



What does Jesus want?

# Christmas list

*Small Group Discussion Guide*  
**DECEMBER 3, 2017**



## PREPARATION

### ■ STUDY

Spend the week studying Matthew 1. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

### ■ DETERMINE

Many questions have been included in this guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

### ■ PRAY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming weekend. Pray also for your time in this week's study and your group's openness to God's Word.

### ■ LANDING POINT

When I give God my future, I can look forward with hopeful expectation.



## GROUP DISCUSSION

■ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

■ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

■ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

■ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



## INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

Do you remember what it was like waiting for Christmas morning as a kid? Each day leading up to that morning felt like an eternity, didn't it? You'd shake your presents to try to figure out if that dolls, BB gun, or gaming system was in there. When Christmas morning finally arrived, it felt like all your hopes and dreams would be realized once you opened that gift.

What if God wants you to look at your future the way you looked forward to Christmas as a kid? What if you could look at your future with hopeful expectation? In this series, your group will look back at the Christmas story and see what Jesus wants from you and for you this Christmas. This week you will discuss how you get real hope in return when you give God your future.

**Q:** *What was the best Christmas gift you received as a kid? What did it feel like to get it?*

**Q:** *What does it mean to have "hopeful expectation"?*



## LEARN

*Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.*

### A PECULIAR HERITAGE

The Christmas story takes place in a time when the people of Israel had all but lost hope. Once again, Israel found itself under the rule of a foreign power, Rome. God had been silent for centuries, and many Israelites wondered if He had forgotten them. But there were some who had hope. They believed God would be true to His promises to send a Savior (or "Messiah") to rescue them.

Matthew's gospel begins with Jesus' genealogy. Think of it as Jesus' family tree. Three sets of fourteen generations are given. The list includes men, women, biblical heroes, villains, adulterers, prostitutes, and gentiles. It's a peculiar heritage, but this is the line from which the Savior would enter the world.

**READ:** Read Matthew 1. Why do you think it's important to understand Jesus' heritage?

**Q:** How do you feel about your heritage? What thoughts come to mind when you consider where you came from?

## OBEDIENCE IN UNCERTAINTY

Jesus' genealogy ends with Joseph, a carpenter. At the time, he and Mary were excited about the future. They were betrothed to be married, and they must have spent countless hours planning their future together. And then something changed. Mary became pregnant. Suddenly, the future didn't seem so certain. Joseph didn't know what to do. He loved Mary and didn't want her to be shunned as an adulteress. So, he made plans to divorce her without creating a scandal.

One night in a dream, an angel spoke to Joseph and told him go ahead with the wedding plans. Mary had not been unfaithful. She had conceived by the Holy Spirit. The child inside her was the promised Messiah. When Joseph woke up, he knew what to do. He took Mary as his wife, and he was by her side every step of the way until their son was born. They called him Jesus, which means "God saves."

**Q:** What do you learn about Joseph in this story? What do his actions say about his character?

**Q:** Why is obedience often hard in the face of uncertainty?



LIVE

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

## OUR PLANS, GOD'S PLANS

While Joseph's story is unique, the feelings and tensions he experienced surrounding an uncertain future are something we can relate to. Most of us have an idea of what we want our future to look like. Joseph and Mary likely had a good future together in mind. But God had other, better, plans for them. God's plans for Joseph and Mary

were bigger than they were too. God's plan would bring the Savior of all mankind into the world.

The truth is, everyone's future is uncertain, whether you're the janitor or the big shot banker in town. No one can guarantee what tomorrow will bring. Many things out of our control can happen to make us worry about the future. But we have no legitimate reason to despair about an uncertain future. God promises us that He has a plan, and it's a plan to give us a real hope and a good future (Jer. 29:11).

**Q:** *Recall a time when you faced uncertainty about the future. What emotions did you experience? How did you respond to them?*

**Q:** *How would you live differently if you truly believed God's plan for you gave you real hope and a good future?*

## GIVING GOD YOUR FUTURE

What gave Joseph the resolve to take that next step of obedience into an uncertain future? Perhaps it was the belief that when we give God our future, we get something in return. We get a hope that overrules our concerns and suspicions about the unknown. The hope we have is not like hope for better weather tomorrow. Weather changes. God doesn't. The hope He gives is certain, a "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Heb. 6:19).

**Q:** *Why do we fear the unknown? How does God speak to that fear?*

**Q:** *In what area of life might be God calling you to give Him your uncertain future?*



**LEAD**

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

## FOLLOWING JOSEPH'S LEAD

Joseph faced uncertain times with uncommon obedience. Let's look at three ways you can respond to uncertainty in your life. First, you can have faith in God's character. God is a good Father who knows His children. Look back, and you will see God demonstrating His care for you and His concern for your future time and again.

Second, you can trust in God's work. God meets you in your uncertainty with a promise to give you that next step of obedience at just the right time. You may have another timeline in mind, but God is working the events of your life for your good and His glory.

Third, you can obey with expectancy. If you have faith in who God is and trust what He is doing, you can step forward in obedience with hopeful expectation about your future.

**Q:** *Reflect on the three ways you can respond to uncertainty. Which of them is most challenging to you? Why?*

**Q:** *You don't have to face an uncertain future alone. How can you invite others into the process?*



## PRAY

Present any fears, worries, or concerns to God about any uncertainty in your life. Thank Him for caring about your future. Praise Him for being in control of your life. Declare God's promises to give you a hope and a future, and ask Him for faith, trust, and obedience to step forward into an uncertain future.



## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Jeremiah 29:11. Reflect on how believing God's promise could make you look differently at your future.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



**MORE ON JESUS' GENEALOGY** Jesus' genealogy is peculiar for a few reasons. First, the list of names includes men and women. This is rare, because it was typical in those days to trace someone's lineage through men only. Second, there are some on the list whose character was questionable at best, and downright evil at worst. This list is made up of the kind of people Jesus came to save. He didn't come for those who were good and had their act together. He came to save sinners.

**THE PROMISED MESSIAH** The term messiah can be translated "anointed" or "anointed one." Through His covenants with Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3; confirmed in Genesis 13:14–17; 15:1–7; 17:1–8) and David (2 Sam. 7:4–17) and His message through the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Isa. 9 and 53), God promised to send the Messiah to save His people. One of the main concerns in Matthew's gospel is establishing Jesus as this promised Messiah.

**BETROTHAL IN 1ST CENTURY JEWISH CULTURE** "The custom of betrothal was different from 'engagement' in modern society. Customarily, the parents of a young man chose a young woman to be engaged to their son. A second stage of betrothal involved official arrangements and a prenuptial agreement before witnesses, which was a legally binding contract and could be broken only by a formal process of divorce."<sup>1</sup>

### ENDNOTES:

1. Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1821.