

## Session 1: Emmanuel, God with Us

### SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

**Main Idea:** God has sent his son to dispel our darkness, saving us from sin and death.

**Head Change:** To know Jesus promises his presence to anyone who receives him.

**Heart Change:** To feel God's nearness in every circumstance.

**Life Change:** To rely on Christ, even when our path is dark and unclear.

### OPEN

**What do you love most about Christmas? What holiday traditions do you get most excited about this time of year?**

Christmas is one of our most important and beloved holidays, but it takes place during the darkest time of the year. That is a strange contrast, but it's not an accident. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. It reminds us that God has entered our wintry darkness of sin to bring us light, love, joy, and peace. Jesus has come so that we might be with God now and into eternity.

## **VIEW**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how J.D. answers the following questions.

**What is the meaning of the name Emmanuel? Why is it an important name for Jesus?**

**What other names does God give to Jesus?**

Watch Session 1: *Emmanuel, God With Us* (11 minutes).

## REVIEW

In the book of Isaiah, God uses multiple names to describe Jesus. God calls him Emmanuel, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, and Everlasting Father. These names are rich with meaning—meaning that will change your life. In this first session, J.D. Greear discussed the first name, Emmanuel, and the powerful truth of God being with us.

Emmanuel literally means “God with us.” **In what ways have you recognized that God is with you? What, if anything, can make you think he is not with you?**

It can be easy to feel disconnected from the people and promises of the Old Testament. But, while we are not in the same situation as the ancient Israelites, we all are living in some kind of darkness, be it the darkness of fear, betrayal, illness, loss, or hopelessness. **What darkness are you currently living in?**

**What in your life do you wish God would rescue you from?**

Think about God’s promise to his people. He promised he would send Emmanuel, God with us. J.D. said that if God is with you, he will work everything out for your good and his glory. This is good news! **In what ways would your life change if you believed that every situation would work out for your good?**

**What could it look like for you to glorify God in your current circumstances?**

J.D. said Jesus took on death so that we would only have to experience its shadow. If you trust Christ, your current darkness is passing. **In what ways does seeing your darkness as a passing shadow change your perspective on your circumstances?**

If you are not a Christian or are just learning about Jesus, the name Emmanuel is an invitation. God came because our lives were shrouded in darkness. If you feel like you are in darkness, know that for *you* a child has been born. To *you* a son has been given. Jesus came for *you* in your darkness. **What, in your mind, makes Jesus’s arrival good news? What questions do you have about Jesus?**

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## BIBLE EXPLORATION

This series focuses on the names of Jesus in the book of Isaiah. These names were given during a very uncertain time in Israel's history, when God's people were threatened by all sorts of dangers. They cried out to God for help and he promised to send the Messiah, Jesus, to rescue them from their darkness. This promise is as relevant to us today as it was when Isaiah was written.

You may feel pretty distant from Isaiah and the ancient Israelites, but when we read God's promises you will find that they comfort and encourage you, no matter what darkness you are going through today.

Read Isaiah 7:10–14.

Ahaz, the leader of God's people, is facing down two armies, one from Syria and one from Ephraim. In the midst of this chaos, God promises Ahaz that neither army will overcome his people. It seemed like an unbelievable, even overly optimistic promise. **Put yourself in Ahaz's shoes: what are his options at this point in the story?**

In verse 10, God goes a step further, offering to give Ahaz a sign to confirm his promise. **Why do you think God offered Ahaz a sign to confirm his promise?**

**What biblical promises are difficult for you to believe?**

Ahaz, surprisingly, refuses the confirming sign. He passes on God's offer, thinking that he is being tricked into "testing the Lord." **When have you felt like asking God for something is improper? Do you ever feel like you are bothering God? Why?**

In the Old Testament, asking God for a confirming sign showed that a person didn't trust God. If God made a promise, he kept it. Asking for a sign before trusting his Word was essentially like yelling, "Prove it," to God.

But here, God *offered* Ahaz a sign—Ahaz's choice of a miracle. God wanted Ahaz to have unshakable faith in his promise. All Ahaz needed to do was pick his miracle but instead he said, "I will not." This doesn't prove Ahaz's righteousness; it shows us he didn't think he needed God's help. **Do you ever feel like you don't need God's**

**help with something? What situations do you feel like you need to handle on your own?**

God does not rescind his offer but chooses what Ahaz's sign will be: a child. The sign is strange; Ahaz is asking for protection and God gives him a baby. **If you were Ahaz, what would you think of a baby as a sign?**

God was not playing a cruel joke on Ahaz. Instead, he was offering Ahaz and his people exactly what they needed: his presence. The child, Emmanuel, is a promise: God is with us. **What good does God's presence in your current circumstance offer?**

**In what ways is his presence the best gift to face your darkness?**

The promise God gave to Ahaz in Isaiah 7 is extended to us (Matthew 1:22–23). God has seen us in our distress and darkness and sent us a miracle, a child called Emmanuel. He did not come to defeat the armies of Syria and Ephraim but our true enemies, sin and death. In Jesus, that promise is offered to us, the church. God has met our true need by wiping away our sin and offering us his presence. **What encouragement does God's provision give you in your current circumstances?**

No matter what you are going through today, God offers you his presence. He wants to be with you so that you can have peace and assurance of his goodness. **In what ways do you need God today? This week?**

**In what ways does God's presence feel like enough, or not enough, for what you are going through?**

## LAST WORD

In the dead of winter, when we are surrounded by darkness, we celebrate the light of Jesus. We gather in decorated homes to give one another good gifts as signs of our love.

This is Christmas: that in our darkness and spiritual coldness, God has sent light into the world and has given us the gift of his Son as a sign of his love. More than that, Jesus took on our sin, rose from the grave so that we might be saved, and promises to be with us until he returns.

Christmas is not just a sentimental holiday; it is the good news that for us a child is born, a Son has been given, and his name is Emmanuel, God with us.

## DEEPER WALK

**Read:** Read Matthew 1:18–23 and 28:16–20. Take note of the promise of Emmanuel in both Jesus’s birth and Great Commission. He came to us and is with us even now.

**Pray:** Pray to see God’s presence in your life more clearly. Even though he may feel far away, his presence never leaves us.

**Memorize:** Memorize John 1:11–12, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

*An additional Christmas resource from J.D. Greear you may find helpful is his book Searching for Christmas.*