

Family and Journey Group Resources for the Advent/Christmas Season

For the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we're taking a break from the "normal" Journey Group discussion guides. Instead, the Adult Ministries team will provide a variety of ideas to use with your family and/or journey and new community groups. Each week will include three categories with a suggested theme, an idea for a shared experience, and a few discussion questions. Our hope is that this flexibility allows groups and families to focus on relationships and shared experiences that make the holidays more meaningful and joyous. Happiest of holidays to you!

Option 1 – Christmas Story/Biblical Text

Over the next four weeks, we will be looking at four different sections of the Christmas story and the way people respond when God speaks. This week we will be looking at Luke 1:5-25. This passage describes Zechariah and Elizabeth's response to the angel Gabriel foretelling their son John the Baptist.

Objectives:

- Discuss the message given to Zechariah and his response to the angel.
- Reflect on how we respond when God speaks to us.
- Pray that we will recognize God's presence and that His Word will speak to our hearts in a transformative way that honors Him. Ask God to continue reveal Himself in life-changing ways, and pray that we will be responsive and obedient.

Bible Discussion:

- Read Luke 1:5-25 as a group. Let everyone have a moment to reflect on the text, then open up discussion by inviting everyone to share their initial responses.
- **How does Zechariah respond to Gabriel's message?**
 - **How do you think you would have responded if you were in Zechariah's shoes?**
- Gabriel seems to see unbelief in Zechariah and deals with this pretty harshly. As a Jewish priest, Zechariah should be very familiar with the Genesis 18 account of Abraham and Sarah being promised, and then receiving, a son in their old age. Zechariah would have known that God was capable of doing what Gabriel said, but Zechariah still found it hard to believe that God would work this way in his own life.
 - **What are some areas in our lives that God has promised He is at work or will work, but we find it hard to believe?**
 - **Why do we find it hard to believe sometimes?**
- **What can deepen our faith that God is good, powerful, and faithful to do all that He has promised?**

Activity Suggestion:

- **What might our group do together in response to God's goodness and provision and fulfilled promises in our lives? Serve together!** Consider some of the possibilities offered online at <https://www.ccomaha.org/decemberserve>

Option 2 – Advent Celebration – Week 1 - HOPE

Advent means “the coming,” and is a time of expectant waiting. Christians have been celebrating the Advent season since the 4th and 5th centuries. We celebrate the coming of Jesus’ birth, which has already occurred, and we wait in expectation for Christ’s return which is yet to come. This is not a passive waiting, but an active waiting.

Activity Suggestion:

- Create an advent wreath for your journey group and light the first candle symbolizing “hope” when you gather.

How to make an advent wreath:

<https://growingslower.com/how-to-make-an-advent-wreath>

For more information on the background of an advent wreath:

<https://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/christmas-and-advent/advent-wreath-candles-understanding-the-meaning-history-tradition.html>

Group Experience:

- Open with prayer. Then read Psalm 130:7-8.
- Watch the Bible project video- “Yakhal / Hope” <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/the-advent-series/>

The video explains the difference between Biblical hope and optimism.

- “God’s past faithfulness motivates hope for the future.” (2:25 in video)
 - **What are some ways that we can live into this Biblical hope?**
- “Christian hope looks back to the risen Jesus in order to look forward, and so we wait.” (3:58 in video)
 - **In light of this video, how can we share hope with others during the holiday season?**
 - With our words?
 - In our actions?
- Reflect together:
 - **How can we nurture a spirit of anticipation and hope for the arrival of Jesus in ourselves, our homes, and our families? Share ideas with one another.**
- Listen and/or sing together: “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”
- Pray for one another that you would have a spirit of hope this holiday season.

Option 3 – Movie Night - A Christmas Story

In 1983, a low budget movie reflected the sense of commercialism in America's annual holiday festivities. A Christmas Story was unique in that it acknowledged the American greed surrounding Christmas, highlighted the sufferings of commercialism, but also the sufferings of disappointment and hurt feelings. The movie, so popular in our culture that cable channel TBS runs the movie back to back for 24-hour periods, gives us a glimpse into middle-class, Midwestern life, and specifically, the struggles of adolescent desires, all of which are seen through the eyes of a nine-year old boy, Ralphie Parker.

A Christmas Story is in every way a satire, hilarious and exaggerated, its characters caricatures of the American family. From the grumpy father, Mr. Parker, "The Old Man," who eventually becomes the hero of sorts by providing "the gift," to the kind and loving Mrs. Parker, to the younger brother Randy and so many more, A Christmas Story is brilliant in its depictions of our modern America.

So, why choose a movie for this series that depicts suffering and disappointment? For starters, it's a classic comedy and laughter is always great medicine. Secondly, we've selected a few clips in the hope that they will spark conversation about your own holiday favorites, family traditions, and Jesus' amazing gifts.

A Christmas Story – Santa Claus Clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwGYfMVKQtQ>

A Christmas Story – Ralphie Gets His BB Gun

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soUG7NSgkTg>

Reflect on the most memorable Christmas gift you received in childhood or adolescence.

- **What was the gift? What did you experience when you received or opened it?**
- **Did the gift fulfill your expectations? Do you still own the item?**
- **What does this tell us about "gifts that last"? How does it re-shape what you think about Christmas and gift-giving?**

Now reflect on a gift only the Holy Spirit could provide for you.

- **If you were to ask the Holy Spirit for a gift, what would you ask for? Why?**

A Christmas Story – Chinese Restaurant Scene

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTq2oprt0K8>

The Chinese restaurant scene is, according to screenwriter Jean Shephard, a significant part of the anti-nostalgia theme of the movie. The traditional meal of turkey, potatoes, stuffing and gravy, ruined by the neighborhood dogs, is replaced by a completely un-American Chinese meal. Complete with another hilarious moment in the singing of Deck the Halls by the restaurant staff and the lopping off the now famous duck's "smile," this meal does not fit the ideal.

Many of us have a favorite food or meal for which we feel somewhat nostalgic. Reflect:

- **What are your family's traditional food favorites during the holidays? Is there a dish that has to be included or "it just isn't Christmas"?**

But is food really the focus of Christmas?

Of course we know the answer; Jesus is the focus, praise God!

- **How can we shift our focus off gift and food expectations back onto Jesus?**
- **How have you seen or experienced Jesus in your life? What are you thankful for?**