrespondent.nl/5801/kerstessay-waarom-onze-politiek-geregeerd-wordt-door-doodsangst/148679630-5e7b4434>

The Christian attitude looks like optimism. Yet it is different. In his letter, Peter does not talk about optimism, but about hope: 'into a living **hope**' (verse 3).

- What is hope? Why is it different from optimism?

Optimism is based on the confidence that we as humans can make the world into a 'heaven on earth' ourselves. Hope is not based on human possibilities, but on God's promises. Hope is based on the confidence that God can and will do what is impossible in human terms. Hope comes 'from outside', it is 'aroused', as it were. Hope is able to persevere even when everything seems to be lost, because it is not based on the circumstances.

4. Hope for there or hope for here?

What does Peter mean when he speaks about 'into a living hope'/living in hope'?

This hope has something to do with heaven. See verse 4 and 5:

*This inheritance is kept in **heaven** for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

An 'inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade' is kept for us in heaven. Does Peter mean with this that it is our hope that we will go to heaven later, away from the earth, to receive our inheritance?

No! In the bible's worldview heaven is not a place far away. Nor primarily a place we go to after we die. Heaven was for them the place where God is, very close, right above the clouds, above the 'celestial dome'. As such, Peter's hope is not concerned with an 'escape' from this world to heaven, but

If heaven is not our final destination, where are the dead then? They are 'with Christ' (Fil. 1:23). Which is in heaven, because that is where Christ is. But that is not the final destination. It is a kind of intermediate stop. Awaiting the moment that heaven and earth are reunited, the dead will rise (1 Cor. 15) and we can live on the new earth with a new and glorified body (Rev. 21)

with the revelation of what is currently 'concealed' in heaven. The word 'revelations' plays a key role in his letter (1:12, 13; 4:13; 5:1). It means something like: revealing what is hidden.² This is the image: the 'cloth' between heaven and earth will be 'folded away' soon, and then we will see Jesus as he is: sitting at the right hand of God, glorified, king of everything.

- Together, watch the video *Heaven & Earth* by *The Bible Project* on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy2A0IK6C5k>. In this video the same is explained in a different way.

For more background information about *The Bible Project*, see: <https://thebibleproject.com/about/>

- What do you notice? What is new to you?

The video describes how the biblical hope is focused on the uniting of heaven and earth (Rev. 21:10,22). That is the renewal of the earth.

² The same word but in opposite form is used in the word 'cover-up', 1Pe2:16, and the phrase 'love covers over a multitude of sins', 1Pe4:8.

Jesus (Mat. 19:28), Peter (Acts 3:21) and Paul (Rom. 8:21) also spoke about this. Thus, that is hope for *this* world. In the end we are not going to heaven, but heaven comes here. We are not going to Jesus, but Jesus comes here.

Not convinced? Then discuss the annex together.

5. Hopeful living

To live in this greater story of hope impacts your life/way of living. Further on in the letter Peter writes: '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.' (1 Pe. 3:15)

Life in hope is something of our heart ('honor him with your whole heart'). Yet at the same time it becomes visible on the outside (in our actions). Because apparently people can see it, which makes them ask: "hey, where does this hope, that you have, come from?"

- But how does that become visible? And in what?

Divide the following fragments from the letter over three small groups. Each set of texts revolves around a specific theme. Answer the following two questions, first for yourself and then, when everyone is finished, discuss it in the group:

(a) What kind of behaviour or attitude to life does Peter encourage here?

(b) How does that have to do with (living in) hope?

1. 1:13-21, 2:1-6, 3:13-16; 4:3
2. 1:22-24; 3:8-12; 4:7-11
3. 2:13-3:7; 5:1-7

These set of texts revolves around the following themes:

1. 1:13-21, 2:1-6, 3:13-16; 4:3 (“holy” lifestyle, especially in the eyes of non-believers, no longer participating in debauchery. They will look surprised, but ask you “to give the reason for the hope that you have”)
2. 1:22-24; 3:8-12; 4:7-11 (loving one another as brothers and sisters, living united, hospitable, dedicating and using one’s gifts.)
3. 2:13-3:7; 5:1-7 (dealing with authority; Christ as supreme Lord, and out of serving Christ a life in freedom, expressed in humbly serving all kinds of “earthly” authorities in the culture at the time; emperor, master (of the slave), husband (of the wife). Knowing that Christ, in the end, sees everything, that he supports and will judge and reward honestly. As such suffering is transformed into a possibility to show extraordinary love, as Christ did.)

- To which extend do you live the kind of life that Peter encourages? Are there things you would do differently if more aware of that future?
- How would you be able to move forward in this? And what do you need from others to make this possible?

Close with a prayer. Pray together that, like those first Christians, you may (again and again) live in hope. Especially pray for one another, for the situations in your life which make you hopeless. (That could be anything; a setback in your studies, mental illness, the loss of a loved one, etc.) In the following bible studies we will look more into how God wants to give us hope, especially in these kind of difficult situations.

Annex: Not convinced?

The idea that Christians do not hope for a place in heaven (far from here), but for the 'revealing' of heaven can be new and maybe even confusing.

If the explanations above and the video are not convincing for (part of) the group, then consider to discuss the following. In 2 Peter 3:10 Peter writes:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the stoicheia will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

This text can be translated and explained differently, depending on and revolving around the different translations of the word 'stoicheia':

- elements [building of this world]
- ór 'celestial bodies' [stars].

The two ways or options to translate 'stoicheia' run parallel to the different 'paradigms' described earlier: hope for a future in heaven (where earth will perish), or hope for the renewal of the world (where heaven and earth will come together (be united), meaning that the separation between heaven and earth will be 'folded away').

See

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWLV_iTy

[KYc](#) starting from 5:54. In this video is also referred to an important argument for the second option: the parallel in Isaiah 34:4, where *stoicheia* also applies to celestial bodies, and the image of 'folding away heaven' is used.

The second part of the verse is causing confusion again, for it differs greatly in different translations (compare NIV with KJV). This has to do with different versions of the Greek original text.

- Some manuscripts, for example those on which the King James Version relies, say: 'the earth also and the works that are therein shall be *burned up*' (katakaesetai).
- However, the majority of the manuscripts (so does Nestle-Aland³) read: the earth and everything done in it will be *laid bare*. This word, 'lay bare', 'reveal', (euresthésetai), is an image of judgement: everything will be brought to light.

Arguments in favour of the second reading, which is in line with the idea presented in this bible study, are: (1) the majority of manuscripts that supports this version and (2) the substantive connection to the previous part of the verse.

³ We no longer have the original documents (letters, gospels) of the New Testament. We do have many "manuscripts", handwritten copies (of copies). There are sometimes small differences between them. "Nestle-Aland" (named after the scholars who composed this version) is a reconstruction, as accurate as possible, of the original Greek text of the entire New Testament based on a comparison of all known manuscripts. Biblical scholars generally consider this reconstruction of the original text as the most reliable version of the original text that we have. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novum_Testamentum_Graece. For this study we have used NA27 (27th edition).