

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 Matthew 1:18-25. This passage reveals how Joseph lived a surrendered and obedient life unto the Lord in the details of Jesus' birth.

Objectives:

- Discuss how a disciple lives according to God's will (obedience) and by the power of God's Spirit (surrender) through Joseph's example.
- Identify where God is at work changing your affections and will to follow Jesus.
- Pray and encourage each other to take a step of obedience and surrender to experience the joy of the Christmas season.

Bible Discussion: Read Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph had a shocking surprise; the Holy Spirit gets his bride-to-be pregnant! In what would be a loving response, he set out to end the engagement discretely because in doing so she'd be protected from the actions of a judgmental society. But God reached out to Joseph and asked him to surrender his plans and trust in a bigger plan through obedience.

Relating to Joseph's story of surrender and obedience

Joseph demonstrated obedience to the Lord by taking a stand and publically marrying his pregnant bride.

- *What is something in your life that God's prompting you to take a stand that goes against the grain of the majority?*
- *How can your group help you trust and obey God in taking a stand?*

Joseph had to surrender his needs by take cold showers for nine months so that Jesus is born of a virgin. Why is the virgin birth so important? <https://www.gotquestions.org/virgin-birth.html>

- *What are some needs you're surrendering to God's timing and provision?*
- *How might God work in your surrender to bring a greater fulfillment to that need?*

Activity Suggestion:

Joseph was obedient and gave up the right to give a name to the newborn child. He trusted and obeyed God in giving the newborn baby the name Jesus. Later we discover in Philippians 2:9-11, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Share the **name** that is above all names this Christmas season.

- *Who can you invite to a Christmas service to hear the name of Jesus?*
- Share the name of Jesus in my family gatherings. Simple ideas here: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/christmas-activities/>
- Serve others so that they give thanks to Jesus for the outpouring of love and compassion. Suggestion: Help at a local homeless shelter. <https://www.opendoormission.org/volunteer/>

Option 2 – Advent - JOY

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 the return of Christ which is yet to come. This is not a passive waiting, but an active waiting.

Activity (Optional):

- Light the third candle of your [advent wreath](#) symbolizing “joy” when you gather. [History/Tradition of Advent Wreaths](#)
- Use this [Advent calendar](#) throughout the week.

Open with prayer. Read Luke 2:1-11.

Watch the Bible project video- [“Chara / Joy”](#)

- The video says that joy is a theme that runs through the whole Bible.
 - ***What are some examples of joy that we see in Scripture?***
- Joy is not dependent on our circumstances but rather is deeply connected to hope.
- In Luke 2 the angel says that the coming of Jesus will cause great joy for the people.
 - ***What might the coming of Jesus have meant for the people? What do we have to be joyous about?***
- The video emphasizes that joy is a decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus.
 - ***What does this decision of joy look like in our everyday lives? How can we live in the joy of the Lord?***

In what ways might we share joy with others during this holiday season?

Listen (Optional): “Joyful Joyful”

Pray for one another that you would have a spirit of joy this holiday season.

Option 3 – Movie Night – The Grinch*

How the Grinch Stole Christmas, the movie based upon the children’s book by Dr. Seuss, has many adult lessons.

Optional opening scene 10 min - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heD427hwSZQ>

In case you have not seen the movie – or have become so “adult” that you have forgotten the story – here is a summary:

- The Grinch is jealous of other people enjoying Christmas because he has a heart that is “two sizes too small.”
- The Grinch decides to steal everyone’s Christmas presents, their decorations, and even their Christmas trees so that he can have Christmas all to himself.
- The Grinch is surprised to discover that the people (called the “Who’s”) are still able to celebrate Christmas, even without their gifts and decorations.
- The Grinch further discovers that Christmas isn’t just about gifts, decorations, and trees, it is about “something more.”
- The Grinch’s heart suddenly grows several sizes, he returns all of the Christmas items to the Who’s, and he is invited to join them in celebrating Christmas.

Not a bad list of lessons to learn at this time of year. The lesson that there’s something more amazing to be discovered in the Christmas season than gifts and decorations, shopping and busyness. The Grinch isn’t just a book or a movie for kids, it’s for all of us. It’s for the lost who need to be found, and for the saved searching for hope.

Discussion starter: (divide into two teams and brainstorm as many items as you can think of)

Think through a couple of lists – what are the tangible items that you associate with Christmas? (gifts, cocoa, tree, carols, etc) **What are some of the intangible realities of Christmas that make it so special?** (love of family & friends, spending time together, serving and helping the less fortunate, etc)

Let’s talk about three important lessons from the Grinch that are about “something more”:

1) Presents aren’t the reason for the season

Throughout the whole movie, Cindy Lou-Who wants Santa to help her mother be free from stress and hardship as a single parent, rather than receive a Christmas-sized gift. The idea of a child rejecting presents is virtually unheard of and truly refreshing! As the movie comes to a close, the Whos learn that all their presents were taken on Christmas morning.

stealing Christmas 4.5 min - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7ctcVtm4xA>

Even after losing all their gifts, (and to the surprise of the Grinch) the community gathers in the town square to sing Christmas carols instead of being angry or frustrated. Here, audiences see that material objects are merely additions to Christmas, rather than the source of meaning. It’s the love, kindness and joy we give and receive that brings meaning to the season.

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 4:19 (KJV)

2) Community is important (It’s why we “do life together”)

The Grinch lives in isolation with his sweet pet dog named Max in a cave far away from the Whos. In the newest version of the movie, audiences learn that the Grinch was forgotten as an orphan; this has shaped his heart to be callous towards others, especially during Christmas. Many scenes juxtapose the Grinch’s solitude with the happy and warm environment of all the Whos in Whoville. Watch this scene near the end of the movie when the Whos invite him in:

last scene – dinner with the Whos 5 min - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swBASmh3jws>

Although resistant at first, the Whos teach the Grinch that with kindness, coming together as a community helps to bolster love and unity. This was vital for the Grinch, and it’s important for audiences as well, to be reminded that we were not created to be alone. We do life together.

“Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire...” – Proverbs 18:1a (ESV)

3) Jesus is the Savior of the world!

With a commercialized emphasis on Christmas, it's encouraging that THE GRINCH inserts truth about the real reason for the season. THE GRINCH features Christmas carols like "God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman" which has a lyric that reads, "remember Christ our Savior" and clearly alludes to the Gospel. **What are some other Christian themes you noticed:** (examples - honoring your parents, treating others with respect, repenting of wrongdoing)

He realizes & changes heart 5 min - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXmbA6SpOw0>

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." – Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)

May God bless us all with community, love, kindness, joy and most importantly, may He bless us all with a Spirit of Peace as celebrate of the birth of Jesus, the Savior of the world.

**some ideas adapted from Tess Farand and Mike Coyner*

<https://www.movieguide.org/news-articles/3-christian-messages-that-surprised-us-in-the-grinch.html>

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/missionwork/2015/12/lessons-from-the-grinch/>