



LIFEgroup Study Guide

December 1 - December 29

LIFEgroup Study Guide

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series, and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

- *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
[www.lbf.church/messages]

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big, contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

- *Contact Pastor Dan:*
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God With Us

The most frequent command given in the Bible is some form of "Do not fear." Fear is a massive part of the human experience. We fear physical danger. We fear disease. We fear financial disaster. We fear national insecurity. We fear marriage failure. We fear emotional pain. We fear heartache for our children. We fear homelessness and poverty. Our lives are full of fear, yet over and over again, God speaks to us the message, "Do not fear."

How is it possible not to fear?! When God says, "Do not fear," he frequently follows this command with the simple assurance, "I am with you." I may fear for my physical safety, but not if a military escort is with me. I may fear drowning, but not if the Coast Guard is with me. I may fear getting beat up, but not if Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson is with me. Fear can be assuaged by the presence of someone who is both strong and good.

At Christmas, we celebrate the reality that, when Jesus took on human flesh as a baby, he was God-with-us. And because of what Jesus has done, God uniquely is with his people through his Holy Spirit. The birth of Jesus signals the powerful reality that we don't need to fear because God is with us. And he proved his commitment to be with us through the humility and suffering of Jesus as a frail and vulnerable human being.

For this Advent series, we will focus on the essential changes that happen when we embrace the reality that God is with us. The first lesson will walk through the events of the Christmas story, and the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy that a virgin would have a child and that he would be Immanuel, God-with-us. The next three lessons will follow three stories in Luke 8. Each story will demonstrate how the presence of Jesus, God-with-us, changed the lives of people that he was around. And looking at these stories will bring us the comfort and the joy that we can now experience because, through Jesus, God is truly with us.



God With Us in Jesus

Lesson 1 • December 1 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

The birth of Jesus brought us the ongoing presence of God.

Getting Started

1. Why is the biblical Christmas story so significant to you?

2. What are some times in which you find yourself in desperate need of God's presence with you?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Matthew 1:18-25.

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was

found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Because Joseph, her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."

This passage begins with a straightforward statement that we will read about the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. "Messiah" means anointed one. This is the story of the birth, not of a man who became important because of the life he lived. This is the story of the birth of a man who had been promised long before by God himself.

The Gospel of Matthew brings us the story of Jesus' birth mainly through the eyes of Joseph, while Luke brings the story primarily through the eyes of Mary. So Matthew's account introduces the fact that Mary and Joseph were pledged to be married. This pledge—a formal engagement—was so severe and binding that Joseph was going to have to divorce Mary to break it off. He wanted to do it quietly, though, so that she didn't have to face public scorn. And why was Joseph about to break off his upcoming marriage? It was because Mary was found to be pregnant. Since Joseph knew that he was not the father of this child, he planned to break off the engagement.

But then God gave Joseph a dream. In the dream, an angel appeared to him, telling him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. But why should Joseph marry a woman who is pregnant with someone else's child? It was because the Holy Spirit conceived the child in her. Joseph is told that she will give birth to a son and that they are to name him Jesus. The name Jesus means “Yahweh saves” (‘Yahweh’ was the name God gave for himself). This was a proper name because Jesus, the angel said, would save his people from their sins.

Matthew then tells us that all of this happened to fulfill a prophecy from Isaiah 7:14, which says that the virgin will give birth to a son and that they will call him “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” Jesus would not merely be a prophet or a military leader; he would be God-with-us.

Joseph immediately obeyed the angel, took Mary as his wife, and named her son Jesus.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about this passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?
4. Looking at Joseph’s overall conduct in this passage, what do you conclude about what kind of a man he was?
5. In verse 18, Jesus is referred to as the Messiah, which is a reference to his identity as God's anointed one. How does Jesus being the Messiah relate to the idea of him being God-with-us?
6. In verse 21, the angel says that Jesus will “save his people from their sins.” How does Jesus' role as our Savior from our sins relate to how he is present with us in an ongoing way?
7. Verses 22-23 demonstrate that Jesus was the long-awaited, long-promised Savior. How did the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus impact your ability to trust him?

Wrestling with Issues

8. In verses 23, Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14.

Take some time to read through Isaiah 7-8. What do you conclude about what Isaiah's words meant for the people in his time, and what they mean when they are applied to Jesus?

Taking it to Heart

9. What does Matthew's account of Jesus' birth show about God's determination to save us from our sins?

10. Name one way that your attitude and actions would be different if you more fully embraced that God was present with you because of Jesus.



God With Us In The Storm

Lesson 2 • December 8 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

If God is with us, then this changes how we handle our trials.

Getting Started

1. Share about a difficult trial in which you experienced God's presence with you.

2. When you are facing trials and troubles, what is your instinctive belief about God's attitude toward you?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Luke 8:22-25.

²² One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a

boat and set out. ²³ As they sailed, he fell asleep.

A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

²⁴ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. ²⁵ "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement, they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

Several of Jesus' disciples were fishermen, so he spent a reasonable amount of time in boats. In this passage, Jesus and his disciples were crossing the lake (the Sea of Galilee), when a tremendous storm came upon them. But as the disciples dealt with the danger of the storm, Jesus was sleeping peacefully on his own.

The disciples wake Jesus, crying out to him that they are about to drown. But Jesus rebukes the wind and the raging waters, and the storm immediately is calmed. To rebuke someone is to tell them to stop their behavior. But Jesus here rebukes not a human being, but the natural elements themselves. This would seem to be lunacy if not for the fact that these natural elements obeyed him.

After he calms the storm, Jesus asks his disciples, "Where is your faith?" This seems like a strange question. Did they lack faith because they were afraid? Because they thought they were going to drown? Because they were surprised at Jesus' power? In essence, he seems to be saying that his presence with them ought to be enough to calm their fears. Instead of being panicked, they can experience peace because of him. That is the power of the presence of God-with-us in Jesus.

The disciples respond in fear and amazement, pondering the identity of someone who can order around the winds and the water. This miracle demonstrates Jesus' great power over the natural elements, and it also reflects the freedom from fear that we can have if we remember that he is present with us.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about this passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. What do you think is the significance of Jesus sleeping during the storm?

5. The miracle in this passage is Jesus rebuking the wind and the waves. What do you think we are meant to learn about Jesus from this story?

6. Jesus asks the disciples, "Where is your faith?" What was it about their actions that demonstrated a lack of faith?

7. What do you think this story has to do with the idea of Jesus being God-with-us?

Wrestling with Issues

8. In this story, the disciples are rescued from a storm because of the presence and power of Jesus. What do you think this means about the kinds of difficulties that Christians will face while the presence of the power of Jesus is with them?

Taking it to Heart

9. Just as God was with the disciples in the boat because of Jesus' presence, God is with us today because of Jesus taking on human flesh at Christmas. How does God's presence with you impact how you deal with fear?

10. How does the fact that God is with us change the way that you relate to him when you're facing trials?



God With Us In The Battle

Lesson 3 • December 15 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

If God is with us, then this changes how we engage in spiritual battles.

Getting Started

1. In what kinds of situations do you feel like you are in a spiritual battle?

2. As Christians we believe that we have an enemy, Satan, who wants to bring destruction to all people. What do you think are some of the ways that Satan tries to do this?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Luke 8:26-39.

²⁶ They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. ²⁷ When Jesus

stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time, this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. ²⁸ When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” ²⁹ For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. ³⁰ Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. ³¹ And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. ³² A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. ³³ When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. ³⁴ When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, ³⁵ and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ³⁶ Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. ³⁷ Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to

leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

³⁸ The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him."

In this passage, Luke records the story of Jesus' encounter with a man who was possessed by a legion of demons. As Jesus and his disciples arrive across the lake from Galilee, they meet this demon-possessed man. This man lived in tombs, wore no clothes, and often broke the chains that others put on him to keep him under guard. It is a frightening picture of a man who is under satanic power.

When the man sees Jesus, he immediately knows his identity. The demons call him the Son of God and beg him not to torture them. They fear that Jesus will cast them out into the abyss, which likely refers to some sort of bondage in the spiritual realm. They ask instead to be cast into a herd of pigs on a nearby hillside. Jesus allows this, and the demons go into the pigs, leading them to rush down the hill and drown in the lake.

After this powerful miracle of casting out demons, Jesus is the recipient of two very different responses. The first response is that of the people of the town. They are amazed by what Jesus has done, and so they beg him to leave. His great power overcame them with fear, and they didn't want his presence with them.

The second response is that of the man who had been made well. He is suddenly sitting clothed and in his right mind. He is restored! He asks to be able to travel with Jesus. He wants to be in his presence.

Jesus instead instructs him to stay in his region and spread the word about what God has done for him. The man obeys, spreading the word about what Jesus—God-with-us—had done for him.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about this passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. In this passage, we see Jesus cast out a legion of demons. What do you think we are meant to learn about Jesus from this story?

5. What significance do you draw from the fact that the demons knew the identity of Jesus?

6. After Jesus casts out the demons, the people of the town ask him to leave the area. Why do you think this was their desire?

7. Why do you think Jesus told the man to spread the word in his region instead of allowing him to travel with the disciples?

10. How does the presence of God-with-us impact your approach to dealing with the temptations and trials that Satan brings into your life?

Wrestling with Issues

8. Many of us today are shocked by the demonic activity in this story. It seems unreal to us. But demonic activity takes many forms. What does each of the following passages say about how demonic activity impacts our lives?

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Ephesians 6:10-17

James 3:13-18

Taking it to Heart

9. In the story of the demon-possessed man, the power of Satan seemed unbeatable until Jesus showed up. What are some ways that the activity and influence of Satan can seem unbeatable to you today?



God With Us In The Darkness

Lesson 4 • December 22 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

If God is with us, then this changes how we engage in dark and discouraging times.

Getting Started

1. What kinds of difficulties bring you the most discouragement?

2. What is your gut-instinct about God's attitude toward you when you are facing deep discouragement?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Luke 8:40-56.

⁴⁰ Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed

him, for they were all expecting him. ⁴¹ Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house ⁴² because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. ⁴³ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." ⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." ⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." ⁴⁹ While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore." ⁵⁰ Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." ⁵¹ When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. ⁵² Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." ⁵³ They laughed at him, knowing that

she was dead. ⁵⁴ But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" ⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶ Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

This passage contains a story within a story. The main narrative finds Jesus on his way to the house of Jairus—as a synagogue leader—to heal his sick daughter. But as he is on his way, Jesus has an encounter with a woman who needed to be healed of a bleeding disorder that had plagued her for twelve years. When this woman sees Jesus passing by, she touches the edge of his cloak, thinking that she can be healed through this minimal encounter with Jesus. She is right, and she is healed immediately!

But when she experiences the healing, Jesus notices that something has happened. He immediately stops and tries to find out who has touched him. Because crowds were pressing in around Jesus, it turns out to be challenging to find out who it was. But, after a short while, the woman finally comes forward and admits that it was her. Perhaps she thought she would be in trouble for "stealing" healing from Jesus. But he affirms her faith and tells her to go in peace.

It seems strange that, on the way to heal a sick girl, Jesus would take the time to sort out the identity of this woman. And if Jairus was concerned about the delay, his concerns were confirmed when someone from his house comes to tell him that his daughter has died. There is no longer a need to bother Jesus with his matter. But Jesus turns to Jairus with simple words: "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." With that, they continue toward the house.

Jesus arrives to find people mourning for Jairus' daughter. Jesus, however, tells them that she is only sleeping. He is not saying this because he doesn't know that she is dead. Jesus is saying this because he is about to raise her. He speaks similarly about Lazarus before he raises him (John 11:11, 23).

Jesus then enters the girl's room, takes her by the hand, and tells her to get up. She does! Her life is restored! Jesus not only showed the power to raise the dead, but he shows that he didn't have to hurry to do so. He had time to stop along the way and attend to a sick woman who also needed healing and hope.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about this passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. In verses, 41-42 Jairus approaches Jesus in a moment of desperation. What are some things that make you desperate for Jesus?

5. The woman who touched Jesus' cloak had been dealing with a physical affliction for 12 years. Have you ever dealt with a trial for that long? If so, how did such an extended difficulty impact you?

6. Jesus, on his way to heal a dying girl, stops to find out who touched his cloak. What does this say to you about Jesus' attitude toward time?

10. How can you help to shine the light of Jesus when others around you are experiencing times of deep darkness?

7. Jesus has no problem in this passage; healing both disease and death. What does this mean for how we can call upon God today when we are in dark and difficult moments?

Wrestling with Issues

8. Before healing Jairus' daughter, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid; just believe." How does fear get in the way of faith?

Taking it to Heart

9. Think of the most daunting challenge in your life right now. How does the fact that God is with us change your attitude toward that challenge?



God With Us Always

Lesson 5 • December 29 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

If God is with us, then this means that he will bring victories that we can celebrate.

Getting Started

1. What is the difference between doing something for God and doing something with God?

2. Think of the most challenging parts of the Christian life for you. How are those parts impacted by the idea of God being with you as you live them out?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This passage is often called The Great Commission. It is the passage in which Jesus tells his disciples to make disciples of all nations. It is a commission that trickles down to believers today. After all, the original disciples made disciples who made disciples who made disciples who made disciples (eventually) of us. We now carry on that calling.

We carry out the commission of Jesus in his name and his power. After his disciples respond to him in verses 16-17 with a mix of worship and doubt, Jesus tells them that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. He is the Lord! He will one day inherit the world and be its king. He has all power and authority. So when he tells the disciples to make disciples of all nations and to teach them and baptize them, he is speaking with the authority of God.

The focus of this lesson, though, will be on the very last thing Jesus said in this passage. After giving them commands that could seem daunting, he says, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” These words in the last chapter of Matthew parallel words from the first chapter of Matthew, which quotes Isaiah 7:14, saying, “‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means God with us).” Jesus is predicted to be God-with-us in chapter 1, and then Jesus promised that he will be with us always in chapter 28. It is a way for Matthew to tie the Jesus story together. He truly is God-with-us.

While Jesus is not physically with us today, he is with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is also with us through the certainty of his promises. And he is also with us through his work of intercession before the Father (Romans 8:33-34). Jesus will never forsake us, and one day he will return and be with us forever.

If Jesus is with us always, then this means that we are not alone as we seek to do his work. It means that we can anticipate growth and victory in many ways because Jesus is at work in us and through us. It means that we can share exciting stories of how God has worked because we are not trying to manifest the power of God on our own. God-with-us means that we not only have comfort and hope for tomorrow but also strength and victory for today.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about this passage—or the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Verse 17 says that Jesus' disciples worshiped him, but that some doubted. What does this say about the human ability to have both reverence and doubt present at the same time?

5. When you look at the Great Commission in verses 18-20, what do you see as the main task that God has called his disciples to do?

6. After reading verses 18-20, how do you feel? Excited? Intimidated? Discouraged? Inspired?

7. Jesus' last words in the book of Matthew are about him being with us always. How do these final words impact the way that you read the previous words about making disciples of all nations?

Wrestling with Issues

8. Jesus is not on the earth physically today as he was in the first century. In what sense, then, is Jesus with us today?

Taking it to Heart

9. During this entire past year, God has been with you.

In what ways have you seen him at work, bringing power and victory?

10. As you look ahead to this next year, how can you walk in the hope and the assurance that God is with you every step of the way?