



The Christmas Experience Leader Guide Session 4: This Is God's Plan?

Leader's Devotional:

Can a person experience anguish and joy at the same time? These two emotions are polar opposites, right?

Joseph and Mary's ancestor, King David, a man whose sight was blurred because of his tear, said he was dying from grief, and misery had drained his strength (Psalm 31:9-10). He said he was scorned, despised, and ignored, even by some of his closest friends. People had been spreading false rumors about him; there was a conspiracy of lies and gossip aimed at him. Sounds a lot like the circumstances of Mary and Joseph, doesn't it?

Buck Owens and Roy Clark sang about their feelings of grief and misery on the old 70s TV show Hee-Haw:

Gloom, despair, and agony on me;
Deep, dark depression, excessive misery.
If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all.
Gloom, despair, and agony on me.

You can face the gloom, despair, and agony of your life like the Hee-Haw gang or you can deal with it like David, Joseph, and Mary. Each of them chose to trust God in the midst of their excessive misery. David prayed, "I am overcome with joy because of your unfailing love, for you have seen my troubles, and you care about the anguish of my soul."

Journey CHURCH

Pastor James Greer

James@jcpineville.com

www.jcpineville.com



David's soul was in anguish, and yet he was overcome with joy because of God's unfailing love. He was feeling anguish and joy at the same time! This is only possible with God. The New International Version and other versions begin verse 7 with David saying, "I will be glad and rejoice..." David made a decision to be glad and to rejoice, even in the midst of his anguish. Like Joseph and Mary, he trusted God with the anguish and made a decision to rejoice in God rather than wallowing in the sorrow. He placed his focus on the God who loved him unfailingly rather than on the sorrow that is temporary.

This takes trust in God. Later in verse 14, David said, "But I am trusting you, O Lord, saying, 'You are my God!'" This is one of the greatest "buts" ever! David recounted all his sadness, grief, hurts, and dangers, and then he said, "But I trust in you, God. You are still my God!"

David was called as a leader because he was a man after God's own heart. As you prepare to lead the group this week, can you, with David, say confidently to God, "You've got all this. I trust you with all of it. I don't understand it. This is not what I hoped for or dreamed of. I wonder if this is the way it's supposed to work. But I will trust you with all of it. My life, my future, is in your hands"?

Purpose of this Week:

- To help participants see in Jesus' birth an example of humility for them to follow.
- To encourage members that regardless of the difficulties of their circumstances, God is still in control and can still use them to accomplish his purposes.

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Discussion:

1. The circumstances of Christ's birth have been softened by the passage of time, until we see them with all the nostalgic quaintness of a Hallmark greeting card. Does this video presentation depict the way you've typically viewed the scene of Jesus' birth, or are there differences? How so?
2. Read Philippians 2:1-11. What does verse 5 tell us about Jesus' nature? What do you learn about his attitude?
3. What does it mean that Jesus made himself nothing?
4. In verse 4, what is the connection between Jesus' humility and his obedience?
5. Why do you think Jesus came to earth in such a humble circumstance?

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6. When, like Joseph and Mary, have you thought, “This isn’t the way it’s supposed to work”? what were the circumstances? How did you feel about them?

7. Kyle mentioned the Old Testament verse, “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9). How does this passage help you understand why things don’t always go the way you hope?

8. Kyle pointed out that Jesus often shows up in unpredicted places. Where have you seen Jesus show up? Where do you need him to show up now?

9. Kyle said, “The manger is an invitation to live a life of humble service and sacrifice.” How does a life of humble service and sacrifice change the way you think about your difficult life circumstances?