

CHRISTMAS

Hope

**AND THE WOMEN IN JESUS'
FAMILY TREE**



Have you ever struggled to get into the Christmas spirit?

We live in a culture that idealizes and romanticizes Christmas. Throughout the season, we expect to feel warm fuzzy feelings of joy and contentment. We imagine welcoming family, giving (and receiving) perfect gifts, and building rich traditions. But for many of us, the reality of Christmas is different. In fact, it is probably because we idealize Christmas so much that, at this time of year, we feel pain, sadness, grief, and brokenness so acutely. When we experience sorrow at Christmas, we may feel like we're missing the true meaning of the season. But the truth is, it is because of our pain and grief that Christmas exists. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of the Savior who came to confront and conquer sin, the root cause of our sadness and brokenness. So, no matter if you're sorrowful or joyful this season, *Christmas is for you.*

We at *Groundwork* invite you to dig deeply into the Bible with us in our podcast series, "Christmas Hope and the Women in Jesus' Family Tree," to discover the hope of Jesus through the stories of the women named in the genealogy of Christ. We might feel uncomfortable thinking about sorrow and trauma at Christmastime, but the Bible doesn't scrub these realities from the life of Jesus or his family tree. The gospel of Matthew begins by laying out a long list of names, the genealogy of Christ, five of which are the names of women. Through the stories of these women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba (Uriah's wife), and Mary—we hear the message that no matter how broken we may feel or how much the world says we don't belong, Christ came into our world to offer God's love and belonging to all. That is the very meaning of Christmas!

"Christmas Hope and the Women in Jesus' Family Tree" is a five-part audio series that delves into the story of each of the five women Matthew names in Jesus' family tree. This accompanying ebook includes a study guide for each episode with commentary and questions for individual or group reflection, and prayerful response.

Episode 1 - Christmas Hope: Tamar - Matthew 1:1-3, Genesis 38, and Romans 8:35-39

Episode 2 - Christmas Hope: Rahab - Matthew 1:5, Joshua 2, James 2:25-26, and Romans 5:8

Episode 3 - Christmas Hope: Ruth - Matthew 1:3-6, Ruth 1-4, Luke 16:10, and Micah 6:8

Episode 4 - Christmas Hope: Bathsheba - Matthew 1:5-7 and 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25

Episode 5 - Christmas Hope: Mary and Christ's Birth - Matthew 1:15-25, Galatians 4:4-7, and Ephesians 3:17b-19

It can be tempting to skim or even completely skip over Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1, but I encourage you to slow down, recognize the names, and recall with us their stories. As we consider these stories, we'll recall together that in Christ, there is a place for the broken, the traumatized, the outsider, and the imperfect. This Christmas, let's experience the full richness of God's love and faithfulness.

In Christ,

Courtney Jacob

Producer, *Groundwork*

Christmas Hope: Tamar

Primary scripture texts: [Matthew 1:1-3](#), [Genesis 38](#), and [Romans 8:35-39](#)

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- How do you feel about this Advent season? What do you expect of Christmas this year?
- Do you ever feel far away from God? Why?

There are many reasons we might feel far away from God, some of them are the result of our own sin, while others are caused by things that have happened to us. This feeling can steal our joy and our desire to celebrate at Christmastime. That's when we need to remember the story of Tamar, the first woman named in Jesus' family tree. In Tamar, we see an outsider deeply hurt by the sins of her father-in-law, Judah. But we also witness God mercifully draw her in and give her an important place in his covenant family. Tamar's story reminds us of God's love and grace, and it provides us hope, even in the darkest of Christmas seasons. Join us as we explore Tamar's story—a painful, yet important reminder of why we so desperately need Jesus to come.

▶ **Listen:** [Christmas Hope: Tamar](#)

“Somehow God's grace and mercy weaves its way through to get to my heart to change me, to help me; and that is hopeful for anybody.”
– Darrell Delaney

Conclusion

Reflect on this quote from Scott in segment 3.

“Jesus' birth at Christmas, and all of our Advent expectations, it is all about dealing with the raw reality of our human sin. And Tamar's story reminds us of that, but it also reminds us that the real message of Christmas is that because of what Jesus has done, none of our sinfulness will have the last word in our lives, only God's grace has the last word.”

What assurance and hope does that truth provide even if you feel far from God?

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- In segment 1, hosts Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee make three points about why it's significant that Matthew opens his gospel with Jesus' genealogy: 1) it confirms Jesus as Messiah by demonstrating that Jesus descended from the line of David, 2) it traces Jesus' lineage further back to Abram and God's promise that all nations of the earth would be blessed through Abram, and 3) it includes four foreign women showing that Jesus' bloodline was not “pure” or “perfect,” but rather a beautiful mosaic of different people joining God's family. Were any of these new points to you? Have you considered them before? Which one challenges or encourages your faith most?
- In segment 2, Scott says “You cannot even tell Jesus' story without telling sinful stories, and that is why Jesus came.” Why is this significant? Are there any scandals or shameful stories in your past or from your family that help remind you WHY Jesus needed to come? Give thanks to God that he does not ignore or shy away from the messy things in our lives. Pray for God to use the messy things in your life for his glory and kingdom, as he did with Tamar's story.
- Seeing Tamar's name in Jesus' genealogy reminds us that she belongs to God's covenant family—tawdry stories and all. How does this truth encourage your faith even if you feel far from God or unworthy of his love?
- How does the story of Judah and Tamar offer hope both to those who sin and those who are victims of other people's sins?

Related Passages for further study:

- [Genesis 12:1-3](#),
- [John 3:16-18](#)

Christmas Hope: Rahab

Primary scripture texts: [Matthew 1:5](#), [Joshua 2](#), [James 2:25-26](#), and [Romans 8:1-2](#)

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- Is it important to remember the reality of human brokenness and sinfulness at Christmas? Why?
- What do you think: is there anything that can disqualify a person from serving God?

Rahab was a prostitute. Therefore, we might be shocked to see Rahab's name in Jesus' family tree. What's more, she was not even an Israelite. She does not seem to belong; her heritage and trade would seem to make her unworthy of God's attention. And yet, as we study her story, God shows us that no one is beyond his grace, not even a foreign prostitute. He will work through anyone who is willing to serve his kingdom and he welcomes them into his family. In Rahab's story, we find affirmation of God's providence, his grace, and our belonging, as we anticipate the coming birth of Jesus, our Savior, the descendent of Rahab.

▶ **Listen:** [Christmas Hope: Rahab](#)

“God can redeem us from these mistakes, and then we can have stories that he can be glorified in.” – Darrell Delaney

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- Rahab was an unexpected source of God's provision for the Israelite spies. A foreigner and an outsider, she was a broken, vulnerable, and imperfect person. In what ways are you like Rahab?
- In segment 2, host Scott Hoezee observes that in [Joshua 2:11](#), Rahab uses what's known in Hebrew as a *merismos*, the style of stating the highest point and the lowest point to stand for everything, when she says, “God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” Reflect on your life for a moment. What are some of the highest and lowest points you could use to describe how God is God of everything in your life? Then, write your own *merismos*!
- Identify instances of God's providence and grace in Rahab's story. What truths do these examples teach you about who God is and how he works?
- Against the odds, Rahab lived out her faith in the God of Israel and God used her faithfulness to advance his plan. She is named in Matthew's genealogy and now belongs to God's family because of her faith, not her past. How does this encourage you in your faith?

Conclusion

Spend some time reflecting on the following questions. Journal or draw your responses.

- How does Rahab's story make your celebration of Christ's birth more profound?
- In what ways does it give you hope?

Related Passages for further study:

- [Hebrews 11:31](#)
- [1 Samuel 16:7](#)
- [John 4:1-42](#)
- [John 1:1-14](#)
- [Romans 5:8](#)

Christmas Hope: Ruth

Primary scripture texts: [Matthew 1:3-6](#), [Ruth 1-4](#), [Luke 16:10](#), and [Micah 6:8](#)

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- In what ways do you think the story of Ruth might offer hope at Christmas?
- Have you heard the term “faithful foreigner” before? What do you think it means?

Christmas is a season of hope. Christians and non-Christians alike long for miracles at Christmastime: broken families hope for reunion; those struggling financially hope for relief; and those who are unemployed hope for jobs. During life’s difficult seasons, it’s easy to wonder if God really cares and if our faith in him is still worth the effort. But when we come across Ruth’s name in Jesus’ family tree, we see yet another outsider being drawn into God’s plan of salvation; this time a young woman who keeps the faith despite her vulnerability. And as we study Ruth’s story, we learn how God uses our simple faithfulness to provide and care for the vulnerable and to bring the good news of his kingdom to all people.

▶ **Listen:** [Christmas Hope: Ruth](#)

“There are no coincidences...there are no random events in this story. [It’s] the hidden hand of providence.” – Scott Hoezee

Conclusion

Ruth stood in a very vulnerable place in her society, and yet God provided hope and deliverance for Ruth through her determined faithfulness to Naomi, and Boaz’s simple trust in God’s law. God brings their obedience together in the story of the Messiah, whose birth we anticipate during Advent. Like Ruth and Boaz, God provides for the *anawim* of our society through our simple acts of faithfulness. As Scott said in segment 3, “It is just simple faithfulness over the long haul. It is love and mercy and humility; and at Christmas, we celebrate what such basic things can bring about...It brings about nothing less than joy to the world.”

Identify some specific ways God asks you to faithfully obey him. Then consider, if you faithfully obey God’s law, how might you experience joy and the hope of God’s kingdom this Christmas?

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- In your experience, is the message that “Jesus the Messiah has come for more than just Israel” still clear today, or do we struggle with an insider/outsider mindset? What leads you to that conclusion?
- At the end of segment 1, host Scott Hoezee introduces the Hebrew concept of the *anawim*, the three most vulnerable members of society at that time: the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. Who do you think would be the *anawim*, the most vulnerable classes of people in your community today?
- What are the similarities and differences between God’s hidden hand of providence in Ruth and his providence in the Christmas story?
- In segment 3, Scott says, “That happy ending came about because someone like Boaz tended to the finer points of the law.” Boaz faithfully obeyed God. How have you seen God work through simple acts of faithfulness in your own life? How about in your community?

Related Passages for further study:

- [Leviticus 19:9-10, 33-34](#)
- [Matthew 25:31-46](#)
- [Matthew 5:17-20](#)
- [Acts 2:42-47](#)

Christmas Hope: Bathsheba

Primary scripture texts: [Matthew 1:5-7](#) and [2 Samuel 11:1-12:25](#)

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- What dampens your Christmas spirit?
- Is there any pain, sorrow, shame, or trauma in your life story? Does it ever impact your celebration of Christmas?

Pain, sorrow, and shame can feel especially acute at Christmas when everything around us demands that we feel cheerful and full of the Christmas spirit. But the truth is that a season, however cheerful, cannot erase reality. The fallout of past mistakes and the brokenness of trauma do not disappear just because it's Christmas. Our sorrow can leave us feeling left out and unworthy of celebrating Christmas. Yet, as Matthew continues to tell the story of Jesus' family tree, he shows us that our stories do not surprise God. It is for stories like that of "Uriah's wife," Bathsheba, that Jesus came at Christmas in the first place. God enfolded Bathsheba into his own family and into his story of redemption and restoration. How God dealt with David's sin encourages us to seek the truth of God's love and abundant forgiveness. These are the reasons we can lean in, give thanks, and celebrate the hope Christmas offers.

▶ **Listen:** [Christmas Hope: Bathsheba](#)

“There is no reason to celebrate Christmas if we cannot honestly look at this kind of brokenness, which is why Jesus came.” – Scott Hoezee

Conclusion

As part of your Christmas preparation, dedicate some time to reflection and prayer. Identify some of the brokenness in your life or in our world and pray for God's continued intervention in those areas. Pray for God's continued intervention in this brokenness. Give thanks for the first Advent, Jesus' first coming into our world at his birth. Then, look ahead to the second Advent, the second coming of Jesus, and pray for when all will be made well, all of our sins forgiven, and all of our brokenness healed. Finally, close your prayer with the words of [Psalm 103](#).

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- As you listened to the story of David and Bathsheba in the context of Christmas, were there any details that surprised you or made you think about the story differently than you may have in the past?
- Hosts Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee twice discussed the power dynamics at work between David and Bathsheba. How might the fact that God included Bathsheba, a socially powerless woman, in Jesus' genealogy encourage you when you recognize unfair power dynamics in your own life or in the situations of others you observe? How might it impact your approach to the people and circumstances involved?
- God SAW Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. He saw her vulnerability; he saw her brokenness; he saw how David sinned against her. God SAW David. He saw David's abuse of power: he saw David's adultery; he saw David's murder of Uriah; he saw David's imperfection. In his unfathomable mercy, he drew them both in and gave them an integral place in Jesus' family tree. Likewise, God SEES you. How does that truth make you feel? What emotions does it stir in you? Relief? Hope? Comfort? Guilt? Shame? Where might you need God to intervene in your story today?

Related Passages for further study:

- [Psalm 32](#)
- [Psalm 103](#)
- [Psalm 10:14-18](#)
- [Romans 8:35-59](#)

Christmas Hope: Mary and Christ's Birth

Primary scripture texts: [Matthew 1:15-25](#), [Galatians 4:4-7](#), and [Ephesians 3:17b-19](#)

Awareness

Before listening, reflect:

- What is the most meaningful part of the Christmas story for you?
- Why do you think God allowed Jesus to be born into seemingly scandalous circumstances?

In the months before that very first Christmas, Mary, the mother of Jesus, finds herself at the center of an apparent scandal—young, pregnant, and unmarried. In the fabric of Mary's story before and after Jesus' birth, we encounter struggle, pain, and brokenness. But we also discover hope—the hope that Christmas brings to human brokenness and that sheds light on why we need a savior. Through the story of Mary, and the birth of Jesus Christ, take comfort in learning more about a God and Savior who enters into our brokenness, witness God's great love for each of us, and remember God's promise of belonging.

▶ **Listen:** Christmas Hope: Mary and Christ's Birth

“The incarnation of God's Son happens in a situation that looks like a mess...that looks like scandal...and God uses this very situation to redeem all of humanity.”
— Darrell Delaney

Reflection

After listening, consider:

- Where does your understanding of righteousness come from? Is that where it should come from? What did you learn about righteousness from hosts Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee's discussion about Joseph's change of heart?
- In segment 2, Darrell says, “God is actually helping us to understand that his redeeming nature comes through these complicated circumstances.” Where in your life do you need to remember this truth, that God's redeeming nature comes through broken, complicated circumstances?
- Based on Jesus' prayer in [John 17:14-19](#), Christians often talk about the need to be in the world, but not of the world. Read that passage; then reflect on host Scott's observation at the end of segment 2, “Our salvation couldn't come without the people most intimately involved in it: Mary, Joseph, and then finally, Jesus himself, getting caught up in the brokenness of this world, so much so that they got accused of all kinds of false things.” In what way does this idea help illustrate the meaning of that passage?
- Who are the voiceless, disregarded, and marginalized in your community? With these people in mind, reflect on these questions: Would it feel scandalous to see them in church on Sunday and consider them part of God's family? Why? What needs to change in order for you and/or your church to join God in saying as Darrell did in segment 3, “You are welcome to become part of this family. You are welcome to become part of the body”?

Conclusion

Read and reflect on [Psalm 113](#), remembering the Christmas truth that God enters our human brokenness through Jesus Christ. Consider how this gives you hope both personally, for yourself, and for the world we live in. In your own words, write additional verses, in the style of verses 7-9, naming the people you identified above as the voiceless, disregarded, and marginalized, and like the psalmist, declare how God can enter and redeem that brokenness. Close your time by turning the words of [Psalm 113](#) into a Christmas prayer.

Related Passages for further study:

- [Psalm 32](#)
- [Psalm 103](#)
- [Psalm 10:14-18](#)
- [Romans 8:35-59](#)

Recommended Resources for Advent from ReFrame Ministries

From *Today Daily Devotional*

[“Waiting in Expectation”](#) - a devotional email series for Advent. Explore themes of Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy as we anticipate the coming Christ.

[“Blue Christmas”](#) - a 14-day devotional series. Even in the darkest Christmas season, God never leaves you alone.

[“The Jesse Tree”](#) - A 31-day family devotional and craft that helps you focus your heart this Christmas on the coming Christ.

From *Family Fire*

[“Advent Hope,”](#) by Nadia Swearingen-Friesen. Do you find the holiday pace exhausting? This article poses a few simple questions that can help you navigate your hectic Christmas schedule.

[“Bringing Meaning to Advent,”](#) by Nadia Swearingen-Friesen. Need to simplify your Christmas? Ten simple tips to help your family stay focused on the meaning of the holiday season.

[“10 Tips for a Faith Focused Christmas,”](#) by Kim Sullivan. Does the busyness of the season rob you of your Christmas joy? Reflect on how the source and meaning of joy can reframe your perspective this Advent season.

[“How to Love Well at Christmas,”](#) by Rev. Joel Vande Werken. Let the wisdom of Romans 12 guide your family to love more like Jesus this Christmas.

From *Kids Corner*

[“Gifts of Kindness Advent Calendar and Devotional”](#) - Countdown to Christmas and prepare your hearts for the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ. Included are 24 ornaments and five family devotions.

From *Groundwork*

[“The Incarnation: What it Means and Why it Matters”](#) - A four-part Bible study podcast series about the birth of Jesus and what the incarnation means for our faith.

[“Advent Waiting”](#) - A four-episode Bible study podcast series that looks at the traditional Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love to remind us why we wait, what we're waiting for, and how we should live while we're waiting.



GROUNDWORK

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