

advent

This Advent series utilizes videos and resources from RightNow Media. If you do not have an account, create a free one using this link: [RightNow Media - Antioch Invite](#). Under each video, you'll find a link to a study guide as well as a family guide. If using this resource as a Lifegroup, the study guide will be most helpful. Feel free to share the [family guide resource](#) with Lifegroup members so they can continue the discussion with their family. Watch the [Advent trailer](#) for an intro to the series.

Week One: Emmanuel, God With Us

Icebreaker: What do you love most about Christmas? What holiday traditions do you get most excited about this time of year?

Worship: Christmas lyric videos on [Lifegroupleaders.com](#).

Watch: [Emmanuel, God with Us](#) (12 minutes)

Read: Matthew 1:18-23

Discussion:

1. In what ways have you recognized that God is with you? What, if anything, can make you think he is not with you?
2. It can be easy to feel disconnected from the people and promises of the Old Testament. But, while we are not in the same situation as the ancient Israelites, we all are living in some kind of darkness, be it the darkness of fear, betrayal, illness, loss, or hopelessness. **What darkness are you currently living in? What in your life do you wish God would rescue you from?**
3. In what ways does seeing your darkness as a passing shadow change your perspective on your circumstances?
4. How might what you long for be fulfilled in Jesus? **What would it look like to live as if God is with you?**



Dive Deeper: Read Isaiah 7:1-17

1. Ahaz, the leader of God's people, is facing down two armies, one from Syria and one from Ephraim. In the midst of this chaos, God promises Ahaz that neither army will overcome his people. **Why do you think God offered Ahaz a sign to confirm his promise?**
2. Ahaz, surprisingly, refuses the confirming sign. He passes on God's offer, thinking that he is being tricked into "testing the Lord." **When have you felt like asking God for something is improper? Do you ever feel like you are bothering God? Why?**
3. In the Old Testament, asking God for a confirming sign showed that a person didn't trust God. If God made a promise, he kept it. Asking for a sign before trusting his Word was essentially like yelling, "Prove it," to God. But here, God *offered* Ahaz a sign—Ahaz's choice of a miracle. God wanted Ahaz to have unshakable faith in his promise. All Ahaz needed to do was pick his miracle but instead he said, "I will not." This doesn't prove Ahaz's righteousness; it shows us he didn't think he needed God's help. **Do you ever feel like you don't need God's help with something? What situations do you feel like you need to handle on your own?**
4. When Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, God does not rescind his offer but chooses what Ahaz's sign will be: a child. The sign is strange; Ahaz is asking for protection and God gives him a baby. **If you were Ahaz, what would you think of a baby as a sign?**
5. God was not playing a cruel joke on Ahaz. Instead, he was offering Ahaz and his people exactly what they needed: his presence. The child, Emmanuel, is a promise: God is with us. **What good does God's presence in your current circumstance offer? In what ways is his presence the best gift to face your darkness?**
6. The promise God gave to Ahaz in Isaiah 7 is extended to us (Matthew 1:22–23). God has seen us in our distress and darkness and sent us a miracle, a child called Emmanuel. He did not come to defeat the armies of Syria and Ephraim but our true enemies, sin and death. In Jesus, that promise is offered to us, the church. God has met our true need by wiping away our sin and offering us his presence. **What encouragement does God's provision give you in your current circumstances?**
7. **In what ways do you need God today? This week?**
8. **In what ways does God's presence feel like enough, or not enough, for what you are going through?**

Prayer: Let's end by breaking up into groups of 2-3 and pray to see God's presence in your life more clearly. Even though he may feel far away, His presence never leaves us.

Resources: An additional Christmas resource from J.D. Greear you may find helpful is his book [Searching for Christmas](#).

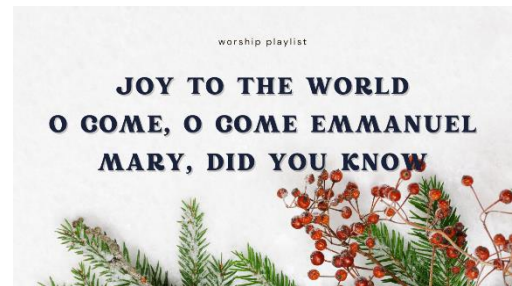
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Week Two: Wonderful Counselor

Icebreaker: Are you more likely to ask for too much advice or to never ask for advice at all? Why?

Worship: Christmas lyric videos on [Lifegroupleaders.com](https://www.lifegroupleaders.com).

Watch: [Wonderful Counselor](#) (11 minutes)



Discussion:

1. In Isaiah 9:6, God calls Jesus our Wonderful Counselor. In Hebrew, Wonderful Counselor roughly translates to “a guide whose goodness goes beyond words.” **In what situations in your life do you want help from a good guide? What kind of help are you looking for?**
2. Think about the way you pray. It is easy to think of a counselor as someone who simply listens to and sympathizes with our problems. But, as J.D. taught us, Jesus is much more than a sympathizer—he is an authoritative guide. Jesus not only hears and sympathizes with you but is also able to guide and rescue you. **In what ways might your prayers change knowing that Jesus can hear and sympathize with you? That he can guide and rescue you?**
3. J.D. asked three questions we need to answer before approaching our Wonderful Counselor. The first is: **Are you ready to be honest with him, even about the painful and secret parts of your life? What worries you about talking about, or even praying about, your secret sins or problems?**
4. The second question J.D. asked was, “Do you want to be healed?” Many of us want to be healed but may not want to change. **What parts of your life are off-limits to change? What would you do if God asked you to change those parts of your life?**
5. The final question J.D. asked us was, “Are you ready to do what Jesus says?” Jesus is our guide, and he will lead us by his Word and his Spirit. **Do you trust him enough to let him call the shots? What does it look like for you to trust and do what Jesus says?**

Dive Deeper: Read Hebrews 4:12-16

It may be intimidating to approach God with your problems. What if he ignores you? What if he rejects you? What if you only receive judgment instead of mercy? These questions may seem reasonable, but they stem from thinking that God is like an angry boss, not a Wonderful Counselor. When we approach God with our problems, our sins, and our hopes, he sympathizes with our weaknesses and is eager to help us.

1. Verses 12–13 teach us about God’s omniscience. God knows everything, including our motivations. **What worries you about God knowing everything about you?**
2. For some of us, Jesus is the last person we want to talk to after we sin. He knows everything, even our selfish motivations for doing good. But when we approach God’s throne, we don’t find disappointment or judgment. Verses 14–16 show us a very different picture of Jesus than we might expect. **What do we receive when we approach the throne of God? What stands out to you about the character of Jesus in verses 14–16?**
3. Jesus came as a person, just like us. He knows what it means to be tempted, to struggle, and to suffer. As a result, he sympathizes with, or suffers alongside, us and extends mercy and grace whenever we need it. **What does it mean to you that Jesus sympathizes with your weaknesses and pains?**
4. Jesus is not waiting on his throne to smite us. He invites us to his throne so that he can give us grace. He knows what you are going through and is eager to meet your needs. He is our God and our Wonderful Counselor. **In what ways does Jesus’s empathy change the way you think about approaching him?**

Prayer: Let’s end by breaking up into groups of 2-3. Share any areas of your life where you may not be willing to respond “yes” to the question Jesus asks, “Do you want to be made well?” What holds you back from trusting Jesus with this area or where you aren’t willing to surrender in obedience to Him? If you feel comfortable, take time to confess any hidden sin and pray for one another that you may receive the grace that God freely offers before His throne.

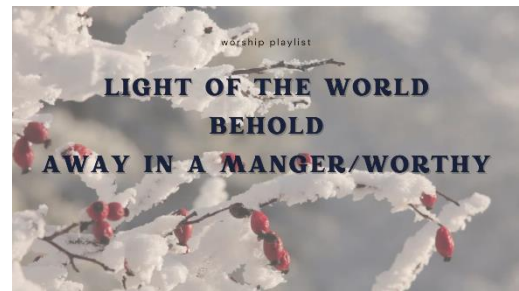
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Week Three: Everlasting Father

Icebreaker: What is your favorite memory of your father or someone who was a father figure to you?

Worship: Christmas lyric videos on Lifegroupleaders.com.

Watch: [Everlasting Father](#) (12 minutes)



Read:

Psalm 23:6 "Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Zephaniah 3:17 "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

1 John 3:1a "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

Proverbs 3:11-12 "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."

Matthew 6:25-26 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

James 1:17 "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

Discussion:

1. What is/was your earthly father like? What kind of relationship did you have with your father as a child?
As an adult?
2. In what ways has your relationship with your earthly father shaped your perspective of God, whether positive or negative?
3. In what ways do the verses you read above shape your perspective of God as your Father?
4. In what ways have you sought to be near and known by our Everlasting Father?

Dive Deeper: Read the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32.

1. If you grew up in church, you have probably heard or read this parable before. This time, let's focus on the father and his love for his wayward son. **What surprises you about the love of the father in this parable?**
2. In verses 18–19, the younger son practices an apology he plans on giving to his father. **Have you ever practiced an apology before asking your father's (or your father figure's) forgiveness? What worried you about approaching him? How did he react to confession and repentance?**
3. In verses 20–23 the father does not wait for the son's apology before kissing him and welcoming him home. In fact, he does not even let the son finish his apology and orders a feast of celebration in his son's honor. **According to verse 24, what is going through the father's head?**
4. This parable is Jesus's picture of God's love for us. Our Father rushes out to meet us with love and celebration. **In what ways do you feel like you have to earn God's love or make him appreciate you?**
5. **What does it make you think or feel knowing God loves you and simply wants you to "come home"?**
6. This is the only parable where Jesus does not end with an application. This parable is meant to make us recognize God's love for us as a restored son or daughter. We are meant to sit in awe of God's great love for us. **What makes you question God's love for you?**
7. To practice "beholding" God's love for you, read the passage again, making note of everything the father does that demonstrates his love and goodness.

Prayer: Let's end by breaking up into groups of 2-3. Pray that God would show you his goodness as your heavenly Father. Ask that his love might be overwhelmingly apparent to you as you seek to know him more closely.

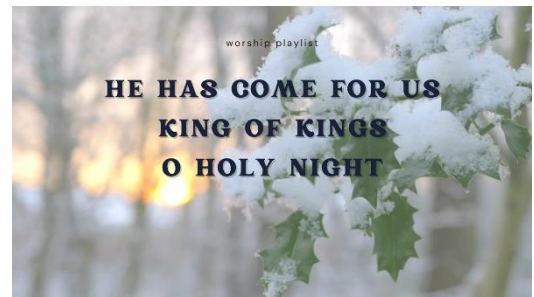
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Week Four: I AM

Icebreaker: How would you describe yourself? What names or descriptions do you think are true of you?

Worship: Christmas lyric videos on Lifegroupleaders.com.

Watch: [I AM](#) (9 minutes)



Discussion:

1. In this session, J.D. mentioned a few times when God came to his people in need and said “I AM.” He is our healer, our sanctifier, our righteousness, the ever present one, our shepherd, our provider, and our defender. **In what ways do you need God today?**
2. When we pray, we can sometimes ask only for the things we think we need to solve our problems but forget to ask God to be our I AM. **In what ways can you seek God’s presence and ask for his involvement in your current circumstances?**
3. **If you know Jesus, are you living in the fullness of his name?** Jesus wants us to trust him as Emmanuel, our Wonderful Counselor, and our Everlasting Father. Think back on the names of Jesus we have studied so far. **In what ways can you trust Jesus more deeply as Emmanuel, God with us? As your Wonderful Counselor? Your Everlasting Father?**

Dive Deeper: Let’s take a deeper look at Scripture and figure out how we what it looks like to live “in the fullness of Jesus’s name.” Read Colossians 3:1–17.

1. **What is the command for Christians in verses 1–4? What do you think it means to be “hidden in Christ”?**
2. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are meant to identify with him. In all the ways that we are weak, he is strong. He is our righteousness and our redeemer. **What does it look like for you to define your identity in Jesus?**

3. Verses 5–11 describe who we were before trusting Christ. **As you read through these verses, which of the listed characteristics best describe you apart from Jesus? Which of these characteristics do you still carry with you? What would it look like for you to put them aside?**
4. Colossians goes on to list who we should be now that we know Jesus. Verses 12–16 describe what it looks like to be hidden in Christ. **Which of these characteristics is most difficult for you to “put on”?**
5. **What can you do to practice that characteristic, especially in times when it is not easy?**
6. **What role could your community play in helping you grow in these Christlike characteristics?**
7. Verse 17 ties a bow on this passage by giving us an overarching principle to follow as we seek to be more like Jesus. **What practical steps can you take to remind yourself to do everything in the name of Jesus today? This week?**
8. **In what ways are you giving thanks to God the Father in everything that you do?**

Prayer: Let's end by breaking up into groups of 2-3. Pray that you would take on the names of Jesus for yourself and trust God to be all that you need each day.