



Discussion Guide Away In a Manger — Part 1 LEADER GUIDE

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Hey leaders! We are overjoyed to have begun our Christmas series, “[Away In a Manger](#)”! Throughout this series, we’ll take a closer look at the simple, unexpected place where God’s greatest gift was born. We’ll see how the manger is **a sign, a challenge, and an invitation** to trust God’s plan. Even when life feels far from perfect, there is joy, hope, and peace waiting when we choose humility and let Jesus lead the way.

Our Christmas Eve services are coming soon! We hope you and your loved ones will join us on December 24th as we come together to celebrate the birth of our Savior and share in His joy as a church family. Start praying NOW for who you will invite to sit with you for a special time of singing, reflection, and celebration. Find your campus’s service times and invitational tools [HERE!](#)

Thank you for shepherding a group of people to Love God, Love Others, and Live Sent!

NEED A RESOURCE, HAVE A QUESTION, OR WANT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION?
Let us know how we can help! Contact your groups director or discipleship@rockbridge.cc

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“The joy of God has gone through the poverty of the manger and the distress of the cross; therefore it is invincible and irrefutable.”

[Dietrich Bonhoeffer]

LEADER RESOURCES || **Leader Note** We do our best to equip, empower, and encourage you to shepherd your group well. Access a resource by clicking on the underlined title and share them with your group!

- **Passage Summary**
 - The first Christmas is anything but perfect from a circumstantial perspective. However, for the people involved, it was an amazing blessing and the beginning of forever joy and certain hope. Why is that? Because they humbled themselves in relationship to God and therefore received all that God was for them in Christ!
- **Luke 2 Commentary & Luke 2 in 5 Minutes**
 - Use this commentary and short video for background and encouragement. These would be good resources to share before you gather.
- **Jesus's Humility: The Beauty of Holiness**
 - This would be a good resource to share with your group after you gather.

ENGAGE & CONNECT || **Leader Note** The goal for the icebreaker is to prepare your group for the conversation ahead by connecting with one another’s hearts and building joy together.

Share about one of your most joy-filled Christmas memories (the day or season; as an adult or child).

BEGIN WITH PRAYER || **Leader Note** Begin your time together by thanking God for his presence and praying His word back to Him. Ask a few people to pray, beginning in a posture of humility and dependence!

Spend a moment praying this passage, beginning your time together in humility and gratitude!

*"The humble will see it and rejoice. You who seek God, take heart!
For the Lord listens to the needy and does not despise his own who are prisoners."
[Psalm 69:32-33]*

BIG IDEA || Leader Note Read this aloud so your group knows the theme of today's reading and discussion.

The God we were created to know, the life we were meant to live, and the abundance we long to receive all come when we humble ourselves.

PASSAGE & DISCUSSION || Leader Note Have people read aloud the passage as instructed. Your role is to FACILITATE, so keep your group moving along, encourage multiple people to share, and look for opportunities to point out the grace and glory of God! Here are two reminders: 1) Every question does not have to be answered ... go where the Spirit leads! 2) Answers do not have to be read aloud ... they're for guidance!

Have a couple of people read aloud portions of Luke 2:1-20.

1. In the sermon we heard, *"Luke is telling us that the particular circumstances of Jesus' birth are significant."* What might the setting of Jesus' birth in a manger symbolize about God's character and His approach to humanity? *Answers will vary: the manger reflects humility and accessibility. It shows God's willingness to enter into the lowliest of conditions to reach humanity, emphasizing His love and identification with the marginalized.*
2. What does shepherds being chosen to receive the announcement of Jesus' birth reveal about what and who God values? *Shepherds, considered lowly in society, were chosen to highlight that God's grace is available to all, regardless of status. This reflects His preference for humility and His desire to bring good news to the overlooked and humble.*
3. Humility is central to the Christmas story, particularly the birth of Jesus. How could embracing humility more fully change the way we experience God's presence and blessings? *Humility aligns our hearts with God's will, making us more receptive to His grace and guidance. It shifts focus from self to God, allowing us to experience His presence more deeply and appreciate His blessings fully.*
4. Mary and Joseph accepted God's plan with faith, even when it seemed difficult or confusing. How can our small group encourage one another to trust God's providence in challenging circumstances? *Answers will vary: we can share testimonies of God's faithfulness, pray for one another, and offer practical support. Encouraging reminders of Scripture and God's promises also foster trust in His plans.*
5. What area(s) of your life may require you to trust in God's providence more, even when His plans are unclear? How can Jesus' birth story encourage you in this trust? *Trusting God's providence might involve waiting on answers, accepting loss, or navigating transitions. The story of Jesus' humble birth encourages believers to trust that God's plans are for their good, even when difficult to see.*
6. What step is God inviting you to take in order to cultivate a humble heart during the Christmas season? *Answers will vary: steps might include serving others, practicing gratitude, focusing on Christ instead of materialism, and seeking God's guidance over personal ambition.*
7. Mary and Joseph said yes to God's plan, at great personal cost. What does it look like for you to "say yes" to God in this season of life? What are you willing to give up in order to say yes to Him? *Saying yes might involve prioritizing God's will in decisions, surrendering personal desires, or embracing opportunities to serve, trusting that God's plans bring ultimate fulfillment.*

8. The shepherds shared the good news after encountering Jesus. How is God inviting you to share the message of Christ's birth in your own sphere of influence? Let's be creative in sharing the GOOD NEWS of Jesus this year! *Answers will vary: this might include inviting friends to church, sharing personal testimonies, or extending acts of kindness and generosity that reflect Christ's love.*
9. What does it mean to "treasure" God's work in your life, as Mary did (she was "treasuring up all these things" in her heart)? How can you more regularly and wondrously practice this daily? *Treasuring God's work means reflecting on His blessings, promises, and guidance with gratitude. Practices include journaling prayers, meditating on Scripture, and pausing to acknowledge His presence.*
10. Who is someone that God is placing a particular burden for on your heart? How can the humility of Christ's birth inspire you to approach that relationship differently this Christmas season?

STEP OF OBEDIENCE || **Leader Note** *This is an opportunity for people to put into practice what the Spirit is inviting them to do and live in obedience to God for the sake of love! You can encourage your group to be accountable to one another and use these to follow up with one another throughout the week.*

In Christ and over time, God's favor and rescuing grace will arrive, and you will be exalted. Every day, the effect of that continues when Christians treasure Christ's person more than Satan's promises! Based on the Holy Spirit's guidance, what is a step of obedience that you can take this week? Here are a few additional questions to make Christmas better. *Have I truly humbled myself ...*

- by saying NO to self-pity?
- by saying YES to correction?
- by being OPEN to reconciliation?
- in response to the REVELATION of His word?
- by looking for the EVIDENCE of grace in others?
- in response to what He's PROVIDENTIALLY permitted?

Remember ... what could make Christmas or life better this year? Truly embracing humility!

Give your group a few moments to reflect on their answers to the questions above. Then have your group answer the question aloud. Feel free to separate into smaller groups of 3-4 for this question.

PRAYER FOCUS || **Leader Note** *We want to commit to praying for OTHERS as a unified church who is dependent upon God for everything. Be intentional about saving at least 5-10 minutes for prayer at the end of your gathering each week to pray together. You can pray for one another as well as the prompts below!*

Participating In God's Will

- Let's reflect on the truth that humility opens the door for God to work in us, revealing His love, purpose, and provision in ways that we cannot achieve on our own. Where in our lives is God inviting us to a greater level of humility?
- As we pray, let's ask God to help us surrender our pride, self-reliance, and fears. Let's invite Him to shape us into people who walk in humility, trusting Him to fill our lives with His presence, guidance, and abundant blessings.

VISIO DIVINA || **Leader Note** *Each week during this series we will share an image for your members to prayerfully meditate on AFTER you meet. Visio Divina means "divine seeing" and is a form of prayer that involves meditating on visual art or imagery to encounter God.*

Sometime in the week AFTER your group meets, we invite you to try a spiritual practice known as Visio Divina. It is a Latin word that means "divine seeing" and is *a form of prayer that involves meditating on visual art or imagery to encounter God*. This practice engages your senses and imagination, and it can help you reflect more deeply on God's love and leading in your life.

First, take a few moments to prayerfully reflect on the image and Scripture below, welcoming God's presence with you.



Hanna Varghese, God Is With Us, 2006

*"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory,
the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

[John 1:14]

Now, come to God in prayer and share what you hope for, knowing He is with you and hears you!