



Discussion Guide  
Away In a Manger — Part 3  
LEADER GUIDE

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Hey leaders! We are overjoyed to have completed our Christmas series, “**Away In a Manger**”! NEXT week we will have a standalone sermon called “**Don't Give Up Yet**”, when we'll be reminded that the trials we face are not without purpose. Through the power of the gospel, God calls us, transforms us, and works through our weaknesses to reveal His glory, encouraging us to walk by faith and not give up.

**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](mailto:discipleship@rockbridge.cc)

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**“When we see the hand of God at work, let’s ponder and treasure it all.”**

[Dawn Reed]

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!

- **The Shepherd: A Story of the First Christmas**
  - This video (19 minutes) would be a wonderful thing to share with your small group before you gather OR watch together during your meeting!
- **Start the Day Happy In God**
  - 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.

What in nature or life captures your attention? What about that thing is beautiful or good?

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!

**“I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.”**

[Psalm 77:12]

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

Could we be missing God because we are not thinking deeply and correctly? The Christian life is meant for us to pay attention to what we ponder!

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!

1. In the sermon we heard, *“You never know how small, unseen, insignificant moments may be playing a part in God’s plans, and we often overlook these moments.”* How has that been true in your own life? What small moment have you overlooked because it didn’t seem to be part of God’s plan?
2. *Have someone read aloud Luke 2:6-7 and 11-12.* What do these verses tell us about the humility of Jesus’ birth? How does this contrast with the expectations for the Messiah? *Jesus’ birth in a manger shows profound humility, contrasting with expectations of grandeur for the Messiah. This setting reflects God’s priorities of identifying with the lowly and revealing His Kingdom values.*
3. *Have someone read aloud Isaiah 55:8.* How does this relate to the story of Jesus’ birth, specifically about God’s ways and thoughts compared to ours? *This reminds us that God’s plans often defy human logic. The story of Jesus’ humble birth underscores His higher wisdom, revealing profound truths through seemingly ordinary events.*
4. Pondering and thinking more deeply is part of the Christian life. How can you cultivate a habit of reflection and meditation on God’s Word more deeply? *Strategies include setting aside quiet time for Scripture, journaling reflections, sharing insights with the group, and praying for wisdom. These habits help align thoughts with God’s truth.*
5. The sermon contrasted “lesser stories” with God’s Kingdom story. How can you identify and reject cultural narratives that compete with biblical truths? What is a “lesser story” you might be trusting in right now? *By discussing cultural influences critically and comparing them with Scripture, the group can discern truth. Praying for wisdom and sharing experiences can help resist harmful narratives.*
6. What “small or insignificant” moments in your life (today) might be part of God’s greater plan? How can reflecting on Jesus’ birth help you trust His purposes? *Personal moments, like daily acts of kindness or unnoticed obedience, may play crucial roles in God’s plan. Trusting His work through small beginnings fosters patience and faith.*
7. “Testing our thoughts” is an important part of our faith, if we want to grow and mature. What practical steps can you take to recognize and replace ungodly or non-Kingdom thoughts? *Steps include evaluating thoughts against Scripture, praying for discernment, seeking counsel from others, and focusing on God’s promises instead of fears or doubts.*
8. The sermon encouraged “pondering to the point of praise.” How can you practice this in your daily life, especially during challenges and setbacks? How have you done this before that you can share to encourage us? *Practicing gratitude, reflecting on God’s past faithfulness, and worshiping through music or prayer can shift perspectives from worry to praise.*

**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 Luke 11:28, Jesus tells us this: *“Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”* Based on what we’ve read and discussed today, what is a step of obedience you can take this week to ponder, treasure, be captivated by, and praise our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

*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!

### Pondering and Praising Jesus at Christmas

- As we approach Christmas, let's take time to ponder the wonder of Jesus—God's gift of love wrapped in humanity. Like Mary, who treasured and pondered the miracle of Christ's birth, let us also pause to reflect on His humility, His love, and the salvation He brought to the world.
- Let's pray together, asking God to captivate our hearts anew with the beauty of Jesus. May we treasure Him above all else and overflow with praise for our Savior, who came to dwell with us and bring us eternal hope and joy.

**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.

AFTER your group meets, we invite you to try a practice called Visio Divina, which means "divine seeing". This simply involves meditating on art or imagery to encounter God. This 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 moment to prayerfully reflect on the image and Scripture below, welcoming God's presence with you.



Greg Olsen, The Nativity

*"O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."  
[Psalm 95:6]*

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