



## Countdown to Christmas / Week 1

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### BEFORE GROUP

#### BOTTOM LINE

Because of Jesus, there is always hope.

#### SCRIPTURE

*Jeremiah 33:14-16 NIV*

#### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To encourage students to understand and experience the hope they can have in Jesus.

#### THINK ABOUT THIS

This week's conversation focuses on the difference between "hoping for" and "hoping in"—a concept that can be difficult for even adults to grasp! Be sure to give context to these two terms for your students. Hoping *for* is something they're looking forward to or wanting to happen. This can be good grades, a new spot on the

team, or a parent to get well. Hoping for something isn't negative at all; it's simply more circumstantial. Hoping *in* is different. It's the thing we center our attention, our energy, and our emotions around. So, when we hope in Jesus, we're focused on Him. We trust that He will do all He's promised. We believe that He will make the best out of our lives today and in the future, regardless of what our circumstances look like. Keep in mind that for students who have hoped *for* something big and been disappointed, hoping *in* Jesus can be difficult. Be quick to hear their struggles and not dismiss very real feelings or struggles. Instead, remind them that just because their circumstances haven't been made right yet, it doesn't mean they won't be made right one day. When their hope is in Jesus, that's something they can hold on to no matter what.

*This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions and activities as needed, and don't feel like you need to do, or ask, everything you see here.*

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### DURING GROUP

#### DO THIS (EXPERIENCE) 1

Kick off your first Christmas small group by having all of your students count down to do something fun together all at the same time. (Like eating something gross, or something spicy, or a bunch of Christmas candy!)

#### DISCUSS THIS

1. Tell us about a time you hoped for something at Christmas and you got it!
2. What's something a middle schooler might hope for?
3. Do you think hoping and wishing are the same? Why or why not?
4. What's something you're hoping for...
  - a. In your family?
  - b. With your friends?
  - c. At school?
  - d. On your team?
5. What's the difference between hoping for something and hoping in someone?
6. How might hoping in Jesus help you while you wait?

#### DO THIS (EXPERIENCE) 2

Pass out one pre-cut strip of construction paper and a pen/marker to each of your students. Ask them to write down a Bible verse or Christmas song lyric about hope on it. If they don't know where to find a Bible verse on hope, introduce them to the Subject Index of their Bible or the search feature if using the Bible app. Then, create a chain out of the paper strips using tape or a stapler.

*Note: This XP can feel elementary and simple, so be sure to present it to your few with excitement, acknowledging that something that feels elementary can still be fun. Focus on the countdown to Christmas and the tangible reminder they're creating with the paper chain. Keep the conversation going while you're working on this XP by having students talk about what they're writing and why they're writing it.*