

BE CHRISTMAS

Life Group Leaders Guide

Directions

This packet contains the background information, series information, and weekly curriculum you will need to lead a life group during our *Be Christmas* series. Everything on this page is to help you stay connected to the series as a whole. Behind this page is the individual curriculum to help you point people to Jesus. The *Purpose* and *Move* sections of the curriculum are for the leader to read or paraphrase to the group. The *Notes and Commentary* section is for the leader to get background information and go deeper into the passages before leading the life group. The curriculum was designed with your freedom in mind. Read through the curriculum and decide what will work best for your group. SOAP the passages with the group, use only certain questions, write your own questions, or use the curriculum verbatim. As the leader, you know what will point your people to Jesus.

Series Overview

Christmas is the story of a God of love coming to us. So, for the believer, the season of Christmas should be defined by us going to others. In our culture, the Christmas season has been transformed into a season of us receiving from others but this stands in contrast to what God had in mind. *Be Christmas* is going to show us that Christmas is a verb for us to show love and mercy to a world that is in dire need of it. Throughout this series we will challenge our people to come closer to Jesus, give to God and others, do for others what God would, and love all people well. Our hope is that this season, our people will not only experience Christmas but *Be Christmas* to the world around them.

Life Group Overview

During the *Be Christmas* series our life group curriculum will cover the same topic that was covered from stage but using a different passage or set of passages. Each curriculum will begin with an unpacking of the previous Sunday's service to help the leader open up the topic for the study and also see how people responded to the Sunday teaching. Please keep in mind that this series is 4 weeks long but only the first 2 weeks will have life group curriculum. The weeks after that all of our life groups will be on a life group break. This break will last from 12/17 to 1/7.

Be Christmas Series Schedule

Week	Sermon Date	Topic of sermon	Topic of life group
Week 1	12/3	Christmas Gives	Genesis 32 & 33 (Jacob and Esau)
Week 2	12/10	Christmas Loves	1 John 4:7-12
Week 3	12/17	Christmas Does	Life Group Break
Week 4	12/23-12/24	Christmas Comes	Life Group Break

The Point Church Life Group Curriculum

Be Christmas - Week 1 - Genesis 32/33 (Jacob and Esau)

Purpose of Study

This study explores the power of gift-giving to deepen and restore relationships. One way we can *Be Christmas* to those around us is to give generously. But how do we live this out with people who have hurt us badly and those we have hurt? We shouldn't give gifts to buy forgiveness or friendship, but as we'll see in the scripture, thoughtful gifts combined with a posture of humility can give us an opening to begin the difficult work of healing and reconciliation. God gave us his son, the precious gift we celebrate at Christmas, for this very reason: to reconcile a broken world to himself.

Flow of Study

Optional Icebreaker: What is the best gift you've ever given? What's the best gift you've ever received? Why?

Move #1: Since the sermon series and life groups are covering the same topics, it might be a good idea (both for content and time) to begin the discussion with some unpacking questions from this Sunday's sermon.

1. Did anything stand out to you from the sermon this weekend?
2. What is one thing from the sermon that you want to apply this week?

Move #2: Before we get into the scripture, let's think about reconciliation and gift-giving in general.

1. Have two members of your family ever been estranged with each other, so much so that they would avoid being in the same room together? How did this affect the family? Did they ever reconcile? If so, how did that happen?
2. Have you ever tried to appease someone who was upset with you using a gift? Did they forgive you?
3. What are some other reasons people give gifts? Does the motivation affect what happens afterwards?
 - a. **Possible Answers:** obligation, celebration, peace offering, joy, to meet a need, to show you care, reciprocity

Move #3: Now let's explore gift-giving as a tool for reconciliation using the story of two feuding brothers.

Background: The main scripture comes from Genesis and is the story of two brothers: Jacob and Esau. Jacob, (the younger brother) blackmailed Esau (the firstborn) out of Esau's birthright (think inheritance). Then Jacob tricked their father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing meant for the firstborn. When Esau found out that Jacob had stolen his blessing, he was furious and planned to kill his brother.

Knowing Esau's anger, Jacob fled to the faraway land of his uncle, Laban. After the two brothers were separated for twenty years, Jacob again ran away from family drama, this time because of a disagreement with Laban. Taking his wives, his servants, and his livestock, he headed back to the land of his brother, Esau,

hoping that enough time had passed to heal the old wounds. We pick up the story with Jacob sending messengers ahead of him to Esau to see if his brother would welcome him back.

Read Genesis 32:3-16 (NIV)

³ Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. ⁴ He instructed them: “This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. ⁵ I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.’”

⁶ When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

⁷ In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. ⁸ He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.”

⁹ Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ ¹⁰ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. ¹¹ Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. ¹² But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”

¹³ He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, “Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds.”

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. Why does Jacob refer to Esau as “my lord” and himself as “your servant”? How does humbling oneself help to bring about forgiveness? Have you seen this in your own life?
3. Jacob prays to God to save him from Esau. What would your prayer be in that situation? Can you think of a time you prayed for God to save you from a disaster? Did he?
 - a. **Hint:** Jacob could have taken his prayer one step further and asked God to restore his relationship with his brother.
4. Livestock totalling hundreds of animals was a very generous gift at that time. What’s the most expensive gift you’ve ever received? How did it affect your relationship with the giver?
5. Is there someone in your life you feel called to give an abundant gift?

Read Genesis 33:1-11 (NIV)

¹ Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. ² He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. ³ He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. ⁵ Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked. Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.”

⁶ Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. ⁷ Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

⁸ Esau asked, “What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?” “To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said. ⁹ But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.”

¹⁰ “No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. ¹¹ Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. It has been said that ‘time heals all wounds’ and that ‘absence makes the heart grow fonder’. Do you think that all those years apart helped Esau forgive his brother? Have you experienced this in your own life?
3. Re-read verse 3. Again Jacob humbles himself before his brother by bowing to the ground seven times and later having his wives and children do the same. Do you think his show of humility softened Esau’s heart towards him? Have you ever humbled yourself when giving a gift?
4. Re-read verse 8 and 9. The ‘flocks and herds’ Esau refers to are Jacob’s gift from the previous passage. Do you think that his generous gift was the main reason Esau embraced Jacob? Did Esau need Jacob’s gift?
5. Re-read verse 4 and 11. How does Esau demonstrate the right way to receive gifts? Does he seem more interested in the gift or the gift-giver?

Soon after this passage, Jacob, still fearful of his brother, decided to settle away from his brother. Although he successfully appeased his brother, he missed an opportunity to restore their relationship. Gifts alone may not restore relationships, they should be followed up with acts of love, which we’ll discuss next week.

6. Have you ever settled for peace when you could have had a deeper relationship? What stopped you?
 - a. **Note to leader:** There may be good reasons not to pursue deeper relationships, such as when they are inappropriate, abusive, or exploitative. Be sensitive to this as your group shares and try to avoid suggesting that pursuing deeper relationships is always the right thing to do.

Move #4: You might be asking yourself: What does all this have to do with Christmas? This final move explores the greatest gift of reconciliation ever given: Jesus Christ. Unlike Jacob’s gift, which was motivated by fear and did not lead to a deeper relationship, the gift of God’s son was motivated by love and reconciled us to Him, restoring our relationship. These verses are a reminder of what that gift means to Christians.

Read Galatians 4:4-5 (NIV):

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Read 1 John 4:10 (NIV):

¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1. What stands out to you from these verses?
2. At Christmas, what do you think of most: the gifts that you're about to receive, the gifts that you must give, or God's gift of Jesus to the world? Why?
3. Unlike Jacob's gift to Esau (which Esau didn't really need (Genesis 33:9)), we desperately needed God's gift to us in Jesus. Have you ever received a gift you desperately needed? If we are to give likewise, what are some ways to find out what someone really needs?
4. Explain the phrase 'adoption to sonship' in verse 5? What does it mean to you personally? How did Christ bring you into God's family?
5. Describe a time you gave someone a 'selfish gift'. For example, you give your wife two season tickets to the Carolina Hurricanes, even though you're the hockey fan.
6. How was God's gift to us the opposite of selfish?
 - a. **Hint:** God didn't want to watch his son suffer and die, but he did it anyway because of his great love.
7. How was Jesus' being born a man an act of humility? What are some ways that we can humble ourselves? How can we give humbly? How can we receive humbly?

Prayer: End your study with a time of prayer where people can share prayer requests and be prayed for before they leave. If possible, please steer some prayer towards what your group talked about during this study.

Next Steps: The following are things you could challenge your members to do in order to take what you studied in this curriculum farther.

1. Read **Philippians 2:1-11**. Meditate on this passage and consider ways you might imitate Christ's humility in your own life. This passage will be the subject of next week's sermon.
2. Is there someone in your life that you know you ought to reconcile with? Consider humbling yourself before that person and giving them a thoughtful gift. Do not try to force reconciliation, but as far as it depends on you, offer it freely and pray that God would use these acts to begin healing the relationship according to His will and perfect timing.