

TALK IT OVER

Sermon Discussion Guide

Don't Give Up-Look Up!

Christmas 2017

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*"God, when I LOOK UP at the night sky and see your handiwork...the moon and all the stars that you set in place, I ask, 'What are we mortals that you should bother with us? And why should you care about mere humans?' But you made us just a little lower than the angels and you've given us glory and honor, and you put us in charge of everything you made...
Lord you are amazing!" Psalm 8:3-6*

We often hear the expression "things are looking up," but the truth is that our life will start to look up when we begin looking at God instead of looking at our problems. The phrase "Lift up your eyes" occurs at many places in the Bible, pointing out like in Psalm 8 above that the greatness and size of God can shrink the size of our problems. 700 years before Jesus' birth, chapter 40 in the book of Isaiah describes his prophecy that "All nations are nothing in comparison to God. ... Look up! ... How can you say the Lord doesn't see your troubles?" In this discussion, we'll consider what the Bible tells us about how people felt at the first Christmas, and how our feelings will change when our focus changes to looking up to God. As the wise men gave gifts to God, let's look up to God's gift that he gave us.

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

1. At the first Christmas, Mary was confused and worried; Joseph was hurt and brokenhearted; the shepherds were scared to death; and the wise men were exhausted. Share a time when you experienced the same feelings as they felt.
2. What could "looking up instead of giving up" look like in your life?

"...Mary said, 'Yes, I see it all now: I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say.'"
Luke 1:38 (MSG)

3. Mary and Joseph turned their confusion, worry, hurt and broken heartedness around by submitting to God's plan for their lives. Name other characters of the Old or New Testaments that turned their negative situations around by submitting to God's plans.

"Jesus Said, 'If you're tired of carrying a heavy load, and you feel like giving up, come to me and I will give you rest! Yoke up with me and let me teach you how to really live...'" Matthew 11:28-29

4. What is an example of a yoke or burden you would like Jesus to help you carry?
5. What gifts does Jesus offer to us?

- "... (The wise men) opened their treasure chests and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Matthew 2:11 (GW)*
6. The wise men gave their best gifts to Jesus. What could be your best gift to give to Jesus this Christmas?

Diving Deeper (optional)

1. When do you typically look to other people for help when you could look to Jesus instead?
2. Share a time when you relied on yourself and how it felt. Then compare that experience to a time when you relied on Jesus and describe the difference.
3. What would be a way to give more of your attention to Jesus?

REVIEW ANY ASSIGNMENTS OR COMMITMENTS MADE DURING YOUR PREVIOUS MEETING.



Sermon Discussion Guide Leader Notes

Suggestions for This Week’s Study

- Icebreaker: We are familiar with the traditional story of the birth of Jesus. Describe a modern version of Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men, if he were born today.
- Goal: Help group members see that when our focus changes by looking up to God, our feelings change like Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men’s did when Jesus was born. Remind them to look up to Jesus, the first gift God gave to us.
- Pray: Father in heaven, you are the one who sets the stars in place and yet you care more about us than we can grasp. Just as you sent angels to encourage Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men, you are watching over our lives and calling us to change our perspective from focusing on our hardships to looking up to you. Jesus, help us to come to you and believe in the promise that you will give us rest. Holy Spirit, help us unwrap God’s Christmas gift to us, the gift of a savior. Fill us with a desire to give Jesus the best of everything, our hearts, our lives, and our focus daily. We thank you Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Preparing to Lead Your Group

- ✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God’s wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God’s instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.
- ✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God’s five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.
- ✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn’t. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

- Talk It Over is a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. We’ve designed it so it can be completed easily within 30-45 minutes. As the discussion leader, you should preview and evaluate the questions based on the needs of your group. Decide in advance what is most important to focus on, should time not allow for the entire lesson.
- Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, consider using the Diving Deeper section or add additional Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.
- The questions relating to Bible study methods are helpful to develop Bible literacy and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can help your group be aware of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- Personal applications are essential for growth and should be included in every discussion. When discussing how they will apply principles, group members may state very general goals such as “I need to spend more time in prayer.” It is important for you to help people make goals that are very specific and commit to specific plans of action by asking, for example, “How are you going to begin?” An example is to get up 25 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- Your goal as the leader is to bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their needs for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.