



*Series*

# What Are You Waiting For?

**December 4 – December 26, 2010**



## What are you waiting for?



**Week 1: Waiting to be Valued (Dec 4/5)**

**Text:** Luke 1: 26-38; Luke 4:18-21

**Gather:** Enjoy this time—give people time to settle in as they retreat to group from the hectic pace of the season.

**Icebreaker:** What is your favorite Advent tradition?

**Pray:** Pray that the richness of this story will help us experience the purpose of this season.

**Focus:** The book of Luke is the first part of a two book series (Luke and Acts) written by a doctor (Luke) to a friend of his in the Roman government. Luke writes to convey the truth of Jesus to this friend, Theophilus, so that the Gospel can be reported in the palace of the most powerful man in the first century, Caesar.

1. **Luke 2** records Jesus' birth and early life. Read it aloud. How does this account of Jesus' birth and early life differ from the story we hear each Christmas season in stores, on cards, etc.? Which account—the real one or the contemporary one—do you experience each year?

Let's back up one step and look at **Luke 1: 26-38**. Here, Mary, a peasant girl from a family that was marginalized because they believed vigorously in the coming of the Messiah, is told by the angel Gabriel that she will be the instrument to deliver those like her – the poor and disenfranchised who faithfully wait for the Son of God. She is thrilled and petrified at the same time. Mary is not only materially poor, but she is culturally impoverished, forced to the fringe by culture and religion. She feels unworthy and unprepared to participate in her own deliverance. The angel tells her not to fear because God is the one who has assigned value and power to her and will empower her to be wealthy in spirit.

2. Why do you think God picked Mary, a poor, unknown woman, to be the mother of Jesus, God's Son?
3. In **Luke 1:37-38**, the angel announces a promise and Mary replies with a commitment. What is the promise and how have you had that promise come true in your life? Have you made that commitment? Why or why not? In what area(s) of your life are you hesitating?

*Our value comes from Whose we are and Who has us, not from who we are or what we have.*

# Small Group Discussion Guide

Turn to **Luke 4:18-21**. Jesus gathers with those who have known him since he was small and participates in the teaching in the synagogue. Taking his turn to read, he chooses Isaiah 61:1-2 and reads the prophecy of his own coming. By choosing this text, in which Isaiah wrote about Jesus and what he would do when he came to earth, Jesus clearly states His purpose. Jesus calls Israel and all those who follow Him to this same purpose: to recover the marginalized and forgotten. Jesus will free and heal the poor, prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. The good news was that provision, freedom, justice, and sight were now available to all. The Good News is that no one is insignificant or unworthy – all waiting for value will now receive it!

*We continue the Gospel by continuing to serve those Jesus did: those realizing their spiritual, emotional, and familial poverty, brokenness, oppression and imprisonment.*

4. Why did Jesus focus so much on the poor in His earthly ministry? Why is His coming such Good News for the poor? Look at Isaiah 61:1-2. What does Jesus mean by the “poor?” Other than material poverty, what types of poverty exist?
5. List the groups of people that you know that fit into the categories in Luke 4:18-21.

### Call to Action:

1. **Think:** Identify the “poor” you are called to serve as Jesus served.
2. **Love:** Write down specific names and pray daily for them this week, asking God to show you how to give them a sense of value and hope. Our value comes from whose we are and who has us!
3. **Serve:** Take action on what you sense God calling you to do for those He has brought to your heart.
4. **Live:** As you are serving, remember that you are the Gospel to the people you are serving – you are the Good News just like Jesus!

**Sharing and Prayer:** Encourage as many people as possible to pray aloud.

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## What are you waiting for?



**Week 2: Freedom and a Future (December 11/12)**

**Text:** Luke 2: 8-20; Luke 4:18-21

**Gather:** Enjoy being together during this holiday season. Use this time to transition from the busyness of the season into the meaning of the season.

**Icebreaker:** What holiday television show or movie do you enjoy?

**Pray:** Thank God for the gift of His son, and pray that this study will help us reflect His glory more.

### Focus:

**Luke 2: 8-20:** God chooses a disenfranchised group of men and women to first hear the gospel. The angels herald the arrival of the hope of humanity to a group of shepherds around a campfire, not to the mainstream. The shepherds knew they were enslaved by a religious and cultural system that judged people by pedigree and possessions. The angels remind the shepherds that it is safe to speak to the angelic beings, then the shepherds humbly bear witness to a stunning concert that prompts them to find the baby – their hope. God chooses them to hear and tell. Mary finds joy as the shepherds share the joy and seek in turn to share it with others. Mary gets a glimpse of her son’s ministry -- a ministry of championing the cause of the oppressed. The paradox is that the shepherds are liberated, and yet return to the flocks.

*The shepherds knew they were enslaved by a religious and cultural system that judged people by pedigree and possessions, and they knew they needed liberation. God chose them to hear and tell, not those who were trapped and didn't know it – those who were limited in choice and expression but had declared entrapment freedom.*

**Luke 4:18-21:** (Review last week’s notes)

*As followers of Jesus we continue the Gospel by serving those Jesus did. Not only do we liberate the people, but we serve to liberate the systems that trap the people.*

1. What groups of people or individuals around you are enslaved and don’t realize it (for example, the religiously legalistic)? What enslaves them? Why don’t they realize their limitations? How can they realize their oppression and escape?

# Small Group Discussion Guide

2. What groups around you know they are trapped (for example, teenage single mothers) but can't be free without help? What needs to happen for them to find freedom?
3. By what do you feel trapped? How can you break free and stay free?
4. When we find freedom, why is it hard to go back to those with whom we were trapped and share the freedom we found? Why do we feel judgmental in bringing freedom to people?
5. Name the systems that keep people trapped (for example, racism) and brainstorm solutions that can bring freedom.

## Call to Action:

1. **Think:** Consider one person you know who is trapped and how you can bring him or her freedom.
2. **Love:** Sit with that person, listen to his or her story, and brainstorm with them a way to freedom.
3. **Serve:** Enact the plan.
4. **Live:** Realize that you are “Christmas” to the person to whom you brought freedom and help them plan to bring freedom to someone else. Plan to continue bringing freedom to someone else too!

## Sharing and Prayer:

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## What are you waiting for?



**Week 3: I Can See! (December 18/19)**

**Text:** Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 4:18-21

**Gather:** Talk, eat, and catch up.

**Icebreaker:** What is one food that you enjoy at Christmas?

**Pray:** Pray that God will teach the group what He wants them to understand.

### Study:

**Matthew 2:1-12:** From the beginning, Herod was an enemy of Jesus. Herod, appointed King of Judea by Caesar Augustus, ruled as a paranoid and cruel leader. When, in the 35<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, he heard of the coming of the Messiah—a rival leader—Herod schemed to use astronomers or the Magi to find this child and kill him. His failure to find Jesus resulted in the deaths of hundreds of children. The Magi, having seen Jesus, were told not to reveal Jesus' identity and to be part of sparing his life so that he could bring freedom to those blinded by false gods. The Magi, intellectually and materially accomplished men, bowed down and worshipped a child in a manger because they were convinced He was as it was foretold—the Son of God. Jesus' simple majesty opened the learned and wealthy eyes of these great men. They, in turn, saw the flaw in Herod's desires and honored Jesus by obeying the message God sent them in their dreams. Once they could see, they realized who Jesus was and the right path forward.

*Blindness will cause people to follow the wrong leaders and to replace God the Father with lesser, demanding gods. When we truly see Jesus, we are introduced to a God who loves and gives. We leave "by a different route"—a route that moves us toward the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven and the hope and joy of following Jesus.*

**Luke 4:18-21:** Review the notes from week 1.

*As followers of Jesus we continue the Gospel by revealing its majestic simplicity and inviting others to see the truth that brings true vision.*

1. Who or what is your God? In what do you put your faith? What receives your time and resources? If someone looked at your calendar and checkbook, what would they assume you worship?

# Small Group Discussion Guide

2. Blindness will cause people to follow the wrong leaders and replace God the Father with lesser, demanding gods. When we truly see Jesus, our sight is healed and we don't return to where we were. We leave "by a different route." When did you begin following Jesus and stop following lesser gods? What caused you to find Jesus and leave "in a different direction"? How do you see things differently than you did before you saw Jesus?
3. Let's check the clearness of our vision. What is your vision for your life? Where do you want to be in five years? What do you want to have accomplished? How do these goals fit with the vision Jesus has for your life?
4. Where do you feel you are still blind? Where are your emotional, spiritual, or relational blind spots? What are your plans for changing them?

### Call to Action:

1. **Think:** Who around you is where you were spiritually five years ago? Pray and ask God to help you build a relationship with them.
2. **Love:** Love that person as Jesus does and seek to serve him or her.
3. **Serve:** Do for him or her what would have caused you to see Jesus sooner and resulted in a clearer vision if someone had done that for you.
4. **Live:** Urgently pursue the clear vision God has given you for your life and don't let anything hinder you. If your vision is not clear, pray that God will show you His vision for you.

**Sharing and Prayer:** Pray that group members will pursue their God-given visions and that the visions would be increasingly clear.

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## What are you waiting for?



**Week 4: It's Just What You Want -- and Need! (Dec. 25/26)**

**Text:** Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 4:18-21

**Gather:** Create a space for those who need to slow down amidst the holidays, and keep the celebratory spirit!

**Icebreaker:** Tell us about a memorable New Year's Eve.

**Pray:** Thank God for this Christmas. Pray for those going through this holiday week without a loved one for the first time.

### Study:

**Luke 2: 1-7:** Joseph takes his family to Bethlehem, his hometown, in obedience to the law. Unless the census had been ordered, Joseph would most likely have avoided taking his pregnant fiancé to face his family. Knowing this, our sovereign God used the census to fulfill prophecy: the Old Testament foretold that the Messiah would be born in the City of David. "Bethlehem" means "city of bread (or bakery)," and God chose that to be the place where the Bread of Life, Jesus, would be born. Joseph's relatives knew that Joseph and Mary were unmarried, and therefore failed to welcome them into their homes. They did not extend any grace to Joseph or Mary, nor even ask about their story. Instead they assumed that Joseph and Mary were sinful. No one opened their home for Mary and Joseph, but someone had mercy on them. Most likely the manger was in a cave under a house. Still, no one was there to greet Jesus. This was just as God had designed it. Jesus' humble beginning causes His exaltation to the right hand of God to be even more miraculous. Having been marginalized and judged, Mary and Joseph appreciated the message of forgiveness and community their Son would teach even more.

*We all know what rejection feels like so we can empathize with others. One who has truly suffered rejection knows best how to accept others.*

**Luke 4:18-21:** The last part of the prophecy from Isaiah 61 says that when Jesus comes He will make the year of Jubilee the standard by which God will treat us and we will treat one another. The year of Jubilee happened every fifty years in the Old Testament times. At this time, all debt was forgiven and all property returned to its owners. It provided a new beginning for a new generation. Jesus' arrival on earth, His death, burial, and resurrection, result in a jubilee every day. Every day brings forgiveness of all debt, and we return to our place of belonging—our family land. Every day we have access to the place we were created to be—in the family of God and on the land of peace, joy, and hope. Further—

get to invite everyone we know to join us there! In Jesus we all gain acceptance into God's family as His kids. That is a gift that gives and we get to give. That is full life.

*We have freedom because our eternal and spiritual debts have been paid. We are free to forgive others and reveal to them a glimpse of the forgiveness they can have for eternity!*

1. When have you felt completely alone and rejected? Was it because of something you did or were you a scapegoat?
2. Why do you think we always seem to require someone to blame for things that cause discomfort? How does that desire reflect the image of God in us? How can that desire be expressed in a manner that reflects the character of Jesus?
3. Write down the actions and attitudes you struggle to accept forgiveness from Jesus for. Now write down the things you struggle to forgive others for. Without necessarily sharing your list, tell the group why you struggle to receive forgiveness and why you struggle to forgive.
4. Declare Jubilee. Forgiveness is deciding that the offender is no longer responsible for repaying you or making you feel better. You are in control of that. Look at your list: what is the first step to accepting forgiveness and extending forgiveness for each item?
5. Spend time in silent prayer, thanking Jesus for and accepting forgiveness and asking for the discipline to forgive others. Sometimes we need to make the decision to forgive someone over and over again—hourly or daily. Ask God to change your heart so as to make this choice.

### Call to Action:

1. **Think:** Develop a mindset of forgiveness by mentally practicing being forgiven and forgiving.
2. **Love:** Consider the love Jesus has for you by reflecting on Luke 2 and the journey He traveled to provide forgiveness. Allow your heart to see others as He sees you.
3. **Serve:** Knowing that they are worthy of Jesus' love, act toward others in a manner that assumes they are forgiven and worthy of your love.
4. **Live:** Every day is a day of Jubilee—a celebration of being forgiven and forgiving. Enjoy it!

# Small Group Discussion Guide



**Sharing and Prayer:** This study may have raised emotions in many. Pray over those with especially emotional situations. People may want to share specifics and they may choose to keep specifics private. In either case, pray for each person to have the desire and discipline to rest in Jesus' love and forgiveness and draw on this well to forgive others.

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