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This week is Part 2 of our Christmas series, “Baggage”! We all carry things that weigh us down that shape how we walk through life. This series will invite us to face what we’ve been carrying, name what holds us back, and discover the freedom Jesus offers when we release those weights. This season, let’s make room for Jesus by setting down the baggage that keeps us from knowing, trusting, and following Him fully.

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 Scriptures contain many stories of people who waited years or even decades before the Lord’s promises came to pass. ...Waiting upon the Lord has eternal rewards.”
[Charles Stanley]

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**
 - From Joseph’s perspective, we get a picture of a man whose plans will not be realized. But there is still A PLAN at work. The question is whether Joseph will step along the path of that plan. God’s promises and assurance from the angel give Joseph the clarity to walk in that plan by faith.

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.

Have any of you been to a wedding or big event where things did not go as expected? What happened?

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

Lord, would You loosen our grips on our plans and the way we’ve decided that things will go—be that in the next ten years, five years, or just this week. We want our plans. But we want You more, so please take our plans and give us more of Yourself instead.

“Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David.”
[Luke 2:4]

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

Disappointment is really an appointment! God may not give us what we expect, but He is giving us Immanuel. Are we satisfied with this gift?

PASSAGE & DISCUSSION || Leader Note Have people read aloud the passage as instructed. Your role is to FACILITATE, so keep your group moving along, encourage 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, *"God does not always do things the way we think He should."* Why is there a disconnect between how we expect God to act and how He actually acts?

Have someone read aloud Matthew 1:1, 17-25. Consider having someone else read it aloud again, possibly in a different translation to gain another perspective (i.e. CEB, the Message, Amplified).

2. Joseph is called a righteous man. How does his plan for dealing with Mary show who he is as a person? *He's not looking for revenge or to disgrace her. In fact, he doesn't seem to want to hurt her at all. He doesn't trust her, but that doesn't mean he's going to treat her harshly. Note: if anyone in your group has gone through infidelity or divorce, this may be time to handle the topic extra gently, for their sake. They may be ready to share their story, maybe not. But, either way, God loves and cares for them, and this is your chance to model that care with how you guide the conversation.*
3. The angel is sent to tell Joseph to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. What was he probably afraid of? *That she had cheated and would cheat again are very likely. That he would face a lot of social shame. That everyone would wrongly think that he did it. That he would spend his life guessing whether she was faithful or not.*
4. Why did God address his fear instead of just telling him what to do? *God is interested in going deeper with us than just rote obedience. He wants to have a healthy relationship with us--and that means He cares about how we are and who we are, not just what we do about it. We can live lives of technical obedience and have hearts full of fear, insecurity, and unbelief if we don't let God address things on a deeper level.*
5. Read Isaiah 7:10-14. The scripture says that these things happened to fulfill this ancient prophecy. Why does God want Ahaz to ask Him for a sign? *God wants this king to ask God for what God wants to show him. We get caught up in our own little kingdoms and forget to ask God for direction. This plays into what is happening for Joseph, where again, God wants to deal on a deeper level than what Joseph planned for. God wants to deal with us on a deeper level than what we've planned for, too.*
6. When has God made a mess of what you had planned? *Answers may vary. God sometimes removes key components to get our attention and change our direction. God sometimes allows a sickness or an unforeseen accident to lift our eyes to Him.*
7. How can we slow down to God's pace and let Him shift and move us? How do we leave room for God even when we're making plans? *Ideas may vary here, but the goal is to foster constant prayer and openness before the Lord. We burden ourselves and fill our spaces with so much noise, it's hard to hear God without something drastic. Close relationships don't require something drastic to happen for the people in them to spend time together.*
8. How easily is Joseph's mind changed? Would a weird dream with an angel change your plans for your next big life move? *This is a chance for lighthearted confession, but it may go deeper. Either we're convinced to obey easily, or we're not convinced to obey, no matter how many warnings and nudges we're given by God's word. It may be a good time to insert a moment of prayer that God soften stubborn hearts and makes the soil of their lives ready for Him to plant there.*
9. Matt mentioned in the sermon that "our expectations will never point us to or take us to the goodness and wisdom of God." What have you been expecting that you might have to hold

lightly to? *Expectations are often gifted to us by our culture. I expect that I'll find a spouse, have two-point-five kids, buy a home, have a "decent corporate" job, or be financially set by a certain age. Or, they could be gifted by our parents, our trauma, etc. What do you expect? Is that an expectation of God, or is it an expectation you're putting ON God to fulfill for you?*

10. How do you keep yourself open to God, even when you're disappointed? *This might be a good place to go first, either by confessing that you're not great at this, that it's new to you, or that you've learned how this works in your heart. It might help to work together on coming up with a prayer to remind you to stay soft and open to God when your plans fail.*

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.*

Let go of the life you *wanted or expected*.

As you consider your next step, reflect on: 1) How can we refuse to be defined by the times life has told us "no"? 2) How can we be defined instead by the "yes" of God with us through Jesus?

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 2 or 3 for this question, so each person has others praying with them for the needs they're taking before the throne. The possible next steps of faith below are not for discussion, but simply a resource for your group members.

Step of Faith Ideas

1. See God's disruptions as upgrades, not downgrades.
2. Look at interruptions and ask, "God, are You offering me more of You instead?"

PRAYER FOCUS || Leader Note *Be intentional about saving at least 5 minutes to pray together. Try the prayer activity below or pray for one another's personal requests!*

More Immanuel

Don't be surprised to find yourself worshiping Jesus where you did not expect to find Him!

- Don't resist God's interruptions
- Listen carefully for God to address deeper things
- Trade your plans for more of God
- Close your time by reading this prayer together:
 - *Lord, may we have more of You? Will You show us that You are more than enough for us? Even if it means everything we had in mind was not in Your mind, care for us in ways we didn't see coming. We look forward to practicing following Jesus closer than ever before.*