

Koinonia Group Study (Session One) — Handout

Gathering question: Briefly introduce yourself and share one small thing you'd like the group to know about you?

Watch Video

Purpose of Koinonia Groups

The purpose of Koinonia Groups is to foster a culture in our congregation that supports our mission statement: for everyone to experience the boundary-breaking love of Jesus Christ by practicing radical hospitality, forming deep relationships, and joining in shared ministry.

Group Best Practices

- Start and stop on time.
- Listen well.
- Pray for each other regularly.
- No advice giving.
- Practice strict confidentiality. Do not share or talk about outside of your group, even with people who missed a particular week, unless asked specifically.

How to Use This Handout

- Use this as a read-along guide during the video.
- Pause as needed for short reflection moments.
- Save the discussion questions for the end (or the last 15–20 minutes).

Who Is Luther E. Smith, Jr.?

Rev. Dr. Luther E. Smith, Jr. is an acclaimed author, theologian, and educator known for exploring the intersection of spirituality, justice, and the Beloved Community. He is Professor Emeritus of Church and Community at Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

This study is based primarily on *Hope Is Here: Spiritual Practices for Pursuing Justice and Beloved Community*. You can participate by watching the video, following the outlines, or reading the book.

Why This Study, Why Now?

A. The emotional climate

- Weariness, outrage cycles, speed

- Information overload but moral confusion
- Private anxiety and public polarization

B. The temptation of our age

- Reaction instead of response
- Cynicism disguised as intelligence
- Optimism as denial
- Despair as sophistication

Many of us feel hopeless and powerless, like watching a train crash in slow motion. This Lent, we are practicing a different way: learning hope that is deeper than mood.

What Is Beloved Community?

Beloved Community is a social justice concept developed by theologian Howard Thurman and popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It describes a world built on peace, justice, equity, and unconditional love, where all people can share in the wealth of the earth and live without discrimination.

Beloved Community was understood to be attainable, not an abstract utopia. It shaped the vision and practice of nonviolent resistance: pure goals cannot be achieved by impure means.

Hope is not a feeling we generate. It is a reality we participate in.

Defining Hope

A. What hope is not

- Not optimism (optimism predicts outcomes; hope commits to presence).
- Not positivity (positivity manages mood; hope anchors action).
- Not wishful thinking (wishful thinking avoids reality; hope faces reality honestly).

B. What hope is

- Hope is purposeful: it moves toward something; it is directional.
- Hope is relational: rooted in God's character; sustained in community.
- Hope is active: it animates courage; it energizes love.

C. Theological grounding

- Hope arises from God's faithfulness, not our circumstances.
- Hope and love are inseparable: love gives hope its shape; hope gives love its endurance.
- We are not simply people who have hope; we are people who can be possessed by hope.

Biblical Horizon: Where Hope Moves

- Justice
- Reconciliation
- Shared flourishing

Hope is not vague

- It imagines concrete restoration.
- It resists injustice.
- It insists on human dignity.

The tension

- The world as it is
- The world as God intends
- Hope lives in the gap

Scripture

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?

James 2:26

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

For Discussion:

Share a key takeaway from the video.

What is something that is a new way of looking at things?

Please read from the preface:

My father was intrigued by a sermon that invited him to reconsider the conclusions of a favorite Scripture (1 Cor. 13). He said the preacher described current traumas, fears, and anxieties that pervaded the country and world. He then affirmed the apostle Paul's naming of faith, hope, and love as abiding virtues, but instead of agreeing with Paul about the superiority of love, the preacher proposed that for current times the "greatest of these is hope." The preacher's conclusion startled my father and me. I had never heard anyone elevate hope to such heights. The spotlight on hope captured my

attention, and I have never withdrawn my gaze. My journey with hope began anew and with regard for its “greatness.” Assessing whether hope or love is greater has never been my aim. Understanding the significance, power, and ways of hope, however, became a spiritual quest that has disclosed hope’s presence for all the seasons of my life.

...

In my journey with hope, I’ve wondered why hope was primarily seen as an emotional servant for feeling better. I have come to understand that the greatness of hope comes not when we treat it as a possession, but when we are possessed by hope. *Hope Is Here!* offers readers insights and practices for nurturing a deeper relationship with hope. Yes, hope uplifts—and does so much more. Hope reveals, empowers, challenges, disrupts, transforms, and enlivens us to God’s desire for our lives and the world.

Smith, Jr., Luther E.. *Hope Is Here!: Spiritual Practices for Pursuing Justice and Beloved Community* (pp. 13-14). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Discussion Questions

What do you think about this framing of these familiar verses?
How can seeing hope this way change things?

Closing prayer suggestion:

Invite each person to name one word they want to carry into the week (peace, courage, patience, joy, steadiness, etc.). Share Prayer Requests and end on time!