**1. Motivate**

What was one gift you hoped for the most as a child?

* bicycle

A video introduction to the lesson is available. View it at <https://tinyurl.com/4fm6b7x4> If you don’t have wi-fi where you teach, it is best to download the video file to your computer from <https://tinyurl.com/277t4ckv>

* talking doll
* pony
* hunting gun
* football, baseball, glove
* skates, hockey stick
* computer, cell phone, computer game console
* puppy

**2. Transition**

Sometimes our hopes were childish, even futile.

* But Christmas celebrates the fulfillment of a significant spiritual hope.
* We have a sure hope because Jesus came to us.

**3. Bible Study**

3.1 Comfort from Forgiveness

Listen for assurance given.

Isaiah 40:1-2 (NIV) Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

Note what the prophet is called to do in relationship to the people who were in despair and distress?

* Comfort the people
* Speak tenderly to them

Let’s list the three elements of the message.

* their hard service has been completed
* their sin has been paid for
* they have received from the Lord’s had double for all their sins

Why do you think comfort is emphasized here (some translations repeat the command). What kind of comfort does God offer?

* forgiveness of sin
* peace and joy, patience
* no longer carry around the guilt
* no more despair for feeling God’s anger against sins
* peace and joy knowing they were once again in God’s favor

Consider how Jesus made the comfort of forgiveness and hope possible?

* Came as both fully human and fully God
* Lived a perfect life with no sin
* Did not deserve to die for any sin in His life
* Died in our place, took the punishment for our sin
* We receive the comfort and assurance of forgiveness

What brings comfort to you when you’re going through a tough time?

* God’s many promises in His Word
* know God’s power, authority, and love are sufficient for any situation
* assurance that God is in charge of the situation
* hearing and remembering hymns and gospel songs that speak assurance

How has your relationship with Jesus brought comfort to you?

* the presence of God’s holy Spirit who brings to mind God’s Truth
* the Holy Spirit produces the Fruit of the Spirit – joy, peace, patience – when we need His comfort
* God sends fellow believers – members of the Body of Christ, the Church
* they can bring specific encouragement and practical help

You have just received tragic news. What do you need to do to know and experience God’s comfort for your family in this situation?

* go to God in prayer
* go to Scripture … especially the psalms
* David always expressed to God his despair, his fears, and his confusion
* eventually he would remember and praise God for His power, authority, and love for him
* he would count his blessings and meditate on the attributes of God

3.2 Hope of God’s Glory

Listen for a phrase quoted in the New Testament.

Isaiah 40:3-5 (NIV) A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The “voice” could be …

* The prophet
* John the Baptist (Matt. 3:3)
* A modern day evangelist
* One of us sharing the Gospel.

How does the roadbuilding imagery of verse 4 speak to us in spiritual terms?

* Jesus removes obstacles for people to know and have a personal relationship with God
* Jesus’ work of redemption clears the way for us to come to God
* the obstacle of our sins and separation from God have been removed
* even after our salvation, God is removing the rugged places in our lives – bad habits, poor decisions, addictions, failures
* times of discouragement and valleys of depression are removed
* mountainous problems in our lives can be removed – see Mark 11:23 – can refer to literal or figurative “mountains”

What are some mountains or hills God has leveled in your life?

* healing
* wisdom to know what to do in a difficult situation
* protection from known (and unknown) dangers
* provision – financial, health, courage
* relational problems – family, neighbors, work
* difficult situations resolved

What are some specific obstacles or "rough places" that need to be smoothed out in our lives?

* bad habits – anger, worry, workaholic
* substance abuse – even bad nutrition habits
* broken relationships
* bad financial decisions, spending habits
* problems at work, problems with neighbors
* rebellious children
* abusive treatment from a family member

Where do you see God's glory reflected in our world today?

* beauty of creation
* power of nature – hurricanes, blizzards, earthquakes
* people’s changed lives – from sinful lifestyle to righteous living
* beauty of a sunrise
* God’s design – in our bodies, in what we discover in science and nature

3.3 Good News and Divine Care

Listen for good news.

Isaiah 40:9-11 (NIV) You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" 10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 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.

Who are commissioned to declare the good news of the Lord’s coming to set people free?

* people who know the Lord
* people who have a message of deliverance

Note the phrases that describe how the message is to be communicated.

* Lift up your voice with a shout
* Don’t be afraid
* Look and see God at work

What words and phrases describe the strong power and authority of the Lord to act?

* the Lord is Sovereign – God does as God pleases to do
* “LORD” signifies “Jehovah” … *the God Who IS* (contrasted to “them who ain’t”)
* comes with power
* His arm rules for him
* His recompense (reward) accompanies Him

Verse 10 describes God as coming with power and might. How does knowing that God is mighty affect your trust in Him?

* God is **not** a wimp
* God is not indecisive
* God is not all bluster and no strength to perform
* He has the wisdom, authority, and power to deal with the situation
* God is not like a government bureaucrat who hesitates to act

When have you experienced the characteristics of God described in these verses?

* encouragement
* healing
* financial provision
* open doors of opportunity
* guidance
* strength to do the task
* protection (will we see video replays of unrealized protections when we get to heaven?)

Use the last page as a handout so your learners can take home the application points of this week’s lesson.

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Pray.

* Our hope in Christ must be cultivated.
* Ask God to reawaken the hopes that have been dormant recently.
* Enter a life of holy expectation as you journey through this sacred season.

Write.

* Is there someone in your life who is struggling to remain hopeful because of circumstance, disappointment, or fear?
* Send them an encouraging note to let them know you are praying for them.
* Underscore that hope is never lost in Christ.

Serve.

* Our hope is activated through service.
* This week, express your hope by serving someone in need.
* It may be as simple as helping someone decorate for the Christmas season.
* Or reaching out to a stranger to offer radical generosity and help.

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For instance the top word will not be “YAW” Then use the numbers below the letters to fill in the letters for the words in the message.

First you need to unscramble the letters in the words in the list. Check the Scripture from the lesson. Isaiah 40:1 -5, 9-11 (NIV)

Double Puzzle