

Two Fathers
Matthew 1:18-25
Small Group Guide

Opening question:

- Who is the best father that you know or have known? What makes or made him so?

We are in Part 2 of a three-part Advent series called “All in the Family,” which looks in the Gospel of Matthew at the events surrounding Jesus’ birth.

TAKE TURNS READING MATTHEW 1:18-25

1. To understand the theology of this passage (important spiritual truths), we first need to understand what is going on in this slice of history.

- a. List everything you see about who Joseph is, who Mary is, and the nature of their relationship.

- b. If you haven’t discussed this already, what is the “big event” that happens here?
- c. What difference does it make that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by Joseph? What difference would it make to Jesus’ identity?
- d. What difference does it make that an angel confirmed who Jesus was? How would this affect Joseph’s perception of Jesus’ identity?
- e. What difference does it make to Jesus’ identity that his birth is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy?

2. What do you learn about Jesus’ intention (purpose in coming) from these verses?

- a. The passage discusses that Jesus saves people from their sins and that he will be “God with us.” Are both important? In other words, discuss what it would be like to have a saving God, but not one “with us,” or what would it be like to have a personal, but not a saving God.
- b. In highlighting Jesus’ intention/purpose, the author reflected it in two names, “Jesus” and “Immanuel.” Names usually reflect identity. How are Jesus’ identity and purpose intertwined?
- c. What does it mean to you personally that God both wants to “save you” (Jesus) from the penalty of your sins and he wants to be “with you” (Immanuel) in relationship?
- d. Given what he’s done for you, can you imagine God as the best father you’ve ever had? How does this realization make you feel?

3. Jesus' identity and intention/purpose implies a call for him to be the savior and master of our lives.
 - a. Pastor Josh points out that salvation doesn't work if we don't recognize Jesus' authority in our lives. How do we resist Jesus' authority as we go about our day?
 - b. Submission is not a favorite word of New Yorkers. Are there any spiritual practices we can do that would acknowledge our submission to Jesus who came to "save" us and "be with" us?
 - c. Pastor Josh also pointed out an emotional factor that gets in the way of this invitation. He basically said that until we believe God loves us more than we love ourselves, we won't let Jesus rule in our lives. Is there anything in the present or in your past that causes you to doubt God's love for you?
 - d. Another way of saying this is that we trust the lie that whispers, "If I ever give myself to God I will be completely miserable. I can't trust him to make me happy." How can we overcome this lie that Satan tries to cement in our hearts?
4. Finally, Josh brought out the observation that God invited Joseph to partner with him in the epic work of redemption. Likewise, Jesus invites us to partner with him in seeing people come alive in Christ.
 - a. How do we specifically partner with Jesus in this work of redemption? What is exciting about it?
 - b. One obstacle to Jesus' invitation that Josh pointed out was that we see the risk of following Jesus.
 - i. What are the rewards to following Jesus?
 - ii. What are the risks to following ourselves?¹
 - c. Lastly, Josh quoted Andrew Barber:

When you're a kid, you believe in God, transcendence, good versus evil, fairies, and everything in between. But eventually you grow up... realize the world is a cold, dark place, and accept your generally meaningless life in a place that will never fulfill you... It's normal to mourn the loss of our childhood, but it's devastating when we can find nothing compelling to replace it—nothing to anticipate with wonder or fight for in everyday life. Even more tragic is when the church implicitly agrees with—or at least doesn't counteract—the dominant narrative: since my life is generally pointless, I must live for the next distraction.

 - i. How much is Jesus your source of meaning vs. how much do you seek meaning elsewhere – say TV, sports, sex, relationships, work success, material gains, etc.?
5. **Share and Pray:** Among our usual prayer requests, let's pray that God will help us accept his invitation to be both our Savior and Lord, for in love 2,000 years ago He sent Jesus for that very purpose.

¹ Tip: Focusing on these two questions each day is one spiritual exercise that will help you accept (on a daily basis) Jesus' invitation to be your savior and authority.