



Our Phones. Our Selves

Text: Luke 5:15-16
Bible Teacher Ben Stuart

1. Think through your average day. What does your interaction look like with your phone, technology, and screens?
 - a. "Phones are wonderful tools but bad masters." Talk through this as a group.
 - b. Why is this true?
 - c. What other things in your life could you say the same thing about?
2. What is the potential that exists when we carve out time for silence and being alone with God?
 - a. What does it say about us if we think, "Yeah, I just don't have time for that"?
 - b. How does Jesus demonstrate a pattern of busyness and alone time?
3. Read Exodus 15:22 - 20:21 and Matthew 3:13 - 4:11. The wilderness has many functions. It can serve as a place of barrenness and hunger, a source of nourishment from God, a location for God's testing and revelation, and a context for the transformation of God's people.
 - a. How do you see the wilderness functioning in these stories?
 - b. How might the stories have been different if they had taken place in our regular, everyday setting vs. the wilderness?
4. The wilderness also serves as a common metaphor for a space or time of confusion, transition, and growth.
 - a. What does "wilderness" mean to you?
 - b. How have you met God in a wilderness place?
5. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 together.
 - a. What do you see in this section of Scripture that might suggest why God would need to command people to love Him?
 - b. What are the practical measures outlined in verses 7-9 to help us fulfill this command?
 - c. How have you personally utilized any of them?

Challenge: Evaluate your daily technology use and distractions, whether it's internet surfing, social media, television, or phone use. What changes can you implement to engage more deeply with God and in the relationships He has placed in your life? (See Postscript for more thoughts from Ben Stuart on implementing changes into your home/family.)

Prayer: Advent God, we journey with You to Bethlehem's stable and a new-born King, ears attuned to the song of angels, eyes alert for Bethlehem's star. Forgive us if on our journey if we are distracted by the tempting offers of this world. Keep our hearts aflame with the hope of Christmas, and the promise of a Savior. Amen

Read more at: http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm#ixzz3szHo8jab

STUDY DEEPER

Prepare Him Room – Advent Begins

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/prepare-him-room>

The season of Advent is beginning again. Advent – a season, so full of tradition, so full of memory, so full of legend. And a season so full, often over-full, bustling and bursting with the exhausting activity of keeping traditions, creating memories, and recalling legends.

And as Advent begins, Luke comes to us, as a kind of a holy ghost of Christmas past, bidding us to lay aside for the moment our Christmas lists, leave the half-trimmed tree, pause the holiday movie, dry our hands from washing the cookie pans, and follow him. And as we do, all we see begins to swirl into an unfamiliar darkness.

Suddenly, we find ourselves standing in what we somehow know is a small, ancient Palestinian village on an unusually starry night. The shapes and shadows of buildings look strange. The human and animal noises sound strange. The smoky scents of fire, foods, burning oils, and manure smell strange. The utter absence of electric lighting is strange. We reach for our smartphone. It's dead.

Disturbing Advent Sight

Luke leads us beyond the village and down a dark, twisting rocky path to some ignored, ignoble spot where we suddenly come upon a sight that we find surprisingly disturbing. Not ten feet away, asleep on the ground, near a small fire that has burned down to embers, is a peasant girl. She has bits of straw in her long, messy, dark hair, and she is wrapped in dirty cloaks and a blanket. A split-second look tells us how difficult this night has been for her. And she is so young.

Even more distressing, we see beside her a small, crude, dirty feeding trough in which lays a sleeping newborn, wrapped tightly in unsanitary, blood-smearred cloths.

We take a few tentative steps forward. We know this child, and we know this girl. But the scene is strange to us. It does not look anything like the manger scenes and illustrated books of our childhood. Our Advent traditions did not prepare us for the earthy realness of the real Advent.

Mary is not serene. She's bone weary. And no divine, heavenly glow emanates from the child. He is not even especially beautiful (Isaiah 53:2). In fact, there is nothing about this child to suggest the unfathomable mystery of who he is. We are unnerved to realize that had we not already known, we would not have recognized him at all.

This scene, the real Christmas, has nothing of the feeling of the Christmas we know. It has all the feel of undesired, desperate homelessness – more like a scene we'd find under a bridge than under our Christmas tree. And we are hit with the shock of a truth we've known all our lives: this young girl just gave birth to a baby – *the Baby* – in a pasture!

Our visceral response is pity and sadness. This poor girl and her baby! We know this story, but as we see it as it really was, it seems so wrong. Our impulse is to do something to help them. We look incredulously at

Luke. He, calmly looking from the child to us, quietly says, “There was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). No place? No place besides a field for the Maker of the world? The cosmic incongruity stuns us. “Surely we can find some room somewhere!” we respond. “Can you?” Luke replies. Then he turns and begins back up the path.

We look back at girl and the child, just as Palestinian darkness begins to swirl with a familiar light.

Prepare Him Room

Suddenly, we find ourselves standing where Luke had found us. There are the Christmas lists, the half-trimmed tree, the holiday movie paused, and pans in the sink. The familiar stress of the bustling and bursting schedule of Advent activities reawakens.

But seared in our minds is the pathetic picture of the holy, homeless mother and child. Bustling and bursting Bethlehem had no room for the advent of Jesus. And echoing in our ears are our own words, “Surely we can find some room somewhere!”

Can we?

The real Christmas was nothing like the Christmas we’ve come to know, with its traditions, memories, and legends. It was a desperate moment that occurred for a desperate reason.

The Word became flesh (John 1:14) so that the Word could become sin for us condemned sinners, and die for us that we might be made righteous in him (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was born outside a village and he died outside a city. “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him” (John 1:10).

As Advent season begins again, call to mind the only detail the Holy Spirit, who inspired Luke’s writing, decided to provide us about the actual birth of Jesus: Mary had to lay him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

It is no less ironic that Jesus can stand on the periphery of our busy Advent activities than it was that he, the Son of David, lay in a manger in a field on the periphery of the city of David.

Therefore, as we plan our Advent season, “let every heart prepare him room.” Surely we can find some room somewhere.

Here are a few Advent resources recommended by Faithbridge Discipleship Team: All are available for free download:

<http://www.desiringgod.org/books/good-news-of-great-joy>

<https://www.bible.com/reading-plans?lang=en&query=advent>

<http://www.faithgateway.com/jesus-storybook-bible-advent-calendar-printable>



Sermon Series Discussion Best Practices

Preparation – www.faithbridge.org/sermon

Week (or weeks) prior to meeting send email to group containing the following:

1. Title of sermon and what will be discussed
2. Link to the sermon that will be discussed
3. Link to the postscript for that sermon
4. Attachment that includes questions and study deeper
5. Any other material you select (Scripture, article, book excerpt, etc.)

Request that group members watch sermon, postscript, and complete questions prior to the meeting.

Group Meeting

1. Discuss challenge presented from previous meeting discussion. How did you apply? What did you discover? How did you see God move?
2. Prepare an introduction summary of the sermon.
3. Highlight the questions you previously selected to discuss for the meeting
4. Focus particularly on additional Scripture study.
5. Do not allow discussion around “feelings about the sermon, pastor, or delivery message.” Keep discussion centered on personal application of biblical truths.
6. Discuss challenge for the week and set clear expectation for follow-up.
7. Leave time for prayer response.