

Small Group Questions – Leader’s Guide - Read Matthew 1:18-25

1. How do we usually respond or deal with the sharp, surprising, and even shocking turns in our lives and in the journey of faith?

The question is a warm up question, inviting everyone to consider how we react when our plans and purposes are interrupted or sabotaged.

2. As Joseph's own life and plans were upended by divine interruptions into the shock and surprise of grace, how can we as Christians "buckle in" for those sharp and surprising turns in our own lives?

We buckle in by trusting in God who upholds us even when the ground underneath our feet is taken away. Joseph responded in just manner, righteously and faithfully, even in fear, as he chose not to disgrace or shame Mary, choosing mercy over law, deciding on grace rather than punishment. Like Joseph, we pray to be nimble and humble enough to course-correct when we are presented a new way.

3. By naming Jesus, Joseph legally adopts Him as his own child. If Joseph had not chosen to adopt Jesus, Mary and Jesus would have been socially cut off from Israel. Jesus was only counted legally as David's descendant through adoption, even though He was genetically from David's line through Mary. Knowing that Jesus Himself was adopted by our humanity and into our humanity, how does the Christmas Story of the adoption of God's only begotten Son into our world inform our own adoption into God's family?

We marvel at the sheer lavishness and intimacy of God's nearness and identification in our social and material existence, choosing to trickle into the dark and damp crevices of our broken humanity and human order. If God loved us in this, we love others the same as to be near and to identify with the bereft and the broken. We cannot remain entitled to the gifts and comforts of life, but rather to share in others' sufferings, and to be near and present to those who are trapped in the cracks and crevices of brokenness.

4. God was with us -- Immanuel -- in this way: that God chose to enter our world fatherless in regards to His humanity, and to bare Himself open to be received or to be rejected, to be deemed illegitimate, ultimately to be chosen and adopted Himself by a sinful and wayward human father. How does the promise of "God with us in Jesus" help us navigate the sharp and surprising turns of life?

God is always with us, no matter what circumstance we find ourselves in. Even in the deepest hell, He is there with us, bearing us in our unimaginable griefs and sorrows. God is thus never absent from any of us, even though we feel as though He has forsaken us. God is relentless in His promises to fulfill, as He did in the past, and so He will and must even at present, even to the very end of the age.