

## The Commitment

### SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

**Main Idea:** Joseph's commitment is found through his obedient response to God's plan, leaving us an example of commitment to follow.

**Head Change:** To expect the greatest outcome to always come from commitment to God's plan.

**Heart Change:** To pause our emotional responses and await God's wisdom.

**Life Change:** To develop the spiritual discernment to notice God's plans.

### OPEN

**Describe an impulse purchase that you have made while Christmas shopping or at another time. Did you later regret the decision, or were you glad you made the purchase?**

The quickest decision is not always the right decision. Our own impulses can seem right in the moment, but they often betray us. Understanding and prioritizing God's will can keep us from making decisions that move us away from what He wants to accomplish through us.

The prior session explored Mary's openness to be part of the fulfillment of God's promises. This session explores Joseph's own decision regarding his betrothed wife, who, it seemed had been unfaithful to him. His ultimate choice to be husband to Mary and father to Jesus gave the Messiah a stable upbringing with two loving parents.

In this session, Jason Turner, pastor of Mississippi Boulevard Church in Memphis, TN, considers the decision-making process that Joseph underwent, explaining what led him to commit so well to God's plan. Joseph's story leaves clues that will help us do as he did.

## **READ**

Matthew 1:18-25

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a couple important things to look for in Jason Turner's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What does Jason mean when he says, "The only way out is through"?**

**Why is it important to sleep on a matter rather than make a hasty decision?**

Show Session 3: *The Commitment* (16 minutes).

## DISCUSS

The emotional aspect of both Joseph and Mary's decisions is impossible to ignore. Imagine the potpourri of concerns and joys this couple experienced during the first Advent. God allowed them to undergo each emotion as they exercised faith in God amid their own insecurities and needs.

### **What questions might have coursed through the minds of Mary and Joseph during this relationship crisis?**

Despite the pain of the moment, Joseph chose to think through the initial hurt and betrayal he felt when he learned of Mary's pregnancy. His level-headed response avoided significant trouble.

### **TO COMMIT TO GOD'S PURPOSES, DECLINE HASTY DECISIONS.**

Read Matthew 1:18-20.

These first verses describe Joseph's original plan, before an angel explained Mary's pregnancy had come from the Lord. **How does this original plan of Joseph's reflect the Bible's description that he was a "just man"?**

Joseph exhibited self-control by not acting hastily. In these verses, we see that he had "resolved" to not put Mary to shame, which already indicates he had pondered the situation. He continued to consider the issue and even took another night's sleep. **Why is it important to not act hastily?**

Jason explained the need for both sober judgment and spiritual discernment. He added, "Mishandling a moment like this can cause you to inadvertently make a situation that God intended to be redemptive turn to ruin." **How can these potentially redemptive moments instead turn ruinous when we mishandle them?**

**How do we develop sober judgment and spiritual discernment?**

Jason explained how important it is to practice "the discipline of pausing." **How would you define the discipline of pausing?**

**How are you practicing this discipline? How can you improve your practice of it?**

**Note:** To consider the discipline of pausing as it relates to God's patience and ours, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

**COMMITMENT INVOLVES DISCERNMENT BETWEEN OUR PLAN AND GOD'S PURPOSE.**

Read Matthew 1:20-23.

Although Joseph had formulated his response to Mary's pregnancy, God explained His purpose as greater than Joseph's plans. **What behaviors would indicate that people value their own plans over God's purposes?**

Jason stated that sometimes we can be "so committed to our plan that we miss God's purpose for our lives." **How can we cultivate a heart that values God's purposes above our plans?**  
**How can we develop the sensitivity to discern God's purposes?**

God spoke His will both to Mary and to Joseph. This happened through angelic announcements, which aligned them both toward God's purpose. Angelic visits tend to be rare, even in Scripture, but God still shares His will with His children. This frequently happens through promptings of the Holy Spirit and studying Scripture. **Why is it beneficial for two or more Christians to discuss God's will together?**

**Note:** To consider how to discern God's will, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

**COMMITMENT REQUIRES DETERMINATION TO TRUST THE PROMISE AND THE PROCESS.**

Read Matthew 1:24-25.

For Joseph, accepting God's will mean enduring significant hardship, as Jason explained. **What would Joseph likely have endured when he decided to take Mary as his wife and Jesus as his Son?**

In the video session, Jason said, "We should always be willing to surrender to what God has in store." **When a person chooses to commit to God's purposes, what difficulties might await? What help does God provide?**

"The only way out is to go through," Jason stated. Committing to God's plans requires full commitment, especially in the face of doubt. **What can Christians do to**

**encourage one another to stay committed to God’s purposes?**

By his commitment as husband and father, Joseph bore the brunt of scorn and shame that his family would otherwise have experienced. In this way, he brought life, normalcy, and stability to his family. 1 Peter 2:24 says this of Jesus: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (ESV). **How does Joseph’s commitment mirror that of our Savior for us? How can we mirror that same commitment?**

**LAST WORD**

God could have arranged for the Messiah to grow up without Joseph’s fatherly presence in the home, but it is difficult to imagine such a situation. God was willing for His Son to enter the world in a family without money or status or security or social connections. He was not, however, willing for Jesus to spend His childhood without two faithful parents.

As Christmas approaches, we recognize that many families have lost loved ones, and many others need stability and would benefit from the caring involvement of others. Although Joseph could have backed away from a situation and claim no responsibility, he leaned in and brought the stability of his commitment and love. He is an example for us. Consider how you can bless a family in an ongoing way, as Joseph did.

## GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

### 1. Pausing and Patience

The Bible often refers to the "discipline of pausing" as patience. Patience is not passivity but active restraint and love. God is our primary model for patience. Read the following passages and discuss what they say about God's patience:

Exodus 34:6; Isaiah 48:9; Hosea 11:8-9; 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 2:4

As followers of Jesus, we are meant to express similar patience. Our exercise of patience models the same restraint and love of God, but it also exhibits faith that God will accomplish His will in His time. We can be patient because we do not have to take matters that belong to God into our own hands. Read the following passages and discuss what they say about our call to patience.

1 Corinthians 13:4; Galatians 5:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Romans 5:3; James 5:7-11

### 2. Discerning God's Will

Christians are called to seek and carry out God's will. Our lives are characterized by aligning our own hearts with God's will and pursuing it. Read each verse below and discuss the accompanying question.

- Ephesians 5:17. What does this say about our responsibility?
- Psalm 143:10 and Colossians 1:9. How is prayer used to help ourselves and others to understand God's will?
- Matthew 12:50. What does Jesus say about those who do God's will?
- Matthew 6:10. Why is praying for God's will to be done beneficially?
- 1 John 2:17. What are the outcomes of doing or not doing God's will?

