

Life Group Notes 12/24/2023
Pastor Mark Warren Christmas Eve

[No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at tbeachhead@comcast.net. Thank you for taking the time—Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.]

Remember: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP.** BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP'S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! **Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.**

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 11/12. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.** I include each of the passages mentioned in full, to facilitate the enjoyment of these notes. Footnotes are not meant to distract. This week's footnotes include:

1. [On Bethlehem and its surroundings.](#)

*****Important:** At the very [end of these notes](#), I've included passages that were mentioned in this week's message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week. ***

Pastor Mark began with some statistics:

- 1948 The TV arrived on the scene in 1948. One percent of the nation had a TV.
- 1955 75 % had a TV.
- June 2007, the first I-Phone came out.
- Average screen time is now seven hours a day.

He points out, "People can be miles away, distracted and scrolling, though in the same room."

1. How does that distance make you feel?
2. Do you seek to enhance the distance?
3. What do you do to deliberately break down the barriers modern devices create? Do you have a testimony?
4. Is it getting better? Or getting worse?
5. If Jesus' one *new* commandment is that we love one another the way He has loved us, how are we doing today?

He says, "The first Christmas, God showed us something: The greatest present is to be present. 'Immanuel' means God is present with us. God didn't want to be distant...some foreign God out there. He wanted to be very present with us."

1. Explain.
2. What changed forever the moment Jesus was born?
3. How many aspects of Jesus' birth were unprecedented? How many can you think of?

Look at Luke 2: [8](#)And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9](#)And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10](#)And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11](#)For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12](#)And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

1. Look at verse 10. Pastor Mark points out the four parts to the angel's message. What are they?
2. What scared the shepherds?
3. What is the good news?
4. Why does the good news elicit an emotional response? What degree of emotion would you expect from this news? Have you ever known this degree of emotion?
5. When the angel says "for all people..." who is included? Who is not?
6. Mark says Jesus was born where the consistency of an undistracted life was important to the moment. Why?

Mark's story of the ten-year-old girl in the faraway city. (Piano plays.)

Once upon a time in a bustling city amidst the rush of life's chaos, there lived an elderly man by the name of Samuel. Samuel was a humble soul known for his warm presence and his kindness. One wintry evening as snowflakes danced in the air, Samuel received an unexpected visitor a young girl named Zoey, who had recently moved in next door. Lonely and homesick, Zoey found solace in Samuel's stories and gentle company. As time passed Samuel became a guiding light in Zoey's life, offering unwavering support and unconditional love. One day, on Samuel's birthday Zoey presented him with a simple gift, a photo album filled with cherished moments they had shared together. Overwhelmed with emotion Samuel realized that the greatest present one could receive was the gift of someone's genuine presence in their life. Samuel realized that the greatest present that he could receive was someone's genuine presence in their life, a treasure more valuable than any material possession. In that moment surrounded by love and companionship Samuel knew that his life was abundantly rich because of Zoey 's presence. You see the greatest present is to be present.

1. The name Samuel means "God hears us." The name "Zoey" is Greek for the fulness of life God offers, eternal life. Why are these names significant?
2. Think of heaven, where friendship and love are what you treasure, and gold is what you trample on. How is this story important in a world where one tramples on friends to get the gold?
3. How do Zoey's memories, created by Samuel's patient kindness serve to produce thanksgiving?
4. What memories are you creating for others?
5. Do you have Christmas memories that restore hope and gratitude when you think of them?

Mark spoke of the candle lighting.

1. What does it represent for you?
2. How much chance does darkness have against a single candle?
3. Does darkness have any effective defense at all against the smallest light?
4. Satan resorted to violence against Jesus to extinguish the light He lit. How did that work?
5. What gives you hope in dark times?

The Follow-up Application

1. Use the [SOAP journal studies](#) below throughout the week.
2. Make a present of your presence. Make note of the results.

Take the time to pray.

Scribe's Notes:

1. **On Bethlehem and its surrounding territories.** Bethlehem even today is surrounded by rolling hills. It's still undeveloped and sheep still graze there. In Jesus' day, shepherds were grazing sheep for the temple sacrifice there. Throughout the area there are limestone caves where shepherds could shelter at night. The "manger" in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, purportedly built over the very spot where the manger stood, is built over one such cave. There is no longer room for the inn there, but the manger is actually found in a recess in what is clearly a cave. The wooden structures we call "Nativity scenes," do not come close to depicting what is very possibly the actual, historic reality of the scene. That there was "no room for them" in the single room "Inn," where eating and sleeping occurred in the same hall, is explained by the inconvenience of a lady giving birth while others are trying to sleep, especially if, as the Roman Catholics claim, the birth took place at midnight.
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For further study:

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP**... (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—What is God saying? / **P**ray—What is your response?) ...method to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: Isaiah 9:6-7
Tuesday: Isaiah 7:13-15
Wednesday: Isaiah 43:1-3
Thursday: Hebrews 1:2-4
Friday: Colossians 1:15-19
Saturday: John 1: 1-4
Sunday: Hebrews 12:1-3

Once again, some passages suggested here have more than the usual number of verses. This is not to increase the burden but to provide clarity of context. Pick the verses that speak to you most clearly, and run these through the SOAP steps.