

Community Group Discussion Questions

CHRISTMAS GIFTS – NO. 2

“The Gift of Peace for Our Problems” – Matthew 1:18-25

Theme: *Life's circumstances can be stressful and crushing in their impact. Yet real peace is possible for us, just as it was for Joseph!*

Peace is the presence of inner calm, harmony and rest, even during times of pressure and turmoil. Peace on the *inside* is equal and opposite of all the stresses and pressures that would normally be crushing us from the *outside*. Most of us probably need such peace in our lives right now. Conflicts in families, financial stress, job-related worries, fears about the future...the pressure on the *outside* is often greater than what we're able to handle on the *inside*.

Joseph was a man under pressure. The stress of his circumstances was devastating. Matthew writes about Christmas from Joseph's perspective in the opening chapter of his Gospel. It is there that we discover the pathway to peace.

Gathering Together (Icebreaker)

What would be necessary in order to make your celebration of Christmas this year *peaceful*?

Growing Together (Truth/Equipping)

Read Matthew 1:18-25:

1. What is *peace*? How would you define it?
2. Our Bible passage focuses on 2 individuals: Mary and Joseph. What do we know about each of them? What were they like?
3. We're told that Joseph and Mary were "pledged to be married." How were engagement and marriage customs among the Jews of Jesus' day different from our practices today?
4. God communicated with Joseph by means of a dream. While God may use this method today, what are the more normal means He employs to communicate His will to us?

5. This passage draws our attention to the doctrine of the virgin birth or, to be more accurate, the virgin conception of Jesus. The doctrine is totally rejected by critics of Christianity. How important is this doctrine to the gospel?
6. What do we learn from this passage about both the identity of Jesus and the reason for His coming into the world?
7. The passage ends with our being told that Joseph "had no union" with Mary until she gave birth to Jesus. Why do you think Matthew, the author of this Gospel, chose to add what might seem on the surface to be a very private and intimate detail? Why does the Bible mention this in the telling of the Christmas story?

Getting Real Together (Accessibility)

1. Perhaps you've been where Joseph was – crushed by circumstances and deeply disappointed! Maybe you're there right *now*! You feel like all of this pressure on the *outside* is crushing you on the *inside*. What do you do? How do you normally cope? Where do you typically turn for peace? How effective are your normal coping strategies?
2. Have you ever been in a situation, like Joseph, where you struggled to know how to balance "doing the right thing" with compassion? What was the situation? How did you handle it?
3. The focus this week has been peace. Look up the following verses, which describe 3 different types of peace:
 - Upward- Peace with God for our guilt (Romans 5:1)
 - Outward- Peace with others for our conflicts (Romans 12:18)
 - Inward- Peace within for our worries (Philippians 4:6-7)

Which type of peace do you need in your life right now? What commitments is the Holy Spirit urging you to make in order to experience it? With His help, are you willing to make these commitments?

Group Prayer Time (Supplication)

Pray that the Lord would use your actions and those of the group to convey His peace to others during this Christmas season.