



GROUP ICE BREAKER

What was your favorite part of Christmas as a child?

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S NEXT STEPS

What, if any, next step did you commit to last week, how did it go?

- I will use the following as reminders:
 - Nativity Scenes - That was a real event in human history.
 - Christmas Cards - I'm on God's friendship list.
 - Gifts - Salvation is a gift.
 - Lights - Jesus is the light of the world.

THIS WEEK'S SERMON RECAP

The working premise in this message is that the love and the deep community captured in the nativity scene is actually the result of several hard-fought battles that Joseph and Mary had to engage in and win for it to look as wonderful as it does.

The first battle Mary and Joseph was the battle for righteousness. Joseph and Mary battled for purity in their relationship, and with God's help, they were winning the battle. Similarly today, whether we're married or single, younger or older, we can fight for sexual purity.

Another hard fought battle that Joseph particularly had to face was the battle for graciousness. When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, he had to fight to move from disappointment and the feeling of being betrayed to the place where he wanted to preserve and protect Mary. We can act on dark impulses that make us want to inflict damage on people who we believe have wronged us. Or we can follow the lead of Joseph and engage in the battle for graciousness.

The last spiritual battle Joseph faced was the battle for trust. Joseph was being asked to trust that the father of Mary's child is, in fact, the Holy Spirit, and not another man. Joseph's trust battles were not easy. God is asking those of us who are facing very difficult situations this Christmas to trust that He is a good God.

I hope everyone will fight for righteousness, graciousness, and trust.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Matthew 1:18-21. What catches your attention in this familiar account of the birth of Jesus?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONT)

2. How would you define righteousness to a family member or friend? Why does the battle for righteousness matter so much?
3. Read Ephesians 4:31-32. Describe the forgiveness we've been given. How does this forgiveness contrast with the traits we're to get rid of?
4. Think of a person who has wronged you or betrayed you. What would it take for you to treat that person with grace rather than judgement?
5. Share with the group a time you chose graciousness in a difficult situation and what God did as a result of your choice.
6. Read 2 Corinthians 5:7. How does faith differ from blind trust?
7. Share an example of a time you trusted God when it made no sense to you. What did you learn from that experience?
8. How does Joseph's story encourage you to cooperate with God and his plans for your life, even when He wants you to do something very difficult?

NEXT STEPS FOR THIS WEEK (COMMIT TO GROW)

Use these as a guide to take your next step and commit to what you learned this week:

- I will fight for personal righteousness.
- I will make something right with God this week.
- I will make something right with someone I've wronged.
- I will battle for graciousness and take the high road.
- I will fight the battle for trust.
- I will read Scripture and stay connected to church.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Matthew 1:18-21
- 1 Peter 3:12