

Community Group Discussion Questions

CHRISTMAS GIFTS – NO. 4

“The Gift of Hope for Our Pain” – Matthew 2:13-23

Theme: *The message of Christmas offers hope and encouragement to those experiencing difficulty, sorrow or pain!*

We think Christmas is supposed to be a happy time. We have this idea that it's all about parties, good food, great traditions, and the annual trip to grandmother's house. This may be true for some people. But for many others, the season is marked by discouragement, darkness and pain.

When Jesus came into the world that first Christmas, it wasn't exactly bursting with happy people, either. In fact, the Bible verses we're going to consider today draw our attention to what has been called *“the dark side of Christmas.”* This dark side still exists and makes Christmas a tough time for many people. Examining the details of the dark side can help us better understand the factors that contribute to it, as well as give direction concerning what can be done about it.

Gathering Together (Icebreaker)

What is your favorite Christmas movie? Why?

Growing Together (Truth/Equipping)

Read Matthew 2:13-23:

1. Last week, you were asked to share an enjoyable memory of Christmas. In light of this Bible passage, can you think of a painful or embarrassing experience to share related to Christmas? How did you cope with it?
2. An angel warns Joseph to take Mary and the Baby Jesus and flee to Egypt. The action introduced difficulty and danger into the Christmas story. What kinds of issues make Christmas difficult for people today?
3. Imagine the sorrow experienced by families in Bethlehem when young children were killed by order of Herod. Does it comfort you to know that the Christmas story includes not only scenes of joy but of sorrow? If so, how? See 1 Peter 1:6.

4. When the holy family was able to return to Israel, they settled in the despised area of Nazareth. This, too, is part of the dark side of Christmas. See Isaiah 53:2-3. Believers in many places continue to experience rejection because of their identification with Jesus. How might the realization that the Christmas story includes such events be of comfort to them?
5. Matthew 2 mentions 4 prophecies that were fulfilled in the birth and childhood of Jesus. They deal with 4 geographical locations: Bethlehem (2:5-6), Egypt (2:15), Ramah (2:18), and Nazareth (2:23). Do you find the fulfillment of such prophecies helpful in defending Christianity? How might the fulfillment of such promises encourage you in your faith?

Getting Real with One Another (Accessibility)

1. What helps you to cope with suffering or the loss of family or friends at Christmas?
2. Are you aware of anyone for whom Christmas is a difficult time? What could you do personally to encourage them this Christmas season? What could you do as a group?
3. Have you ever experienced rejection for your Christian faith? If so, what helped you to deal with it?
4. When Jesus came the first time, suffering and sadness were part of life. They still are. When He returns, how will things be different? See 2 Peter 3:13; 1 John 3:1-2; and Revelation 21:4. What aspect of these promises do you find most comforting right now?

Group Prayer Time (Supplication)

1. Pray for those in your family or in our church for whom Christmas is a difficult time that they would experience the Lord's comfort.
2. Pray that the Lord would use your actions during this Christmas season to encourage others.
3. Pray that the Lord will soon come and heal all hurts.