



WEEKLY STUDY

Week Three

Pastor Jacob continued our series leading up to Christmas Eve. We are learning how to be the light while we look for the Light of the world to come. This week we heard how Joseph's response to a problem was to plan, and God's response to his plan was a dream that was better.

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group, you can share from daily readings as well as the additional question at the bottom of this guide. If you would like to get connected to a Providence Small Group visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Find a time each day to read the passage of scripture, follow the daily prayer prompt, and then pray this or your own prayer.

*O God, You are with us through every kind of trial and difficult situation.
You've given us minds and confidence to try to solve those problems on our own.
You are kind to us, You invite us to see glimpses of what you see. To see your dream for us.
Help us to give ourselves to your dream.
For you are with us in the immediate moment of trial.
And you will redeem all things in the end through your Son Jesus Christ born at Christmas.
Amen.*

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: Matthew 1.18-19

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

- This is the well known set up for the Christmas story. Every good story has a crisis and at least one major moment of decision. A young couple that plans to marry finds themselves pregnant. It was scandalous, and the options were not good. Joseph proved to be a man of integrity and his first response was to do what was right—not by the law—but in response to something deeper. So his plan began to formulate. What problems have you tried to plan your way out of?
- *Pray that you would have the resolve of Joseph to choose kindness and decency in the face of trials.*

TUESDAY: MATTHEW 1.20-23

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

- God gave space for Joseph to begin to plan, but quickly revealed a better (yet maybe even more difficult) way. Had he considered that the Holy Spirit really was involved in Mary’s pregnancy? Had he considered that he might be the one who would be in the delivery room to name the child? Had he considered that God might be up to something bigger than Joseph’s good heart could have imagined? When God’s dream is revealed it might be unsettling, but it is always good.
- *Pray through the problems you face personally and the problems of the world around you. Lift them up to God and pray, “Immanuel. God with us.”*

WEDNESDAY: MATTHEW 1.24-25

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

- Joseph was ready to respond to God’s dream as it was revealed to him. Pastor Jacob called this one of the most powerful verses in all of scripture. It was a moment like many of us face on a regular basis. We are reminded of God’s dream and are then faced with a choice. Joseph chose risky obedience.
- *Pray that God would wake you up to risky obedience.*

THURSDAY: PROVERBS 16.1-3

*To humans belong the plans of the heart,
but from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue.*

² *All a person’s ways seem pure to them,
but motives are weighed by the Lord.*

³ *Commit to the Lord whatever you do,
and he will establish your plans.*

- King Solomon wrote Proverbs long before Joseph came on to the scene. But the story of human wrestling with planning vs pursuing God’s dream was even older than him. God knows the motives of our hearts even when we have convinced ourselves that they are pure. Here we are instructed to place our plan book in God’s hands and allow him to establish our plans—to show us the way.
- *As you pray, search your heart for plans that have not yet been turned over to God.*

FRIDAY: 1 JOHN 5.10-12

Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹ And this is the

testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

- John has written about the testimony of the Holy Spirit. He wrote about the importance of the Christmas story—that Jesus Christ was born of the Spirit through a woman. God came to us to rescue us. Accepting this truth the way Joseph accepted it when he woke up is how we can receive eternal life through the One born in a manger.
- *Pray through the Christmas story and listen for the testimony of the Holy Spirit.*

SATURDAY: ACTS 16.6-10

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- Here is an example of a time when passionate followers of Jesus needed to have their own plans transformed by a God-given dream. It’s often referred to as the Macedonian Call. If we are generally stepping in the direction of obedience—if we put ourselves in the position to hear the dream and to respond—God can do big things like spread the Good News throughout the world!
- *Pray that you would hold your own plans loosely enough to hear your own Macedonian Call.*

- See reverse for Small Group Discussion -

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Jacob stated that God's dreams have both immediate and eternal implications. Do you see that to be true?

- Do you tend to be a big picture person, or one who focuses on the here and now?
- If you can, make a list of 3 or 4 times when God broke through with a way forward that was bigger than your plans.
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- Identify what the immediate implications were. Identify also how those examples might be tied to eternity.