

Crosswalk Communities Discussion Guides

Dec 18th Study Guide

Icebreaker Questions (Pick at the least one question, but use as many as your group feels comfortable)

1. What are your plans for Christmas? What are you most excited about? What do you most dread about Christmas?

Bible Study Questions

1. When you think back to Mary the mother of Jesus, what images or impressions come to mind?
2. Read Luke 1:26-38
 - Pastor Michael talked about Mary living in an honor/shame culture. She would have dreamed of bringing honor to her family and herself being honored by the community. How did God's interruption change that?
 - How does Mary respond to the angel's message?
3. Read Luke 1:46-55. What do these verses tell you about Mary's response? How does she seem to interpret God's work?
4. Have you ever had a time in your life in which God "interrupted" your life? If so, what is the story. How did it turn out?
5. There have been a number of voices over the year who have described our life as a story and that we need to write a good one. According to our culture, what kind of stories are we encouraged to live? How would you describe the story that you have been trying to write with your life?
6. How would you summarize God's story?
7. Mary chose to let go of her story and to embrace a role in the bigger story that God was writing. Does doing this sound attractive or difficult to you? Why? What would it mean for you to do this?

December 18th

The Power of One...Who Perseveres in Doing What is Right

We often imagine Mary as this saintly girl who calmly accepted her role as the mother of Jesus. Generations later, people would write fictional accounts of her own birth being miraculous and of her living a sinless life. It is easy to put her on a pedestal and to make her so holy that she isn't relatable. Yet Mary was a real person with dreams for life. When the angel came to her to announce the coming birth of Jesus, it caused a serious interruption in her life.

I. God's interruption of Mary's life

- **Her reputation would be stained by an unexpected pregnancy:** The culture of the 1st century was a honor/shame culture. What one dreamed for more than anything else was to be in a position in which they would be honored by the community. Yet having a child outside of marriage, would have been a serious stain on that honor. Mary's community would have been aware of this and she would have born the brunt of that shame.
- **She would bring shame to her family:** One's honor/shame doesn't just impact themselves, but their family. The community would question the parenting skills of her parents who allowed their daughter to behave in this way. They would pay a price for their daughter's disobedience.
- **Her future marriage to Joseph was brought into doubt:** a marriage to a righteous man like Joseph would bring honor into the family. But Joseph knows that the child is not his and if he were to marry Mary, he would be bringing that shame upon himself. The expectation was that he would break off the marriage.

II. Mary's Response: To set aside her story and embrace a role in God's story:

Mary responds to the angel saying "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled. (Luke 1:37)" Later in Luke 1:46-55, we have the song of Mary. She starts off declaring that she has been blessed and then goes on to talk about God's work of justice. Mary has given up the normal dreams of a Jewish girl and is excited to be a part of the grand story of redemption that God is writing.

Note: This isn't the end of Mary's story. She is told by Simeon that "a sword would pierce her own heart (Luke 2:35). Years

later, Mary will be there when Jesus dies on the cross. That moment seemed to again be the death of her dreams. Little did she know that it was a critical moment in God's plan to redeem the world.

III. Application

- Remember the greatness of God's story:** There is no greater story than the redemptive story of God. He created us to love him, we rebelled, and he has been on a mission to win us back.
- Discern what kind of story your life is writing:** There has been a number of writers who have talked about our lives being a story and the need for us to live that story well. Our culture tells us to dream big dreams and to pursue them. A good discipline is to look at our life and ask whether we are charting our own life or if we are choosing to follow God's lead for our life.
- Welcome God's interruptions in your life:** God's interruptions are often inconvenient, but they pull us out of our story into his story. We should welcome them as opportunities to join God in what he is doing.
- Embrace your role in God's story:** As great as our dreams are, they are nothing compared to the story that God is writing. We need to embrace our role in his story.

Conclusion

Asa changes a nation by persevering in doing what is right. When he got discouraged, he remembered that God was with him and that his work would not be wasted. The message for us is to press on in our own obedience trusting that God will honor it.

Lastly, Jesus himself lived this out. He came on a mission to save the lost. When he was on the cross, he experienced something that we will never experience ourselves. With the sin of the world upon him, God the Father turned his back on Jesus. Jesus persevered through the suffering, so that we could be restored to God.