

Small Group Discussion Guide

Behold: God's Presence Changes Everything

Sermon Summary

The Christmas story begins with a crisis in Joseph's life—his fiancée Mary is pregnant, and he knows he's not the father. In his darkest moment, God breaks through with a message: "Behold." God announces that He is present in the midst of confusion and pain. Through Jesus—Immanuel, meaning "God with us"—God didn't just visit creation, He joined it. The challenge we face isn't God's absence but our awareness of His presence. This Christmas season, we're invited to practice the presence of God by redirecting our attention to Him throughout our daily routines, remembering that His presence changes everything.

Icebreaker Question

What's one Christmas tradition (good or bad) from your childhood that stands out to you, and why?

Discussion Questions

1. Joseph's Crisis and God's Presence

Read [Matthew 1:18-23](#). Joseph faced a devastating situation that shattered his dreams and expectations. Can you share about a time when your plans fell apart or you faced circumstances outside your control? How did you experience (or struggle to experience) God's presence during that season?

2. Immanuel: God With Us

The sermon emphasized that Jesus being both fully human and fully divine is essential for our experience of salvation—"only a God-man can reconcile God with man." ([Hebrew 4:15](#)) Why is it important that Jesus experienced loneliness, poverty, exhaustion, grief, rejection, and pain? How does knowing that Jesus understands your struggles experientially (not just theoretically) change the way you approach Him?

3. Spiritual Attention Deficit

The message suggested that we all have a kind of "spiritual attention deficit disorder"—we're prone to distraction and have difficulty focusing on God's presence. What are the biggest distractions in your life that keep you from being aware of God's presence? What would it look

like for you to "redirect your attention" back to God this week? See [Isaiah 26:3](#) for a description of what the result could look like.

4. Practicing the Presence of God

Read [Genesis 28:16](#). Brother Lawrence experienced God's presence while washing dishes in a monastery kitchen just as profoundly as when taking communion in a cathedral. Look at this list of ordinary activities:

- Your commute to work
- Folding laundry
- Yard work
- Morning coffee
- Kids' bedtime routine

Which of these (or other routine activities) could become a "consistent conduit" for experiencing God's presence? What would it practically look like to practice God's presence in that moment?

5. Four Types of Thoughts

Max Lucado suggests giving God four types of thoughts throughout the day:

- **Waking thoughts** (first moments of the morning)
- **Waiting thoughts** (quiet time to focus on God)
- **Whispering thoughts** (brief prayers throughout the day)
- **Waning thoughts** (final moments before sleep)

Which of these four comes most naturally to you? Which is the biggest challenge? What's one specific way you could practice one of these this week? For an interesting and ancient resource, try using [Saint Patrick's Breastplate](#), a celtic prayer attributed to him that considered these areas of life and the need for God's protection and our focus throughout all of them (*see leaders note below)..

Prayer Requests

As we close our time together, let's pray for one another, each person picking at least one of these prayer targets for the others to pray for:

- **For Awareness:** Pray for increased awareness of God's presence in the ordinary, mundane, and even frustrating moments of daily life.
- **For Those in Crisis:** Pray for anyone in the group (or those we know) who are experiencing painful circumstances, shattered dreams, or difficult seasons—that they would experience God's "Behold" moment and know He is with them.

- **For Spiritual Focus:** Pray for help overcoming spiritual distractions and the ability to redirect our attention to God throughout each day, especially during this busy Christmas season.
- **For Christmas Opportunities:** Pray that as we practice God's presence this season, we would have opportunities to share the good news of Immanuel with others and invite them to experience God with us at Christmas services.

***Leaders note regarding Saint Patrick's Breastplate. Options for use:**

- Print it out and give it to group members for use during the week.
- Send link to group members to refer to during the group session and for use during the week as interested.
- Send link to group members during the group and assign a different paragraph of it for each member to read/pray through during the prayer time at the end of your small group time.
- Play the audio file, praying along with it in silence.
- Encourage the group to pray with the audio file each day this week as they give God their "waking, waiting, whispering and waning thoughts", learning the language of this ancient prayer that has sustained believers for 1600 years.