



Feast on the Bible's big meal –
to draw strength for today and tomorrow

TALK OUTLINE

An interactive talk written with an all-age congregation in mind, but easily adapted to adult hearers.

Please note: This outline is meant to be adapted to meet the needs of the occasion. Throughout the aim has been to provide more than might be needed so you can select what you think will work best.

It has been created with an all-age talk in mind. For an older audience, we have provided the section Background to the Biblical Material as an additional preparation resource.

Romans 15.4 **Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us, in order that we might have hope through the patience and encouragement which the Scriptures give us.**

1. INTRODUCTION – SOME THINGS DON'T MAKE SENSE

Have you noticed that things don't always make sense? *take your pick from –*

- How is it that you need to press 'start' to turn off a PC?
- Why do dads buy toys for their children and then spend so much time playing with them themselves?
- How come people without a watch look at their wrist when you ask them the time?
- Why do we press harder on a remote-control even when we know the battery is dead?
- Why do people go to Burger King and order a Double Whopper with large fries and then insist on getting a Diet Coke?
- How come abbreviated is such a long word?

Let me tell you something else that doesn't seem to make sense.-

Supposing –

- You only ever got one meal a day – and it wasn't McDonalds? So you were hungry much of the time. Imagine how that would feel.
- You had to work long hours in the fields just to get by. Imagine how that would feel.
- You had to walk for an hour every day to fetch water that was safe to drink. Imagine how that would feel.



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How would you feel? (*Invite answers to the question, looking for words like 'sad', 'unhappy', etc*)

I'd like you to watch some people like that – people you'd expect to be sad and unhappy.

ILLUSTRATION

Play *Massai Praise* PowerPoint film of Massai people living in the Rift Valley in Kenya

(*Background note: Where are the men in this group? Not away doing DIY or playing football as you might think. At the time of filming, the rains had failed for two years, and the men and older boys had moved their cattle a six-week journey away, to the high plateau of Nairobi. At other times, they would be here, listening and worshipping in church.*)

Do the people coming together to hear the Bible's message look sad or unhappy? No.

- Instead they are full of confidence in God.
- Happy to sing his praise.
- And that doesn't seem to make sense either.

How come people who are having such a bad time can be so happy?

- Sometimes we face things that make us sad and unhappy ourselves
- Wouldn't you like to know their secret?
- The answer is they know something we may not know.
- And this Bible Sunday we are going to find it together.

2. THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

The words we read together from the Bible were written by St Paul to people who had no reason to be happy either.

Their problem was not a lack of food or no clean water.

It was because they were Christians, those who followed Jesus, and people wanted to do nasty things to them. Some of them had been imprisoned and beaten up; some were slaves whose masters took it out on them – making them work even harder, doing rotten jobs and being wrongly accused; some were being rejected by their friends because of their allegiance to Christ which would affect their business badly.

They too needed to know the secret of how to be happy when things were bad for them. And this is what Paul told them –

Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us, in order that we might have hope through the patience and encouragement which the Scriptures give us. Romans 15.4



The answer, said Paul, was to 'have hope'.

Who has ever said, 'I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow'?

- I hope my spot's gone by the weekend
- I hope they don't notice the stain on the carpet
- I hope . . .

That kind of 'hope' is just about being 'hopeful'

There's no reason why any of it should happen

All you can do is hope it will

- **Football:** Having looked at the other team – and seen how small they are – you are **hopeful** you won't lose ten nil.
- **Cooking:** Having done your best to follow the recipe – you are **hopeful** it won't poison the family.
- **Finding your way** – You've looked at the maps and generally know the road numbers and are **hopeful** you'll find your destination.
- But 'hopeful' is not what Paul is talking about.
- Paul had a different kind of 'hope' in mind.
- His was an 'I've every reason to hope' kind of hope.
- It was a 'surely it must happen' kind of hope.

Let me tell you about Horace and Elsa

You can tell they were born a long time ago by their names.

Horace and Elsa were in love. One day Horace asked Elsa to marry him and she said 'Not with a funny name like that'. No, she said, 'I will'. They became engaged to be married.

Then Elsa's family and friends began to give her things to save for her new home when she was married.

(If time you could ask for suggestions as to what – towels, pans, cutlery, etc.)

Elsa had a name for where she kept all this – and it was what every engaged girl did in those days. Who knows what it was called – you may need to be quite old to know!

Answer – A hope chest.

- What kind of hope did Elsa have?
- Was it 'hopefulness' or an 'it must surely happen' kind of hope?
- When Horace asked Elsa 'Do you expect me to marry you?' would she say, 'I'm hopeful'? Or 'I know so'?
- Why – because her hope depended on someone else making it happen.



Football: If you had Ronaldo or Rooney in your team what kind of hope would you have of winning? Would it be 'hopeful hope' or 'I know so hope'?

Cooking: With Jamie Oliver doing the work, what kind of hope would you have for the meal that's cooked? 'Hopeful hope' or 'I know so hope'

Finding your way: If you had a sat nav in your car what kind of hope would you have of not getting lost? 'Hopeful hope' or 'I know so hope'

That's what Paul tells us we need for our lives.

'Hope with a reason to hope – because someone else is going to make it happen'.

That's what caused the Kenyan church to sing. It's what we need.

3. FEASTING FOR HOPE

What was their hope based on?

Ronaldo? Jamie Oliver? Sat nav?

See what Paul says – 'Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us, in order that we might have hope through the patience and encouragement which the Scriptures give us'

Our hope is to be based on what 'everything written in the Scriptures has to teach us'.

- How do the Scriptures give us hope?
- Does it ooze off the page as we read?
- Does something magic happen as we listen?
- Do we have some wobbly feeling?

The key word is – 'everything in the Scriptures is to teach us'.

Paul was pointing them to Going Large

The problem is we often don't see the big picture.

We need the Bible's big fat meal.

Our problem is we often just nibble. .

Let me explain what I mean. (Choose one of the following:)

ILLUSTRATION 1 – MAKE A SMOOTHIE

You need – a blender, an assistant, and ingredients that have been previously given to different people in the church. Give a few pieces of fruit to lots of people so they can all take part. (Ham it up with chef's apron and hat if you can)

Get those with the ingredients to stand.

Find out what they have and what the ingredients would taste like by themselves.

Get them to come and contribute their ingredients to make the end result.

Invite them to taste it and have some in plastic cups for people at the end.

[Panel:]



Suggested smoothie recipes

(pick your favourite!):

Red berry

10 raspberries

10 strawberries

4 tbsp redcurrants

4 tbsp Greek style yoghurt

2 handfuls ice

6–8 tbsp milk

Pour the yoghurt into a blender/smoothie maker, add the fruit. Blend for one minute.

Tropical delight

300mls coconut milk

900mls pineapple juice

2 whole bananas, peeled

Crushed ice

Pour the pineapple juice into a blender/smoothie maker, add the coconut milk and the bananas. Blend for one minute.

ILLUSTRATION 2 – MAKE A MEAL

Put the names of different components for a great meal – main course and dessert – on card and give to different people as they come in. Aim to have them scattered round the church.

Suggestions: Roast potatoes, peas, sprouts, carrots, gravy, turkey, stuffing, treacle pudding, custard, ice cream.

- Ask people to stand and shout out what they have in turn. (When you come to 'sprouts' go and tear the card up with an 'augh!')
- Point out that none of the ingredients on their own make a meal – and that a boy who only ate carrots had his skin turn orange.
- Now have them bring all the ingredients together to the front and assemble into a whole meal.

In the same way, we need to see the big picture of what the Bible tells us about God.

Though we eat its ingredients separately, we need to see it as a full meal.

Then it will tell us that God is the one –

- **Who made us and said 'good' when he did** – remember Genesis?
- **Who made promises that he would always keep** – remember the rainbow after the flood?
- **Who rescued his people from slavery** – remember Moses?
- **Who led, guided, protected and provided for them** – remember the journeys in the wilderness?
- **Who helped them beat their enemies** – remember David and Goliath?
- **Who protected them from danger** – remember Daniel in the den of lions?
- **Who sent his Son to make our forgiveness possible** – remember Jesus and the cross?



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- **Who is building a new community, the Church, where we belong to one another** – remember Peter on the day of Pentecost and Paul bringing good news on his travels?

(Note: In an all adult context you may want to fatten this out to give more detail)

4. NOURISHED BY THE FEAST

That's 'going large' and we then need to see what it is that the Bible teaches us that can give us 'hope that's more than just being hopeful.'

It teaches us what God is like –

- A God who never changes.
- Who hates the bad stuff in our world even more than we do.
- Who makes promises that he always keeps.

It teaches us what God thinks about us –

- He always loves us.
- We matter to him.
- He listens to us and he cares for us.

It teaches us what God is up to –

- He's on our side.
- He's working for our best interest.
- He has a great plan that we are part of.

When we let the Scriptures teach us that this is true we can be more than just 'hopeful'.

- We can be full of 'it surely must happen' hope.
- Because it's not Ronaldo, Jamie or sat nav on our side but the living God himself.

When we let the Bible's big picture teach us we will see why we can have hope – real hope – in God

After all –

- If Ronaldo said, 'we need to play 4 4 2' would you trust him?
- If Jamie Oliver said, 'put the flour in before the eggs' would you trust him?
- If sat nav said, 'go right at the lights' would you trust it?
- Then when we see the big picture of God –and his love and plans for us – we can trust him too.

5. SHARING THE FEAST

But on this Bible Sunday, God does more than invite us to eat. He calls us to make sure others are fed too.



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Do you remember that church in Africa who were singing with such joy?

- It was only because they had the Bible for themselves.
- Before they had no hope and could not even be hopeful.
- But because the Bible came to them, everything changed.

This Bible Sunday we can bring the Bible to those who still wait for it.

They desperately need the hope – the right kind of hope – that the Bible's big feast brings.

Let me tell you about Elizabeth (refer to the *Ears to Hear* HhPowerPoint which includes Elizabeth's story). She's a member of the Massai tribe in Kenya, poor cattle herders who struggle to survive.

The Bible has been translated into Kenya's national language, Swahili for 125 years – but Elizabeth didn't speak Swahili. She was a Massai. Then, fifteen years ago, Bible Society translated the Bible into Massai, but this was no use to Elizabeth either because, like most of her tribe, she can't read. But then Bible Society made the Bible available in audio in Massai through their *Faith Comes by Hearing* programme. And Elizabeth said, 'Twenty-two years I have been a believer, and twenty-two years I had to wait to have the Word of God. Now I hear God speak to me in my own tongue, and I think on his words while I tend the goats and prepare my family's food, I can now meditate day and night on God's Word.'

Our gifts today will be used to feed those hungry for God's word like Elizabeth. For example:

A gift of €190 can bring the Scriptures to a listening group.

An average of 50 people will meet weekly to hear the Scriptures. To hear God's Word brought to life in their heart language.

Today we have been thinking about food.

- But there is a hunger only God can satisfy – and we can help make that possible.

During hard times some years ago in South Africa the army invaded the church where Archbishop Desmond Tutu was.

And he said to the soldiers, 'Your guns are very strong, but our God is very big and very strong. We are on the winning side, so why don't you join us now?'

He could say that with confidence because he knew God's big story – he'd gone large.

Today we need to be ready to do the same – so we can live in real hope. And through our gifts and prayers help others to have that hope too.

This talk outline was written by Peter Meadows, Bible Society (England & Wales).

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7 Talk outline

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