

# Advent

## - Christmas Series 2023 - Discussion Guide for Life Group Leaders -

### Introduction

The Christmas Season is an exciting one in the life and ministry of the Faith Baptist Church! Our thoughts go to shared memories and traditions of Christmas past. We're excited for the missional opportunities to give, serve, and invite in this season. There's a lot of nostalgia and joy wrapped up in Advent.

Let's take a moment to consider the fact that not everyone in our Life Group shares these memories or excitement for the season. Some may struggle with the pain of Christmas past, or the suffering they're experiencing in this season. Be sensitive to your individual group members.

These four weeks of Advent will come and go in the blink of an eye. Let's intentionally take time as Group Leaders to embrace all that this season can be for the sake of *Good News of Great Joy for All People!*

### Hope for the Waiting - Sunday, Nov. 26

Be sure to start this Christmas series with an introduction for your Life Group. Set out the expectation. Encourage your group to commit to these four gatherings and discussions, understanding that December is a very busy month. Take a moment to explain why your group is discussing the sermon content from our Celebration Sunday gatherings. You could set a date for a Christmas activity as a group to mark your final gathering for the year?!

Advent means *arrival*. We mark the four Sundays leading up to Christmas as the designated Advent season. Christmas is the celebrated arrival of the long-awaited, Newborn King!

As an ice-breaker for discussion, ask your group whether or not they like to wait. (*Does anyone enjoy waiting?*) What are some significant things they've had to wait for? Why did they choose to wait? Did it end up being worth the wait? Share a personal story about waiting for something that maybe wasn't worth the wait...

Invite a group member to read **Romans 8:18-25**. What images of hope do we see in these verses? Note that childbirth is a picture of a patient hope, like the virgin birth of the Christmas story. Work together as a group to agree on a definition of hope based on these verses. Are hope and patience linked?

In light of **Romans 8:18**, consider some of the suffering situations to which God gave the prophetic hope of the long-awaited Messiah:

- Read **Genesis 3:15** and discuss how this prophecy spoke to the punishment Adam & Eve were facing after eating the forbidden fruit.
- Read **Isaiah 9:6**. Consider the hope this prophecy brought as Isaiah is pronouncing judgment to an idolatrous and unjust nation.
- In **Luke 1:31-33**, Mary is receiving the announcement of her holy pregnancy. How did this prophecy bring hope to Mary's complicated situation?

With **Romans 8:25** in mind, how does the hope of Jesus speak patience to our current suffering? Conversely, how does our current suffering speak to the need for a patient hope that is only found in Jesus? Are there practical steps for your group to apply this hope to their situation?

A fitting close would be to draw our group's attention to the fact that Jesus came, now we're waiting in hope for His return! Our painful situations will one day be fully restored because of Jesus. He is our hope! This is the ultimate reality of **Romans 8:18-25**.

As a group, take time to pray for those who need to receive this hope, and for those who are patient in the midst of suffering.

Song suggestion: *Seasons* by Hillsong worship

### **Love is the Wonder - Sunday, Dec. 3**

You're likely aware of the level of *Christmas Spirit* amongst your Life Group. See if you can facilitate a lively debate on whether or not Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. You could even play that Christmas song!

In all seriousness, is there something about Christmas that causes wonder to well up in you? What's so wonderful about Christmas? Define *wonder*.

Have some fun reading the Christmas story from **Luke 2:1-40**. You could give group members different characters to play as they participate in reading as the angel, shepherd, Simeon, etc.

Ask your group to note every instance of wonder in this portion of the Christmas Story. Why did these people respond in shock, awe, and wonder? What was so wonderful about that first Christmas?

Have your group consider why it seems that *wonder* comes more naturally to children. Is the wonder of Christmas something we associate with children? Do we as adults struggle with wonder? Why or why not?

Let's come at it from a different angle - What do you think the title *Wonderful Counselor* means? (**Isaiah 9:6**) How is Jesus the *Wonderful Counselor*? You could explain that a counselor is someone who has a plan or gives counsel. Does this mean Jesus is God's *Extraordinary Plan* for humanity? It may be helpful for your group to be pushed to consider this familiar Christmas verse at a new depth.

Christmas is the celebration of God's love having come down. Is that not the wonder of it all? Conclude your discussion with this awesome thought - God loves us so much that He gave His only Begotten Son for us! Wouldn't a song of praise be appropriate at this point?

Song suggestion: *Wonderful* by Cain

### **Joy beyond a Wish - Sunday, Dec. 10**

This is the half-way point of our Christmas series. We're two weeks out from Christmas. Be intentional about this short season. How is your group? Check in with each member through an intentional message or call. Care in community is what Life Groups are great at!

As a group, we're likely beyond writing a wishlist to Santa, wishing upon a star or making a wish as we blow out the candles... But, we still have strong desires for things that seem unattainable in our current season. Ask your group what they're wishing for in this season. Does this wish seem unattainable?

Why did the angelic announcement, in **Luke 2:10**, include *Great Joy*? How would you define *joy*? From the fearful Shepherd's perspective, why was this great joy? Why was this a joyful announcement to those angelic messengers?

Consider the story of the wisemen in **Matthew 2:9-11**? Is there an apparent link between *sight* and *joy*? How did the wisemen respond to the joy welling within them as they entered the place where Jesus was? Would you say this is an appropriate response to the Newborn King? Why?

Ask your group if they have encountered the joy Jesus brings. What is Jesus calling us to do if we have encountered *His Joy*? (**Matt. 13:44-46**) Are there members of your group who need further explanation on what it means to find abundant life & joy in Jesus?

Song suggestion: *Joy* by MercyMe

### **Peace that Works - Sunday, Dec. 17**

*Tis' the week before Christmas, and all through your group, not a member was discouraged, not one in a stoop. Maybe... But probably not. The reality is, Christmas can be a difficult season for many. The stress and anxiety that busyness brings can often be seen on faces this time of year.*

What if you began your discussion with prayer? You could pair members together, write and place requests in a jar, or have each answer the question *I need peace for \_\_\_\_*. Whatever you do, be intentional with this week's prayer time. Prayer works for the one who needs a working peace!

Song suggestion: *Prince of Peace* by Taya

Chances are your group is already well into discussions on the stress of the season. It's all around us and often within us! Ask *how do you handle the stress in the season?* Does your group turn to the peace-filled promises of God when the stress builds?

Read together **Isaiah 9:6-7**, recognizing the stressful calling on Isaiah's life and the building anxiety of a nation. Why is Jesus called the *Prince of Peace* in Isaiah's prophecy? Break down those two terms: *Prince & Peace*. How do they correlate?

Let's talk about Jesus further. How has the Prince of Peace accomplished the work of peace for us? Consider **Isaiah 53:5, John 14:27; 16:33**. What do these verses tell us about the Prince's campaign of Peace over the trouble in our hearts and the world?

Let's be sure this is a practical concept for our groups. In what ways will the *Prince of Peace* work in the busyness of your Christmas Season? Consider **Philippians 4:4-7**. Have we submitted to Christ's reign of Peace over the turmoil in our hearts and minds? Have we handed over our anxious heart and will to Him?

### **Closing Thoughts**

Just because the Christmas season is short and filled with activity, that doesn't mean these conversations have to end by December 25th! Keep these Biblical truths active in your conversations and practices as a group. Were difficult situations brought to your attention? Did worshipful practices emerge in your group? Was a creative prayer approach identified? How can you lead your group to respond?

Take a moment to record your thoughts. Journaling is a wonderful exercise! Would you also be willing to take the time to send your group's debriefing comments on this series to our staff team? We find these comments so helpful for future guide content!

Merry Christmas!