

OPENING QUESTION

Can you describe a time or season in your life when you felt especially close to God? Why do you think that happened? How did it come to take place?

READ TOGETHER

Read **Matthew 1:18-25** as a group. Then take some time of quiet and allow everyone to read it again for themselves. Highlight any words that stand out to you.

BIG IDEA

God came to earth to be with us. Everywhere. Everyday. All the time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the two names given to Mary's son upon his birth in Matthew chapter 1? What do each of those names mean?
2. Go back to the roots of the prophecy that Matthew writes about in Matthew 1:22-23. Read Isaiah 7:1-16. In this passage, God used the prophet Isaiah to deliver a message to King Ahaz as to how He will deliver Ahaz and his people from being destroyed in war. As part of his message, Isaiah prophesies of a sign that will take place in the future that can only happen if Ahaz's people are delivered. What is the prophecy?
3. Read Isaiah 9:6-7. What does this prophecy about "Emmanuel" (the only other one in Scripture) add to the description of the one who is coming?
4. Jesus was born – Emmanuel – who was God with us – God come to earth to be with us. His disciples experienced what Jesus as "God with us" was all about. But when Jesus ascended to heaven to the right hand of the Father, that dynamic changed. It no longer felt like Jesus was "God with" them as disciples. Read John 14:5-27 as a group. How does Jesus describe the change in reality that was going to take place in the disciples' lives?
5. Read Ezekiel 36:26-27, Isaiah 44:3 and Joel 2:28-32. What do these prophecies add to your understanding of how God is Emmanuel - God with us?
6. How do you personally experience God being with you each day? How is HE your Emmanuel?

CHALLENGE

This week, try to live with an awareness of how God is with you, how He is your Emmanuel. Begin each morning by talking to Him and inviting Him into your day, your life, your work, your relationships. As you end your day, take some time to think back through your day as to how you experienced God with you.

PRAYER

Go around your group and ask each group member to share one setting in their life (home, work, etc) where they find it difficult to experience God as Emmanuel - God with them. If you can, share why that might be true. And then pray for each other in this regard.

NEXT STEPS

This week, download a copy of *Practicing the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence. This book highlights the story of Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth-century French monk, who learned to practice the presence of God (in other words to walk with Emmanuel – God with us) consistently. Through a collection of conversations and letters that Lawrence wrote, the big idea of this short volume is that at any moment and in any circumstance, we can seek and find God and practice His presence in our lives.

It can be downloaded at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/lawrence/practice>.