
SUMMARY

We're inviting our Life Groups Leaders to play an integral role in our Year in the Bible by aligning their weekly gatherings with our church-wide reading plan. This alignment will not only increase engagement with the plan, but—more importantly—deepen biblical literacy across our church. To support our leaders in this effort, we've created weekly Leader Guides that include discussion questions, commentary insights, and practical teaching tips. Whether your group is Community, Discussion, or Traditional in format, these guides are designed to serve as a helpful and flexible resource.

Format of the Year in the Bible Leader Guides

Our Leader Guides will be sent to Life Group Leaders in monthly packets by the twentieth of the preceding month. Each weekly guide contains five sections, outlined below. Leaders are welcome to walk their group through the guide step by step or to pick and choose the sections that will be most helpful for their group, as we trust that our leaders know their groups best. We've also provided recommendations later on based on group type to serve as a helpful starting point.

1. Create Interest

We'll kick off each guide with a thoughtful opening question designed to help your group engage and generate interest in the Scripture passage being covered. We've found that beginning with simple, personal questions—ones everyone can answer—helps build participation, comfort, and momentum for deeper discussion.

2. Study the Bible

The core of the Leader Guide is the weekly Scripture reading, broken into smaller sections with discussion questions and a few simple activities. Community Group leaders may choose to dive deeply into one section, while Discussion Group leaders may be able to cover the entire passage. Traditional Life Group leaders can use this section to help structure their teaching time.

3. Connect to Christ (Apply God's Word)

Every story in the Bible points to Jesus Christ, and as leaders, it is our responsibility to help our members discover how. We also have the opportunity to show how each passage of Scripture applies to our lives today. Because of its importance, we're asking every group to integrate this section in some way each week.

4. Pray Together

Prayer draws our hearts to God and to one another, so regardless of group type, size, age, or stage, we're asking that every group set aside time each week to pray together.

5. Commentary

For those who want to learn more, this will take excerpted and slightly adapted material from *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the three distinct and valuable types of Life Groups at Central, we wanted to offer recommendations for how each might get the most out of the Leader Guide. We trust you to discern what your group needs and are here to support you along the way.

Community Groups

Time Allotment

- *10 mins – The Bible:* Provide an overview of a passage and how it Connects to Christ.
- *40 mins – People:* Engage through your normal weekly rhythms.
- *10 mins – Prayer:* Lift up concerns and praises shared during the group.

Preparation Tips

- Pray, asking the Spirit to guide you as you prepare and read the Leader Guide.
- Decide which passage of Scripture is most relevant to your group and its Connect to Christ, creating a concise overview of any needed context.
- Adapt or add to your weekly community questions to incorporate the Connect to Christ section.

Discussion Groups

Time Allotment

- *10 mins – People:* Open conversation or discussion over a question, high/low, etc.
- *40 mins – The Bible:* Discuss the passage and its Connect to Christ.
- *10 mins – Prayer:* Invite members to share personal requests and praises.

Preparation Tips

- Pray, asking the Spirit to guide you as you prepare and read the Leader Guide.
- Decide which sections or activities may be skipped due to time constraints and create an overview for those portions.
- Use strategic questions to lead your group into the Connect to Christ section.

Traditional Groups

Time Allotment

- *20 mins – People:* Weekly catch-up and social interactions.
- *30 mins – The Bible:* Teach the passage, revealing its Connection to Christ.
- *10 mins – Prayer:* Provide space for those who want to share requests and pray.

Preparation Tips

- Pray, asking the Spirit to guide you as you prepare and read the Leader Guide.
- Consider following the same passage breakdown as the guide, and incorporate questions either rhetorically or literally, depending on the needs of your group.
- In your application, show how we might trust in God's grace—not our works—for salvation and sanctification revealing the Connection to Christ.

GOD WITH US: Matthew 1:18-25

The Point: Jesus entered the world to save his people and dwell with them.

The Purpose: Trust God's saving purpose in Christ and respond to his presence with obedient faith.

Christ Connection: Matthew 1:18-25 reveals Jesus as Immanuel, God with us, and as the Savior who fulfills God's promises to redeem his people through the Messiah.

CREATE INTEREST

Question: What are different names or titles that you are called? What do these mean to you? Could be based on a role or relationship, a funny story or nick name maybe. Some examples might be dad, brother, principal, honey, etc.

Transition to the Study

The opening chapter of Matthew moves from genealogy to miracle. Joseph faces confusion, fear, and social risk, yet God speaks clearly into that moment. The angel's message shows that Mary's child is no ordinary son. He is conceived by the Holy Spirit, named Jesus because he will save his people from their sins, and called Immanuel because he is God who has come near. As your group studies this passage, invite them to consider how God's presence and saving purpose still call for trusting obedience today.

STUDY THE BIBLE**Matthew 1:18-21**

Read Aloud: Have someone read Matthew 1:18-21.

Discussion: What details in these verses show Joseph's dilemma and God's intervention?

Joseph learns Mary is pregnant, plans a quiet divorce, and then receives divine guidance through an angelic dream. God steps into Joseph's confusion with truth and direction. God's plans often unfold in moments that first feel disruptive rather than clear.

When have fear or uncertainty made obedience difficult for you?

Obedience becomes hard when the cost feels public, painful, or unclear. Joseph reminds believers that trusting God may require action before every question is answered. Faithful obedience is often measured by trust, not comfort.

Why does Matthew emphasize both Joseph's righteousness and his mercy?

Joseph's character shows that biblical righteousness is not cold rule keeping. It reflects a heart shaped by justice, compassion, and openness to God's voice. Mature godliness holds truth and mercy together.

Teaching Tip: Lead with layered questions

Start with observation, move to meaning, then end with application. This helps quieter group members enter the conversation with confidence and keeps stronger voices from jumping too quickly to conclusions.

Matthew 1:22-23

Read Aloud: Have someone read Matthew 1:22-23.

Discussion: What prophecy does Matthew cite, and why does it matter?

Matthew points to Isaiah 7:14 to show that Jesus' birth fulfills God's earlier promise. The Messiah's arrival is part of a long planned work of redemption. God keeps his promises across generations.

How does the truth that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, strengthen believers in hard seasons?

Christ's presence means believers are not abandoned in suffering, confusion, or waiting. He does not save from a distance, but comes near with grace and truth. The presence of Christ changes how we endure difficulty.

Why is Matthew's use of fulfillment language so important to this Gospel?

Matthew wants readers to see Jesus as the promised Messiah who completes God's redemptive story. Fulfillment language anchors faith in God's sovereignty, not in random events. Jesus stands at the center of Scripture's unified story.

Matthew 1:24-25

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Matthew 1:24-25.

Discussion: How does Joseph respond to the angel's message?

Joseph obeys promptly. He takes Mary as his wife and names the child Jesus just as he was commanded. Genuine faith expresses itself in action.

What is one area of life where immediate obedience would honor God this week?

Group members may mention relationships, forgiveness, generosity, prayer, or witness. The point is to move from admiration of obedience to actual response. Delayed obedience often becomes neglected obedience.

What makes Joseph's obedience especially costly and significant?

He obeys under the weight of likely misunderstanding and public suspicion. His quiet faithfulness shows that honoring God matters more than protecting reputation. Obedience is most powerful when it costs something.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD'S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

This passage reveals Jesus as the promised Savior and present God, the one who fulfills prophecy and brings God's saving presence near to sinners.

Connect to Christ: Matthew 1 establishes Jesus as the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, firmly anchoring him in the messianic narrative. Through the genealogy, Matthew connects Jesus to Abraham and David, affirming his identity as the promised Messiah who would bless all nations and reign eternally. The account of his birth in verses 18-25 reveals that this promise is fulfilled through divine intervention: the virgin birth, foretold in Isaiah 7:14, confirms that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. His name, "Jesus," meaning "Yahweh saves," declares His mission not to conquer earthly powers like Rome, but to save His people from their sins. In him, God's covenant promises move from long anticipation to decisive arrival, marking the culmination of centuries of promise, purpose, and providence.

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Practice immediate obedience in one area where you already know God is calling you to act.

Meditate on Matthew 1:21 this week and thank God that salvation rests in Christ's work, not yours.

Encourage someone who feels alone by reminding them that in Jesus, God has come near.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer requests. Close by thanking God for sending Jesus to save his people from their sins and for drawing near to us in Christ.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Background

Matthew chapter 1 serves as a theological and genealogical foundation for the entire Gospel. It opens with a carefully structured genealogy that traces Jesus' lineage through Abraham and David, affirming His rightful place in both Jewish history and messianic prophecy. This lineage underscores Jesus' fulfillment of God's covenant promises and His role as the long-awaited King. The chapter then transitions to the miraculous conception of Jesus, revealing that Mary was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit before her marriage to Joseph. Joseph's initial plan to quietly divorce her is interrupted by divine revelation through an angelic dream, leading him to embrace his role in God's redemptive plan. The chapter culminates in the naming of Jesus, "Yahweh saves" and the declaration that He is "Immanuel," meaning "God with us." Matthew 1 sets the stage for the incarnation, highlighting both divine initiative and human obedience in the unfolding of salvation history.

Verse by Verse

1:18 This verse marks the transition from genealogy to narrative, introducing the circumstances of Jesus' birth. The phrase "the birth of Jesus Christ came about this way" signals a divinely orchestrated event, not merely a biological occurrence. Mary is described as "engaged to Joseph," which in Jewish custom meant a legally binding betrothal—stronger than modern engagement and requiring formal divorce to dissolve. The discovery that Mary was "pregnant from the Holy Spirit" introduces the miraculous nature of the incarnation. This conception is not by human means but by divine initiative, fulfilling the prophetic expectation of a virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14). Theologically, this affirms both the full humanity and full divinity of Christ, a cornerstone of orthodox Christian belief (cf. John 1:14; Galatians 4:4).

1:19 Joseph is described as "a righteous man," meaning he was faithful to the Law and lived with integrity. His initial decision to divorce Mary quietly reflects both his commitment to justice and his compassion. According to Deuteronomy 22:23–24, public disgrace or even stoning could have been the legal outcome for perceived adultery. Yet Joseph chooses mercy, seeking to protect Mary's dignity while remaining faithful to the law. This verse reveals the tension between legal righteousness and relational grace—a theme echoed throughout Jesus' ministry (cf. Matthew 9:13). Joseph's character foreshadows the kind of

obedience and humility that God honors, even when circumstances are misunderstood or painful.

1:20 Joseph's internal deliberation is interrupted by divine revelation. The angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream, a method often used in Scripture to communicate God's will (cf. Genesis 28:12; Daniel 2:19). The angel addresses him as "Joseph, son of David," reinforcing his royal lineage and connecting this moment to messianic prophecy. The command "don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife" speaks directly to Joseph's fear—likely of shame, misunderstanding, and stepping into a role he didn't choose. The angel confirms that "what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit," validating Mary's purity and the divine nature of the child. This verse emphasizes God's sovereignty in human affairs and His ability to redirect our plans for His purposes (cf. Proverbs 16:9).

1:21 Here, the angel gives Joseph a specific instruction: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus." In Jewish culture, naming a child was a father's responsibility and signified legal adoption and authority. The name "Jesus" (Greek: *Iēsous*, from Hebrew *Yeshua*) means "Yahweh saves," directly linking the child's identity to His mission. The angel explains, "because he will save his people from their sins," making clear that Jesus' purpose is spiritual redemption, not political liberation. This verse encapsulates the Gospel in miniature—Jesus is the Savior sent to deliver humanity from the bondage of sin (cf. Luke 19:10; Romans 5:8). It also affirms the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, which will unfold fully in Jesus' death and resurrection.

1:22 This verse serves as a theological anchor, affirming that the events surrounding Jesus' conception and birth were not random but part of God's sovereign plan foretold through prophecy. Matthew writes, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet," pointing directly to Isaiah 7:14. This fulfillment formula is a hallmark of Matthew's Gospel, used repeatedly to demonstrate that Jesus is the promised Messiah (cf. Matthew 2:15, 2:17, 2:23). The phrase "spoken by the Lord" emphasizes divine authorship of Scripture, even though it came through human prophets. This verse reinforces the doctrine of inspiration and the reliability of Old Testament prophecy. It also affirms that God's promises are not only predictive but purposeful, unfolding in real history through real people.

1:23 Here Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14: "See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel," which he helpfully translates as "God is with us." The term "virgin" (Greek: *parthenos*) is significant, affirming the miraculous nature of

Jesus' conception. This was not merely a young woman but one who had not known a man, as confirmed earlier in verse 18. The name "Immanuel" is not used as Jesus' personal name but as a title that expresses His identity and mission. In Jewish thought, names often conveyed character and purpose, and "God with us" encapsulates the incarnation—God dwelling among His people (cf. John 1:14; Colossians 2:9). This verse also bridges Old and New Testament theology, showing that the God who once dwelled in the tabernacle now dwells in human flesh. It's a profound declaration of divine proximity and grace.

1:24 Joseph's response to the angelic message is immediate and obedient: "When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him." This simple statement reveals much about Joseph's character. He doesn't delay, debate, or demand further signs—he acts. In a culture where reputation and honor were paramount, Joseph's decision to take Mary as his wife would have invited misunderstanding and social stigma. Yet his obedience reflects a heart aligned with God's will, even at personal cost. This verse also affirms the biblical principle that true faith is expressed through action (cf. James 2:17; Hebrews 11:8). Joseph's obedience parallels other figures in Scripture who responded to divine revelation with trust and surrender, such as Abraham, Moses, and Mary herself. His quiet faithfulness plays a crucial role in the unfolding of redemption history.

1:25 Matthew concludes the birth narrative with a note of restraint and reverence: "but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus." This affirms the virgin birth, clarifying that Joseph and Mary remained celibate until after Jesus' birth. Theologically, this protects the integrity of the incarnation—Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by human means. Joseph's act of naming the child "Jesus" fulfills the angel's command in verse 21 and legally establishes Jesus as his son, placing Him within the Davidic line. The name "Jesus" (Greek: *Iēsous*, Hebrew: *Yeshua*) meaning "Yahweh saves," is not just a label but a declaration of purpose. This final verse in the chapter ties together prophecy, obedience, and divine mission, setting the stage for the life and ministry of the Savior.

JESUS' UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM: Matthew 20:20-28

The Point: Greatness in God's kingdom is measured by humble service.

The Purpose: Reject self-centered ambition and follow Jesus in sacrificial service.

Christ Connection: Matthew 20:20-28 reveals Jesus as the suffering Son of Man who gives his life as a ransom for many and redefines greatness through service.

CREATE INTEREST

Question: Where do people in our culture usually look for greatness, status, or influence? Most people associate greatness with visibility, power, or recognition. Jesus turns that instinct upside down and teaches that true greatness looks like serving.

Transition to the Study

Self-centered ambition can hide in obvious and subtle ways. In Matthew 20, a request for honor opens the door for Jesus to expose the disciples' misunderstanding about leadership and glory. The path to greatness in his kingdom does not run through self-promotion, but through humility, sacrifice, and service. Most importantly, Jesus does not only teach this standard. He embodies it as the Son of Man who came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

STUDY THE BIBLE**Matthew 20:20-22**

Read Aloud: Have someone read Matthew 20:20-22.

Discussion: What request is made, and how does Jesus respond?

James and John's mother asks for places of honor for her sons, and Jesus responds by pointing to suffering before glory. They do not yet understand what they are asking. Kingdom greatness cannot be separated from kingdom sacrifice.

How can selfish ambition appear in spiritual spaces like church, serving, or leadership?

It can show up in the desire to be noticed, affirmed, or placed above others. Even good roles can become distorted when the heart seeks status over service. Motive matters as much as ministry.

Why does Jesus use the image of the cup?

The cup points to suffering and submission to the Father's will. Jesus is showing that participation in his kingdom involves costly discipleship, not comfortable privilege. Following Jesus means embracing his path, not editing it.

Teaching Tip: Invite honest self reflection

When discussing pride or ambition, create a non-defensive atmosphere. Ask leaders and members to examine their own motives before commenting on the failures of others.

Matthew 20:23-24

Read Aloud: Have someone or a few people read Matthew 20:23-24.

Discussion: How do the other disciples respond to the brothers' request?

They become indignant, revealing that the struggle for status is shared by the whole group, not only by James and John. Rivalry often exposes desires we would rather hide.

Where are you tempted to compare your role, gifting, or recognition with others?

Comparison often grows where identity is insecure and service becomes performance. Naming it honestly can help redirect the heart toward faithfulness. Comparison weakens joy and distorts calling.

What does this moment reveal about the disciples' spiritual maturity?

Even close followers of Jesus can still think in worldly categories. Proximity to truth does not eliminate the need for ongoing transformation. Growth in Christ requires repeated correction and surrender.

Matthew 20:25-28

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Matthew 20:25-28.

Discussion: How does Jesus contrast worldly leadership with kingdom leadership?

Worldly rulers dominate, but kingdom leaders serve. Greatness is not found in control over others, but in sacrificial love for them. Jesus does not just improve worldly leadership. He replaces its core values.

What is one practical way you can serve someone this week without seeking credit?

Members may serve through listening, giving time, meeting a need, or taking a hidden responsibility. The act matters, but so does the unseen posture behind it. Hidden service trains the heart in Christlike humility.

Why is verse 28 central to the gospel and not just to leadership?

Jesus grounds his teaching in his atoning work. He serves supremely by giving his life as a ransom, making service not only an ethic but a rescue accomplished through the cross. Christian service flows from Christ's saving service first.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD'S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

Jesus is the true servant king whose suffering secures redemption and whose example reshapes how his people view greatness.

Connect to Christ: Matthew 20:20–28 reaches its climax in Jesus himself, the promised Son of Man who exercises his authority through humble service and redemptive sacrifice. He is the Son of Man with all authority, yet he chooses the path of sacrificial service and gives his life as a ransom for many, fulfilling Isaiah's suffering servant pattern by laying down his life for others. This means the cross is not a tragic interruption of his mission, but its fulfillment. Because Jesus served sinners at the cost of his own life, his kingdom is established not through domination but through a ransom, and his people are freed to lay down pride, status seeking, and self-protection.

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Choose one unnoticed act of service this week and do it joyfully without recognition.

Confess one area where selfish ambition or comparison has shaped your attitude.

Pray each morning for a servant's heart that reflects Jesus.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer requests. Close by thanking God for Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Background

Matthew chapter 20 offers a rich tapestry of teachings that highlight the radical nature of God's kingdom. It opens with the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, where Jesus challenges conventional ideas of fairness by illustrating divine generosity - each laborer receives the same wage regardless of when they began working, underscoring that grace is not earned but freely given. As Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem, He foretells His impending death and resurrection for the third time, emphasizing His role as a servant and sacrificial redeemer. The chapter also includes a moment of ambition when the mother of James and John requests positions of honor for her sons, prompting Jesus to redefine greatness as servanthood. In Jesus's "upside down" kingdom, the last are first and the first are last; to be great you must be the least, and if you want to lead, you must serve.

Verse by Verse

20:20 This verse introduces the mother of James and John, identified elsewhere as Salome (cf. Mark 15:40), approaching Jesus with her sons. Her act of kneeling before Him reflects a customary gesture of reverence and petition in Jewish culture, often used when making a significant request (cf. Matthew 8:2). The fact that she brings her sons suggests both maternal ambition and a misunderstanding of the nature of Jesus' kingdom. Her request is not merely personal—it reflects a broader expectation among Jesus' followers that the Messiah would establish a political reign, with positions of honor and authority. This moment reveals the disciples' lingering attachment to worldly definitions of greatness, despite Jesus' repeated teachings on humility and servanthood (cf. Matthew 18:1–4).

20:21 Here, Salome asks that her sons be granted seats at Jesus' right and left in His kingdom—positions of highest honor and authority. In ancient royal courts, the right hand of the king was the place of greatest prestige (cf. Psalm 110:1), and the left, though slightly lesser, was still a seat of prominence. Her request reflects a desire for status and recognition, likely influenced by the belief that Jesus was about to inaugurate His messianic rule in Jerusalem. However, she misunderstands the nature of that kingdom—it is not one of earthly power but of spiritual sacrifice. Jesus' response is gentle but probing, revealing that such positions are not granted through favoritism or ambition, but through divine appointment and a willingness to suffer. This sets the stage for a deeper teaching on the cost of discipleship.

20:22 Jesus responds with piercing clarity: “You don’t know what you’re asking.” He then asks, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” The “cup” in biblical imagery often symbolizes suffering or divine judgment (cf. Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15). Jesus uses it here to refer to His impending passion—His suffering and death on the cross. The disciples’ confident reply, “We are able,” reveals their zeal but also their ignorance of what true discipleship entails. They do not yet grasp the full weight of Jesus’ mission or the depth of the suffering He will endure. Later, both James and John would indeed face hardship—James would be martyred (Acts 12:2), and John would suffer exile (Revelation 1:9)—but at this moment, their understanding is incomplete. Jesus’ question is both a challenge and an invitation: to follow Him means embracing the cross, not seeking a throne.

20:23 Jesus affirms that James and John will indeed “drink the cup” He is about to drink, a metaphor for suffering and sacrificial obedience. In Jewish tradition, the “cup” often symbolized one’s appointed portion, especially in terms of divine judgment or suffering (cf. Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15). Jesus uses it here to foreshadow His own suffering and death, and to indicate that His disciples will share in similar trials. This prophecy is fulfilled in Acts 12:2, where James is martyred, and in Revelation 1:9, where John is exiled to Patmos. However, Jesus clarifies that granting positions of honor in His kingdom is not His to give arbitrarily—it is “for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.” This statement underscores divine sovereignty and the predetermined nature of kingdom rewards, echoing themes found in Matthew 25:34 and Romans 8:29–30. It also rebukes the notion that status in God’s kingdom can be earned through ambition or favoritism; instead, it is granted according to God’s eternal purposes and the character of Christlike humility.

20:24 The reaction of the other ten disciples—anger toward James and John—reveals the competitive spirit and misunderstanding that still lingered among Jesus’ closest followers. Their indignation likely stemmed from jealousy or a sense of injustice, as they too desired prominence in the coming kingdom. This moment exposes the human tendency to seek status and recognition, even within spiritual communities. It also sets the stage for Jesus’ corrective teaching in the verses that follow, where He redefines greatness as servanthood. The disciples’ frustration mirrors earlier disputes about who would be greatest (cf. Luke 22:24), showing that even those closest to Jesus needed repeated instruction on humility. Jesus does not rebuke their ambition outright but redirects it—calling them to pursue greatness through self-sacrifice, not self-promotion. This verse reminds us that spiritual

maturity involves not only following Christ but also learning to rejoice in others' callings and honors without envy.

20:25 Jesus begins by calling His disciples together, signaling the importance and gravity of what He is about to say. The phrase "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them" (CSB) reflects the common leadership model of the Roman world, where power was often exercised through dominance, coercion, and hierarchy. The term "lord it over" (Greek: *katakuriueo*) implies oppressive control, not merely authority. Jesus contrasts this with the Kingdom ethic, preparing His disciples to reject worldly models of leadership. This rebuke is timely, as James and John had just sought positions of honor, and the other ten were indignant—likely because they too desired status. Jesus' words echo Old Testament warnings against unjust rulers (cf. Ezekiel 34:1–10) and anticipate His call to a radically different kind of greatness.

20:26 Here, Jesus introduces a counter-cultural principle: "It must not be like that among you" (CSB). The Greek construction is emphatic, marking a clear break from worldly norms. Instead of seeking to be first, one must become a servant (*diakonos*), a term used for table waiters or household attendants. This would have been shocking in a culture that prized honor and status, especially among religious leaders. Jesus is not merely suggesting humility as a virtue—He is redefining greatness itself. This teaching parallels His earlier instruction in Matthew 18:4, where He says, "Whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." The call to servanthood is not optional; it is essential to Kingdom identity.

20:27 Jesus intensifies the teaching by saying, "And whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave" (CSB). The word "slave" (*doulos*) is even stronger than "servant," denoting complete submission and lack of personal rights. In Roman society, slaves were considered property, not persons of honor. By using this term, Jesus dismantles any notion of leadership as privilege or entitlement. The phrase "wants to be first" acknowledges ambition but redirects it toward self-sacrifice. Paul echoes this in Philippians 2:3–7, urging believers to "consider others as more important than yourselves" and pointing to Christ, who "emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant." Jesus does not condemn the desire to lead—He redefines it through the lens of humility and service.

20:28 This climactic verse reveals Jesus as the ultimate model: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (CSB). The title "Son of Man" links Jesus to Daniel 7:13–14, where the figure receives dominion and

glory—yet here, He chooses the path of suffering. The word “ransom” (lytron) refers to a price paid to release someone from bondage, often used in the context of freeing slaves or prisoners. This is a clear reference to substitutionary atonement: Jesus gives His life to redeem sinners from the penalty of sin (cf. Isaiah 53:5–6, Mark 10:45, 1 Timothy 2:5–6). The phrase “for many” reflects the breadth of salvation, though not necessarily universalism—it points to the multitude who will benefit from His sacrifice. In this verse, Jesus not only teaches servanthood—He embodies it, laying down His life as the ultimate act of love and leadership.

THE SHEPHERD WHO RESTORES: Psalm 23

The Point: The Lord faithfully shepherds his people with care, presence, and restoring grace.

The Purpose: Learn to rest in God's shepherding care and trust him in every season.

Christ Connection: Psalm 23 points to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who leads, protects, and lays down his life for his sheep.

CREATE INTEREST

Question: When do you feel most at rest, safe, or cared for?

People long for peace, provision, and security. Psalm 23 speaks into that longing by showing the personal care of the Lord for his people.

Transition to the Study

Psalm 23 is one of the most familiar passages in Scripture, yet its comfort is deeper than sentiment. David describes the Lord as a shepherd who provides, guides, protects, and welcomes his people. The psalm moves through green pastures, dark valleys, and a prepared table, showing that God's care is steady in both peace and threat. As your group studies the psalm, invite them to see not only what God gives, but who he is: near, trustworthy, and committed to his people.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 23:1-3

Read Aloud: Have someone read Psalm 23:1-3.

Discussion: What actions of the shepherd are highlighted in these verses?

The shepherd provides, leads, restores, and guides. Every action communicates attentive care for the sheep's needs and well being. God's care is personal, active, and sufficient.

Where do you most need God's restoring care right now?

Members may mention weariness, grief, anxiety, sin, or confusion. The passage invites honest need because the shepherd meets weak and needy people with compassion. Restoration begins when we stop pretending we are self-sufficient.

Why does David connect God's guidance with his name's sake?

God's faithful leading reflects his own character and covenant commitment. He guides his people in ways that uphold his goodness, wisdom, and glory. God's care for his people is rooted in who he is.

Teaching Tip: Use silence well

After reading familiar texts, allow a few quiet seconds before discussion. Silence helps people move beyond surface familiarity and notice fresh details in the passage.

Psalm 23:4

Read Aloud: Have someone read Psalm 23:4.

Discussion: What changes in tone or language in verse 4?

David moves from speaking about God to speaking directly to him. The shepherd is no longer described from a distance, but addressed in the valley. Trials often deepen the personal experience of God's presence.

What helps believers face dark valleys without being ruled by fear?

Courage grows from God's presence, not from easy circumstances. The shepherd's rod and staff symbolize protection, guidance, and comfort in danger. The nearness of God steadies the people of God.

Why is the valley included in a psalm about God's care?

The psalm does not promise a trouble free life. It promises that the shepherd remains faithful in the hardest places, not only in the peaceful ones. God's goodness is not limited to easy seasons.

Psalm 23:5-6

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Psalm 23:5-6.

Discussion: What images of blessing and security appear in these verses?

David describes a prepared table, anointing oil, an overflowing cup, and a lifelong pursuit by goodness and mercy. These images picture abundance, welcome, and covenant love. God's care is generous, not minimal.

How can the promise of God's goodness and mercy reshape your week?

It helps believers live with hope instead of scarcity and fear. They can move through uncertainty knowing God's faithful love remains with them. Confidence in God's character changes our daily outlook.

What does it mean to dwell in the house of the Lord forever?

It points to ongoing fellowship with God that begins now and reaches fullness in his eternal presence. The shepherd's care leads ultimately to communion with him. The goal of God's guidance is life with God himself.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD'S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

Psalm 23 points to Jesus as the Good Shepherd whose presence, sacrifice, and faithfulness secure rest, protection, and eternal fellowship for his people.

Connect to Christ: Psalm 23 reaches its fullest meaning in Jesus, the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep by name and lays down his life for them. Through his death and resurrection, he not only guides and restores God's people but secures them forever. David's shepherd imagery anticipates this Messiah who gathers, protects, and cares for the flock with both authority and tenderness. The one who leads beside still waters is the same one who walks with his people through death's shadow, prepares a table before them, and brings them to dwell in the house of the Lord, all finding their greater fulfillment in him.

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Pray each morning this week, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Write down one fear and surrender it to God, trusting his presence in the valley.

Care for someone practically this week as a reflection of the shepherd's kindness.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer requests. Close by thanking God for his shepherding care, restoring grace, and faithful presence through every season.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Background

Psalms 23 was written by King David, who was a shepherd in his youth before becoming the king of Israel. His experiences as a shepherd provided him with a deep understanding of the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep, which he used as a metaphor to describe God's care for His people. In ancient Israel, the role of a shepherd was crucial, as they were responsible for the safety, nourishment, and guidance of their flock. This imagery would have been familiar and comforting to the original audience of the psalm.

Psalms 23 has been a source of comfort and inspiration for countless individuals throughout history. It is often recited in times of trouble, at funerals, and during moments of personal reflection. Its universal themes of trust, provision, and eternal hope resonate deeply with believers, making it a timeless Scripture passage.

Verse by Verse

23:1 In this opening verse, David declares the Lord as his shepherd, a metaphor that conveys God's guidance, provision, and protection. The imagery of a shepherd is deeply rooted in the pastoral culture of ancient Israel, where shepherds were responsible for the well-being of their sheep. By identifying the Lord as his shepherd, David acknowledges his dependence on God for all his needs. The phrase "I shall not want" signifies complete trust in God's provision, implying that with the Lord as his shepherd, David lacks nothing essential for his life and well-being. This verse emphasizes the personal relationship between the believer and God, highlighting God's role as a caring and attentive provider.

23:2 David continues to describe the blessings of having the Lord as his shepherd. The "green pastures" symbolize a place of abundance and rest, where the sheep can find nourishment and safety. This imagery reflects God's provision of spiritual sustenance and peace for His people. The "still waters" represent tranquility and refreshment, indicating that God leads His followers to places of calm and renewal. This verse underscores the idea that God not only provides for our physical needs but also offers spiritual rest and rejuvenation. It speaks to the peace and contentment that come from trusting in God's guidance.

23:3 David acknowledges God's restorative power. The phrase "He restores my soul" suggests that God brings renewal and healing to the weary and troubled spirit. This restoration is not merely physical but encompasses the whole being, providing spiritual revival and strength. The "paths of righteousness" refer to the moral and ethical guidance that God provides. By leading His people in these paths, God ensures that they live in a manner that reflects His character and brings honor to His name. This verse highlights the transformative work of God in the believer's life, guiding them towards righteousness and integrity for the sake of His glory.

23:4 In this verse, David transitions from the peaceful imagery of green pastures and still waters to a more daunting scenario—the valley of the shadow of death. This phrase represents the darkest and most perilous moments in life, where danger and uncertainty loom large. Despite the ominous setting, David expresses unwavering confidence and fearlessness. The reason for this bold declaration is the presence of the Lord. The assurance that God is with him dispels fear and provides comfort. The "rod" and "staff" are tools of the shepherd, symbolizing protection and guidance. The rod was used to defend the sheep from predators, while the staff was used to guide and direct them. Together, they represent God's protective and guiding presence in the believer's life. This verse emphasizes that even in the most challenging and threatening circumstances, God's presence and His divine instruments of protection and guidance bring comfort and security to His people.

23:5 In verse 5, the imagery shifts from the valley to a banquet scene. Despite the presence of enemies, God prepares a table for David, symbolizing provision, honor, and fellowship. This act of preparing a table in the presence of adversaries signifies God's ability to bless and sustain His people even in the midst of opposition and conflict. It reflects the idea that God's blessings and favor are not hindered by external threats. The anointing of the head with oil is a sign of honor, healing, and consecration. In ancient times, anointing with oil was a practice reserved for guests of honor and was also used for medicinal purposes. This act signifies God's special favor and care for David. The overflowing cup represents abundance and satisfaction, indicating that God's provision is not only sufficient but abundant.

This verse highlights God's lavish care and blessings for His people, even in the face of adversity. It reassures believers that God's provision and favor are ever-present, and His blessings are abundant, bringing honor and joy to their lives.

restoration is not merely physical but encompasses the whole being, providing spiritual revival and strength. The "paths of righteousness" refer to the moral and ethical guidance that God provides. By leading His people in these paths, God ensures that they live in a manner that reflects His character and brings honor to His name. This verse highlights the transformative work of God in the believer's life, guiding them towards righteousness and integrity for the sake of His glory.

23:6 In this concluding verse, David expresses his confident assurance in the perpetual presence of God's goodness and mercy. The term "surely" underscores his unwavering belief in this promise. The words "goodness" and "faithful love" encapsulate the comprehensive nature of God's blessings. "Goodness" refers to the benevolent and generous acts of God, while "faithful love" (or "lovingkindness") highlights God's steadfast love and compassion towards His people.

The phrase "will pursue me" suggests that these divine attributes will actively pursue and accompany David throughout his life. This pursuit is not passive but rather an active and persistent presence of God's favor. It reassures believers that God's goodness and mercy are not fleeting but are constant companions in their journey of faith.

The second part of the verse, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord as long as I live," shifts the focus away from the eternal aspect of God's promise found in other translations that say "forever." The Christian Standard Bible changed "forever" in Psalm 23:6 to "as long as I live" to align the translation with the Hebrew original, which doesn't necessarily imply an eternal dwelling, but rather a consistent and ongoing experience of goodness and mercy during the psalmist's lifetime. The change reflects a more literal translation of the text, focusing on the continual blessings and love God provides during the psalmist's life.

The "house of the Lord" symbolizes God's presence and fellowship. For David, this meant the tabernacle or temple, but for believers today, it signifies an eternal communion with God

THE WAY OF THE CROSS: Mark 8:31–38

The Point: Jesus reveals that he is the suffering Messiah and calls his followers to a cross-shaped life of surrender and trust.

The Purpose: Invitation to reject a comfort-first view of discipleship and follow Jesus with costly, daily obedience.

Christ Connection: Jesus is revealed as the Christ who saves through suffering, death, and resurrection, then calls his people to follow his cross-shaped way.

CREATE INTEREST

Question: What is one kind of discomfort or inconvenience you wish you could remove from your life forever?

Most of us quietly build our lives around avoiding what feels hard, awkward, or costly. That instinct shapes our choices more than we realize and often keeps us from trusting God in uncomfortable places.

Transition to the Study

In Mark 8, Jesus begins to speak openly about what kind of Messiah he is. He is not moving toward political victory or public applause, but toward suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. Peter resists that vision because it does not fit human expectations, yet Jesus makes clear that God's plan of salvation runs through the cross. He then turns to the crowd and says that anyone who follows him must deny self, take up the cross, and lose life for his sake and the gospels. This passage forces every disciple to ask whether they want a useful Jesus or a ruling Jesus, a comfortable faith or a crucified Lord.

STUDY THE BIBLE**Mark 8:31–33**

Read Aloud: Have someone read Mark 8:31–33.

Discussion: What does Jesus begin to teach plainly about the Son of Man in these verses?

He says he must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise after three days. Jesus is not caught by surprise by the cross. His suffering belongs to God's saving plan, not to human failure alone.

When you think about suffering and rejection in your own life, how does Jesus' clear teaching about his path shape the way you view your hardships?

Knowing that Jesus suffered by God's design helps believers see their own trials as places to trust God rather than only as problems to escape. His path encourages patient obedience instead of surprise or resentment.

Why is Peter's reaction to Jesus teaching so serious that Jesus rebukes him as thinking according to human concerns rather than God's?

Peter wants a Messiah without a cross, which distorts the heart of God's plan. Jesus' strong rebuke shows that any attempt to remove suffering from his mission misunderstands both sin's seriousness and God's way of salvation.

Teaching Tip: Move from abstract to concrete

When discussing discipleship, ask for examples from work, family, habits, speech, and time.

Specific situations help people see that cross-bearing is not only dramatic martyrdom but also everyday obedience.

Mark 8:34–35

Read Aloud: Have someone read Mark 8:34–35.

Discussion: What things does Jesus say a person must do if they want to follow him?

Jesus calls people to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. Discipleship is defined by surrender and shared direction with Jesus, not by casual interest or distant respect.

What might denying yourself and taking up your cross look like for you this week?

Think about one ordinary area of life: home, work, school, or time.

It could mean yielding preferences, serving when tired, telling the truth when it costs, or obeying when it is inconvenient. Self-denial shows up in concrete choices, not only in feelings or words.

How does Jesus' statement about losing life to save it challenge common cultural assumptions about what a good life is?

Many define a good life by comfort, success, and self-protection. Jesus redefines it around surrender to him, showing that clinging to control leads to loss, while giving up life for him leads to true gain.

Mark 8:36–38

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Mark 8:36–38.

What contrast does Jesus make between gaining the world and forfeiting one's soul?

He asks what benefit there is in gaining everything the world offers while losing one's soul. Jesus shows that the soul's eternal condition matters more than any temporary gain or achievement.

Where are you personally most tempted to “gain the world” (in possessions, image, achievement, or something else) and how might this passage call you to respond differently?

Identifying specific temptations helps believers repent of misplaced pursuits and choose practices that prioritize faithfulness over status. Jesus' words invite a reordering of loves and goals around eternal value.

Why is being ashamed of Jesus and his words such a serious issue that he ties it to how he will respond when he comes in glory?

Shame toward Jesus reveals divided loyalty and fear of people's opinion. Jesus links present allegiance to future acknowledgement to show that public identification with him now is a crucial mark of genuine discipleship.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD'S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

Jesus is the merciful servant king whose sacrificial mission and healing power reveal the true nature of his kingdom.

Connect to Christ: Mark 8 points us to Jesus as the true Christ who saves through the cross and calls his people to follow him in faith. He does not embrace worldly power or comfort, but willingly walks a path of suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection for sinners. In correcting Peter, Jesus shows that the cross is not a mistake in God's plan but the very center of it. His death in our place secures forgiveness and life, and his pattern of self-giving love now shapes the lives of those who belong to him. Losing life for Jesus and the gospel is not wasted, because the crucified Messiah is also the risen one, and life with him is worth more than anything we might try to keep.

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Identify one area where comfort or self-protection has been ruling your choices, and submit that area to Jesus in prayer and obedience.

Read Mark 8:31–38 each day this week and ask God to show you what cross-bearing faithfulness looks like in one specific relationship or responsibility.

Practice public allegiance to Jesus by speaking clearly about your faith in one conversation where you would normally stay silent.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer requests. Close by thanking God that Jesus did not avoid the cross, but obeyed fully, rose victoriously, and now leads his people in the path of true life.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Background

This passage is a turning point in Mark's Gospel, coming right after Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ. Jesus now begins to teach plainly that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the religious leaders, be killed, and after three days rise again, introducing the first of three passion predictions in Mark. Peter rebukes him because a suffering Messiah clashes with common expectations of a victorious, earthly deliverer, and Jesus answers with a sharp rebuke, identifying Peter's resistance with satanic temptation and with setting the mind on human concerns rather than God's. Jesus then widens the moment, calling the crowd together with the disciples to explain that his way of the cross will also shape the path of those who follow him. Discipleship involves denying self, taking up the cross, and losing life for Jesus and the gospel, trusting that such loss leads to true life, while gaining the whole world at the cost of one's soul is ultimate folly.

Verse by Verse

8:31 This verse explains why the disciples were not yet ready to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. He had to die first. Only here did Mark suggest a reason for the "messianic secret." The expression "began to teach" suggests that the teaching was new. The term "Son of Man" was used previously only in 2:10, 28 with reference to Jesus' ministry in Galilee. In the last half of the Gospel, it is used more frequently with reference to Jesus' suffering and death (here; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21, 41) and his glorious return (8:38; 13:26; 14:62). A comparison of Mark 8:29, 31 clearly shows that Jesus preferred the term "Son of Man" to "Messiah/Christ."

The verb translated "must" (*dei*) suggests divine necessity, probably as it is indicated in the Scriptures. The most obvious Scripture is Isa 52:13–53:12, which also avoids the title "Messiah." The word "elders" refers to the Jewish leaders in general. The New Testament is not the only work to use the plural "chief priests." In Josephus it includes the chief priest, former chief priests, and members of the aristocratic families who had important positions in the priestly hierarchy. As before, "teachers of the law" is the NIV's paraphrase of the term that traditionally has been translated "scribes."

Here and in 9:31 Mark has "after three days." In 10:34 Mark has "three days later." In each instance Matthew and Luke substitute "on the third day" (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke

9:22; 18:33) perhaps because this is a more natural way of stating the matter in Greek, perhaps to prevent any idea of a contradiction since Jesus was not in the grave for three full days. As a matter of fact, “after three days” and “on the third day” mean the same thing (cf. Gen 42:17–18). The expression “after three days” reflects the Jewish practice of inclusive reckoning in which any part of a day or year is treated as a whole day or year.

8:32 The plain speaking about Jesus’ death contrasts sharply with the command to silence about his person. Mark never suggested that Jesus tried to hide the necessity of his suffering and death. Peter, however, possessed as he was by a nationalistic concept of the Messiah, contradicted Jesus. Mark used the same word as in v. 30 and the same word he used elsewhere to refer to rebuking demons.

8:33 Jesus in turn rebuked (same word as in v. 32) Peter. The severity of the rebuke was because Peter was trying to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross, which Mark properly looked upon as an absolute necessity. Some have thought the expression “get behind me” refers to following after Jesus as a disciple, but the reference to Satan makes it likely that Jesus meant to get out of sight, to stop tempting. Jesus’ rebuke of Peter’s protest continues to challenge disciples both to accept the scandal of a suffering Messiah and to accept its implications for discipleship.

8:34 The reference to “the crowd” is admittedly surprising. Its significance seems to be that the teaching is not just for the Twelve but for all who would follow Jesus. To “come after” and “follow” Jesus is to be his disciple. To deny oneself is not to do without something or even many things. It is not asceticism, not self-rejection or self-hatred, nor is it even the disowning of particular sins. It is to renounce the self as the dominant element in life. It is to replace the self with God-in-Christ as the object of affections. It is to place the divine will before self-will.

In the first Christian century an admonition to take up a cross could only have been an admonition to martyrdom. It reflected the practice of compelling a condemned person to carry the horizontal piece of the cross on which he was going to die. Evidently Jesus was too weak to carry his (15:21) or at least to do so all the way (cf. John 19:17), but he died nonetheless. That is what Jesus called on his followers to be willing to do. Many of his early followers did in fact die by crucifixion and in other ways. When martyrdom ceased to be common, cross bearing properly became a symbol of following Jesus in sacrificial service. The concept should never be cheapened by applying it to enduring some irritation or even a major burden. It is closely related to self-denial, involving a willingness to give up

everything dear in life and even life itself for the sake of Jesus. It is a willingness to suffer for Jesus and for others. Such a concept of discipleship is so radical that many contemporary Christians in the West have difficulty relating to it.

8:35-37 The word translated "life" (*psychē*) in v. 35 is sometimes translated "soul," as in vv. 36-37 of the NIV. Generally, when people read or hear the word "soul," they think in Greek terms of an independent element in human nature that is separate from the physical body. This is not a biblical concept. The biblical emphasis in the word is on the wholeness and oneness of the person or self. Therefore "life" is the best translation, and it ought also to be used in vv. 36-37, as in the RSV, NRSV, GNB, and REB. Of course, more is involved than mere physical life, and that probably is why some translations revert to "soul" in vv. 36-37.

8:38 In the first century being ashamed of Jesus and his words had particular reference to denying him in time of persecution. The idea can be applied to other situations. The background of the expression "adulterous ... generation" is the Old Testament, where unfaithfulness to God is sometimes described as adultery (e.g., Jer 3:6-9; 13:27; and Hosea, where Gomer is a picture of unfaithful Israel).

Mark indicated that Jesus predicted not only his death and resurrection but also his return. Some interpreters, however, claim that Jesus here made a distinction between himself and the coming Son of Man. In view of the fact that the term "Son of Man" is often a substitute for the pronoun "I," this claim is most unlikely.

BLESSED IS SHE WHO BELIEVED: Luke 1:39-56

The Point: God honors humble faith and magnifies his saving mercy through the coming of Christ.

The Purpose: Encouragement to trust God's promises and respond with humble praise.

Christ Connection: Luke 1:39-56 celebrates the arrival of the promised Messiah and highlights God's mercy in sending Christ to fulfill his covenant promises.

CREATE INTEREST

Question: Think of a time someone shared really big news with you (good or surprising). How did you react, and what do you remember most about that moment?

Big news moments tend to expose what is really important to us and how we handle strong emotion. Some of us react with loud celebration, others with quiet processing, questions, or even disbelief. We also remember who was with us and whether we felt seen and supported in that moment.

Transition to the Study

Luke 1 is filled with surprise, expectancy, and worship. Mary visits Elizabeth, and the Spirit confirms that the child Mary carries is the promised Lord. Elizabeth blesses Mary's faith, and Mary responds with a song of praise centered on God's mercy, holiness, and covenant faithfulness. As your group studies this passage, help them see that hope begins before the birth of Jesus with a God who remembers his promises and lifts the humble.

STUDY THE BIBLE**Luke 1:39-45**

Read Aloud: Have someone read Luke 1:39-45.

Discussion: What happens when Mary greets Elizabeth?

Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, the baby leaps in her womb, and Elizabeth blesses Mary and the child she carries. God's Spirit confirms the significance of Christ before his birth.

What helps believers trust God's promises before they see full outcomes?

Faith grows through remembering God's character, listening to his word, and receiving encouragement from other believers. Mary models trust before visible fulfillment. Faith often rests on God's promise before circumstances change.

Why is Elizabeth's statement about Mary's belief so significant?

It highlights faith as the fitting response to God's revelation. Mary is blessed not for control over events, but for trusting what God has spoken. Blessedness is tied to believing God.

Teaching Tip: Encourage testimony carefully

Passages about faith and praise can invite helpful sharing. Give room for testimony, but guide the group back to the text so experience serves Scripture rather than replacing it.

Luke 1:46-49

Read Aloud: Have someone read Luke 1:46-49.

Discussion: What truths about God fill Mary's praise?

Mary praises God for his greatness, saving power, regard for the humble, and holy name. Her joy is rooted in who God is and what he has done. Worship grows from seeing God's character clearly.

How can humility deepen a person's worship?

Humility acknowledges need, receives grace, and gives glory to God rather than self. Mary's song is full because her heart is low before the Lord. The humble are well positioned to magnify God.

Why does Mary emphasize her low estate?

She highlights God's gracious pattern of noticing and exalting the humble. Her story becomes a witness to divine mercy, not human significance. God delights to display his greatness through unlikely people

Luke 1:50-56

Read Aloud: Have someone read aloud Luke 1:50-56.

Discussion: What patterns of God's action are described in these verses?

God shows mercy, scatters the proud, lifts the humble, fills the hungry, and remembers his covenant promises. God's kingdom reverses human expectations.

Which line in Mary's song speaks most directly to your current season, and why?

Responses may differ, but the passage gives language for trust in both waiting and gratitude. It shows that waiting can be active, as we praise God for His character and promises even before we see the full outcome. It helps believers interpret life through

God's faithfulness. Scripture teaches believers how to rejoice, remember, and worship in the midst of waiting.

How does Mary's song prepare readers for Jesus' ministry?

It previews the kingdom values Jesus will later proclaim, where the humble receive mercy and the self exalting are brought low. The gospel's reversals begin before Jesus' public ministry.

CONNECT TO CHRIST (APPLY GOD'S WORD)

Discussion: How does our passage this week point to Jesus?

This passage points to Jesus as the promised Lord whose coming displays God's mercy, fulfills covenant promises, and begins the great reversal of his kingdom.

Connect to Christ: Luke 1:39–56 is saturated with Christ even before his birth. The promised Savior is already bringing joy, Spirit-filled recognition, and hope to God's people, as Elizabeth's blessing and Mary's song celebrate a mercy that reaches back to Abraham and forward to the world Christ came to redeem. This scene ties into the messianic narrative by showing that the child in Mary's womb is the long-awaited Davidic Savior, and that in Jesus, God's covenant promises are not forgotten but arriving. The king who comes will exalt the humble and bring mercy to those who fear God.

Application: Choose one of the following ways to apply the study to your life this week:

Write your own short prayer of praise based on God's faithfulness.

Encourage someone who is waiting on God with a Scripture promise.

Confess one area of pride and ask God to form deeper humility in you.

PRAYER TIME

Ask group members to share prayer requests. Close by thanking God for his mercy, covenant faithfulness, and the gift of Christ.

COMMENTARY

The New American Commentary, Dr. Ray Clendennen, General Editor
Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN

Background

Luke 1:39–56 builds directly on the earlier birth announcements of John and Jesus, bringing the two miraculous stories together as the unborn children encounter one another for the first time. Luke intentionally prepares readers for this moment through prior references (1:24–25, 36–37), highlighting God’s unfolding plan. The passage itself follows a clear structure: an opening narrative describing Mary’s visit to Elizabeth (1:39–41), followed by two distinct expressions of praise (1:42–55), and a brief concluding note (1:56). Elizabeth’s Spirit-filled blessing (1:42–45) affirms both Mary’s faith and the identity of her child, while Mary’s response (1:46–55), known as the Magnificat, offers a theologically rich hymn of praise to God. The Magnificat is especially significant for its careful literary structure and its use of poetic parallelism. Its language and themes echo Old Testament praise, particularly Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2:1–10, along with other scriptural traditions. Together, these elements emphasize God’s faithfulness, His reversal of human expectations, and His fulfillment of covenant promises through the coming of the Messiah.

Verse by Verse

1:39 At that time. Literally In these days. Got ready and hurried. Luke here described Mary as a model believer eagerly responding in obedience to the heavenly message of Luke 1:36. A town in the hill country of Judea. Compare 1:23. Judea refers here to the Roman province. The name of the city is not given.

1:40 Greeted Elizabeth. Nothing is said concerning the content of this greeting, for this is not important. Luke reported only what is theologically significant.

1:41 Leaped in her womb. Just as John the Baptist in his ministry was to be Jesus’ precursor and prepare his way (1:17, 76), so even here he prepared the way, i.e., he announced the Messiah’s presence by leaping in his mother’s womb. This prenatal cognition is meant to attest to the truth and fulfillment of Gabriel’s prophecy in Luke 1:31–33, 35. In 1:44 Elizabeth would explain the significance of her child’s action. Filled with the Holy Spirit. What was promised to Zechariah (1:15) was now fulfilled. John and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit even before John’s birth. Thus they were the first persons to realize that Mary’s child is the Messiah. That the hymn that follows conveys

a correct Christological understanding is evident from the character description of Elizabeth in 1:6 and from the fact that she was filled with the Holy Spirit as she spoke.

1:42 In a loud voice. This expression is frequently used to describe an inspired utterance. The first two lines of Elizabeth's blessing found in this verse possess poetic parallelism, but the rest do not. Blessed are you among women. What God had done in Mary outshone even what God had done in Elizabeth. Mary was blessed here not because of her faith, as in Luke 1:45; rather her blessedness depended entirely on her son and his greatness. A similar beatitude is repeated in 11:27. This blessing is not to be interpreted as a call to praise/ bless Mary but as an affirmation that Mary stood in a state of blessedness. Blessed is the child you will bear. "The child you will bear" is literally the fruit of your womb. The Lord had already been conceived. Mary's blessedness was based on the blessedness of the child she would bear.

1:43 My Lord. This indicates that the focus in this account is upon Mary's child more than Mary herself. Here "Lord" is clearly a Christological title and refers to Jesus. The title is used in our account both for God (1:46) and Jesus (1:43; cf. Acts 2:36), and it reveals the greatness of Mary's child already before his birth. It is above all by the resurrection that Mary's child is recognized as Lord (Acts 2:36), although this verse indicates that from his conception he was already Lord. He, like God, is deserving of the title "Lord."

1:44 For joy. This is a partial fulfillment of Luke 1:14. For a similar expression of joy on Mary's part, cf. 1:47. Even as Elizabeth rejoiced in her subservient role to Mary, so later John would also rejoice in his subservient role in preparing for Jesus (John 3:29).

1:45 Blessed is she who has believed. Elizabeth's praise both begins and now ends with a reference to Mary's blessedness. The blessedness of Mary's faith stands in contrast to Zechariah's lack of faith in 1:20. Her blessedness is a present state (cf. 6:20–22). Again Mary serves as an example for the believer. Indeed Luke sought to maximize Mary's role as a model believer. For example, in 8:19 he omitted the "outside" (heksō) of Mark 3:31; in 4:24 Luke omitted "in his own house" (cf. Mark 6:4); and in Acts 1:14 he mentioned that Mary and her other children were among the inner core of disciples. Mary is "blessed" here for her faith but is "most blessed" in Luke 1:42 for the privilege of being the mother of God's Son.

1:46 And Mary said. Mary praised God for what he was about to do and for the part she was privileged to play in his plan. My soul glorifies the Lord. The verb "glorifies" also

appears in Luke 1:58; Acts 5:13; 10:46; 19:17. "Lord" refers here to Yahweh as the parallelism with the next verse indicates.

1:47 My spirit. We find a similar parallelism between "soul" and "spirit". This verse stands in synonymous parallelism with Luke 1:46 and thus emphasizes the praiseworthiness of God by repetition. God my Savior.

1:48 For. What follows will be the grounds for Mary's praise of God. He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. This is the first ground for Mary's praise and has as its background Hannah's prayer and vow (1 Sam 1:11). In the coming of God's Son into the world, the poor and down trodden have been visited with salvation. Humble state. It refers to such a low estate as described in Acts 8:33; Phil 3:21; Jas 1:10. In this verse it may refer to the low state or status in which Mary was held by the standards of this world. Her child would also share this low estate. All generations will call me blessed. Mary would not be called blessed because of any intrinsic personal worth or holiness on her part but because of the child she was bearing.

1:49 For he who is mighty has done great things for me. God is described as "mighty". As affirmed in Deut 10:21, God does "great things." Here the "great things" refers to the virginal conception of Jesus, who in his ministry would bring about the events described in Luke 1:51-55. Since this involves not only Mary but is for all believers, perhaps we should understand "for me" as meaning "to me," although the parallel with 1:48 favors "for me." Holy is his name. This is simply another way of saying, "He [i.e., God] is holy."

1:50 The hymn now moves from Mary to believing Israel. This statement of God's positive behavior toward the humble stands roughly parallel to Luke 1:48. It parallels closely Ps 103:17. God's gracious mercy comes upon the humble devout (such as Mary) who "fear," i.e., reverently obey, him.

1:51 Whereas the first strophe of the Magnificat refers to the great things the Mighty one had done to Mary, the second strophe is a prophetic forward look at the results of the ministry of Mary's child for believing Israel (Luke 1:54). He has performed mighty deeds with his arm. God's "arm" is a frequent a symbol for God's might. It describes the future work of God's Son with the certainty of a past event. Mary saw as already accomplished what God would do through her son. He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. The proud are those who do not fear God (Luke 1:50). The salvation Jesus brings to the humble also works judgment for the arrogant (cf. 6:20-26). Inmost thoughts. "Inmost

thoughts” are literally hearts. The heart serves as the center of a person’s reasoning power. Luke understood the contrast in its religious sense as a contrast between the humble poor and the haughty rich (cf. 6:20–26). The proud are frequently the ruling rich; and the humble, the oppressed poor.

1:52 In 1:52–53 we find an example of chiasmic parallelism. He has brought down the rulers from their thrones. The rulers are identified in this verse with the proud of 1:51 and the rich of 1:53. Such passages as Luke 10:13–15; 14:11; 16:19–31; 18:14 reveal that Luke interpreted this primarily in a metaphorical sense as indicating the reversal of fortune Jesus brought. Exalted the lowly. This is demonstrated in the immediate context by the divine selection of Mary to be the mother of Jesus, but it is found elsewhere in that “the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (19:10; cf. 15:7, 10).

1:53 He has filled the hungry with good things. This reflects such OT passages as 1 Sam 2:5; Pss 72:11–12; 107:9 but foreshadows such future teachings of Jesus as Luke 6:21; 11:5–13; and 16:19–31 and such events as the feeding of the five thousand (9:10–17) and the breaking of bread at the Lord’s Supper (22:14–20; 24:13–35; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11). But has sent the rich away empty. Compare 6:24–26; 12:13–21; 16:25; 21:1–4.

1:54 He has helped his servant Israel. For Israel as the Lord’s servant, cf. Isa 41:8–9; 42:1, 19; 44:1, 21; 45:4.

Remembering. This is an infinitive in Greek, but its exact relationship to the verb “helped” is uncertain. It may function here to express the cause of his helping Israel and should then be translated “because of remembering [his] mercy.” This thought is repeated in Luke 1:72 (cf. Gen 19:29; Exod 2:24; Pss 98:3; 105:42).

1:55 To Abraham and his descendants. By referring to Abraham, Luke emphasized the continuation of salvation history in Jesus’ coming rather than its disruption. It is probably best to see this phrase as being in apposition to “our fathers,” thereby avoiding having a parenthetical comment within the hymn. For God remembering Abraham, see Exod 2:24; 32:13; Deut 9:27; Ps 105:7–11, 42.

1:56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months. It is uncertain why Luke mentioned this. It is not, however, to indicate that Mary assisted in the birth of John the Baptist, for no mention is made of her being present at his birth (1:57–58). And then returned home. Luke did not specify whether “home” referred to her mother’s home or Joseph’s. For Luke this was unimportant.