



LEADER'S GUIDE



# THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTMAS

---

4

**A TIME FOR CELEBRATION**  
SESSION ONE

8

**A TIME FOR SALVATION**  
SESSION TWO

12

**A TIME FOR RECONCILIATION**  
SESSION THREE

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each session includes key passages, lesson background information, and key teaching points, followed by a section with discussion questions. Each session will be divided into different sections following this format:

### LEADER PROMPTS

These bold, upper-case headings will sub-divide the different sections, indicating to the leader prompt for certain actions.

*Discussion questions...*

Questions intended to be shared with the group for open discussion are italicized and will usually follow corresponding Leader Prompts.

### Scripture References

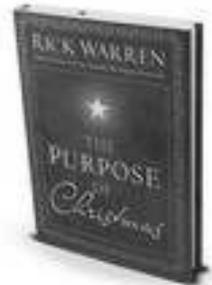
Scripture references are bolded for easy identification. Groups are encouraged to read aloud appropriate references.

+Next Step:

As appropriate, application next steps will be suggested throughout. Help your group members process what their next step is, then make a plan for how they will follow through.

### ***The Purpose of Christmas* book**

The outline and general content of this study is based on the book *The Purpose of Christmas*. Though this study can be used completely independent of the book, for further reading or exploration of these ideas, the book is highly recommended and available in the PV Bookstore.



## A TIME FOR CELEBRATION

### CONNECT

*What are you celebrating this Christmas Season?*

*Reflect on Past-What celebration points have you experienced this year on your Spiritual Journey?*

*Reflect on the Present: What has God done recently in your life or the life of someone around you that gives you reason to celebrate?*

### GROW

Ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of the story of mankind, separated men and women have been looking to find a way back to God. As the story unfolded we were told of a man named Abraham, in whom there would be a great nation of descendants (Israel) through whom God would bring forth His mysterious plan of redemption. God did miraculous works among the Israelites and there were seasons of obedience and many seasons of disobedience. Even though Israel knew the One true God, many times they disobeyed Him and turned to other gods instead of Him. The desires of their flesh also were continually at odds with God. Therefore, God set forth a sacrificial system in the Old Testament in which people could get right with Him through animal sacrifices. But even with these, there was still a separation and things were still a mess, things were still not like they were in the Garden of Eden. But God was faithful to His people, through the prophet Moses, through King David and the prophets, God was revealing His solution to this entire mess! Weaved throughout the prophecies and words of God through the prophets and anointed ones, were sweet tasting words of redemption, hope, and life. The Jews groaned, longed and were highly anticipating the One who would come and clean up the mess and make everything right again. God's perfect plan was revealed a little over 2,000 years ago, as Jesus was born of a virgin, Mary. The mysterious prophecies that God had spoken of were now at work, God came to mankind to save it.

#### **Why did the Jews have reason to celebrate?**

Thinking about the entire history of the Jewish people, all they had been through, this was a long awaited glass of water for their thirst! They had waited decade upon decade, century upon century and finally their long awaited Messiah was here! Although not everyone was excited about Jesus birth (Matthew 2:1-3) the thought of knowing that the Messiah was coming would have many Jews probably responding like John the Baptist and his mother Elizabeth did as he was still in the womb.

#### **Read Luke 1:39-45**

*Why were John and Elizabeth so thrilled about this baby in Mary's womb?*

**Read Luke 2:25-32**

*What kind of an impact did Jesus' birth have on faithful Jews like Simeon at this time?*

The birth of Jesus the Messiah was a heartwarming message to the God following Jews because He was there to save them. Not only had God not abandoned or forsaken His people; He actually came Himself to be their redeemer, their savior and their God! It was a grand time to celebrate the birth of Jesus for the Jewish people!

**Who Else Had Reason to Celebrate?**

Only God knew how He would reveal the story of redemption to His people and no one could have expected the birth of Jesus like the way it happened, but an even greater twist came at the same time: Jesus came to save everyone! Not only were Jews longing for their Messiah, but the gentiles were longing to know their creator! There could have been no greater reason to celebrate than to realize that Jesus came to save all people—all tongues, cultures and humanity

**Read Matthew 2:8-12**

The Magi (who are Gentiles) are coming from a far off place to bring gifts to Jesus and to worship Him! As they had followed the star all the way from the East and saw it rest upon the place where Jesus was, “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy!” as recorded in 2:10. When they finally got to where Joseph and Mary were staying, they worshipped Him and gave Him their gifts.

*What effort did these Magi have to go through to get to Jesus?*

*What was the attitude of the Magi in relation to Jesus?*

Not only were gentiles included in God's plan of salvation, but prophecies had also been written about another group of people who had reason to celebrate. The outcasts in society, also picture in the shepherds in Luke 2:8-20 and even the sick, diseased, blind, deaf and mute.

**Read Isaiah 35:3-6**

Jesus came to save everyone: Jew, Gentile, shepherds, diseased, sick, deaf or blind! Throughout Jesus' ministry he healed those who no one wanted anything to do with, he touched those no one wanted to touch, and he loved those no one wanted to love. Even though their physical deliverance was something to celebrate, Jesus also came to give them spiritual deliverance, and is something to celebrate!

*Think of what it would have been like to be an outcast your entire life without the approval or love of others. How have you received the message about Jesus?*

*Think of what it would have been like to for the first time, experience the care of the one who genuinely loves you.*

+Next Step: Think about someone you know in church who might not have many close relationships or family, invite them to dinner with your family this Christmas, or plan a visit with them, or send a gift bas-

ket to them showing your love for them.

+Next Step: Adopt a PV family who is in need of assistance, as an individual or a community group. Let this act show your genuine love for them.

+Next Step: Get involved in a local missions partnership, they are always looking for volunteers. Many people who our local partners minister to have hit rock bottom in life and might not feel love from anyone, you could be the person or community group that could help them.

+Next Step: There are many support groups made of up people who might find it hard to celebrate this season because of an addiction, loss of a family member, or are hurting because of a broken past. Come along side these people and be an encouragement to them.

There were many who looked forward to the coming of Jesus to bring man back to God. Knowing that Jesus has already come and ascended back to heaven, do we have reason to celebrate this Christmas season?

### **Why Do You Have Reason to Celebrate?**

There are many reasons why we have reason to celebrate today, even in a time of uncertainty, of political unrest, depression, loneliness, and economic uncertainty. The impact of these things play out in our everyday lives and many times drain us of our energies, give us unneeded stress and anxiety and lots of the time we might question what we have to celebrate or to be thankful for. But as Christians we most certainly do! First, we need to continually be reminded of God's love for us and that nothing can separate us from that love.

### **Read Romans 8:38-39**

... now re-read it. Do you really believe it? Even in our toughest days, our uncertainties can be made certain and our depression can become joy, if we focus on this simple truth: God loves me. Within this entire story of redemption, God had you in mind, and God loved you enough to give his life for you.

Another truth we gain from scripture, found in the birth narrative, is that God is with us (Matthew 1:23). That means that the times when we feel lonely, or when we go through really tough days, or when we think we have hit rock bottom, God is there! God is going to get you through it! Just like the Jewish story revealed, God did not forsake His covenant people, and God will never abandon you either! As we go through these tough times, know that you have someone to always turn to, to fall back on and to carry you!

Finally, God is for you. Through whatever circumstances we face, God is always for you, even if you do not think He is! God wants to stretch you and grow you so that you can have a better relationship with Him. Through the tough times and the good times, God is continually on your side! As James writes in 1:2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect

and complete, lacking in nothing.” Even though we might have troubled times, remember God is able to use these things to develop maturity and Christ-likeness, making us “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

## SURRENDER

We have seen examples of people who had reason to celebrate the birth and coming of Jesus Christ. Mankind had longed for the way back to God, and the only way came when He came to us. There are plenty of reasons we might find not to celebrate, but what reasons do we have to celebrate?

*What has God done in your life that you are not celebrating?*

[Leader Note: Let this be a time of personal reflection. It might take a few minutes for people to think of things they are not celebrating.]

*What actions can you take to be more celebratory in your walk with God this week and in the future?*

*Write down your next steps to becoming a more celebrating person of what has done, is doing and will do in your life.*

*Spend time as a group praying to thank God for those things your group is celebrating.*

### More Next Steps:

+Next Step: Begin to keep a journal and record your day to day activities with prayer requests, scriptures that you might be reading, how you are feeling as a follower of Jesus that day, etc. After a month or two, review what God did in your life that you can celebrate. How many celebrations did we miss when we were going through the event, but look back and see that God was doing something amazing?

+Next Step: Visit a family member, friend or fellow church member in a nursing home. Many men and women in nursing homes get lonely, be the friend who reaches out and makes their Christmas season and beyond great!

+Next Step: During dinner with you family, go around the table and share what you are celebrating in life and celebrate what God is doing in your family. Have a different person pray a celebratory prayer each night after the table shares.

+Next Step: As you begin to see the activity of God in your life on a day to day basis, immediately stop and thank Him for it! Let this become a regular routine in your life.

## A TIME FOR SALVATION

### CONNECT

*General-What is salvation, how would you describe salvation in a few words or phrases?*

[Leader Note: The purpose of this question is to get people to really think about what salvation is. Most responses will most likely be churchy words and concepts like: redemption, justification, a free gift from God, freedom from sin, eternal life, moral purity, new life. You might use a board to write the responses from the group. If they have not said, Jesus, you might ask them if there is anything missing from the list. The whole point of the exercise is to realize that our church lingo and ideals might leave out the whole point of salvation. Sometimes we just need to get back to the simple truths and focus on them. Idea taken from and slightly modified from *Speaking of Jesus: The Art of Not-Evangelism*, by Carl Medearis, page 23]

*Reflect on your own salvation story, tell the group or someone at your table a quick testimony of your salvation experience.*

*-What was going on in your life at that time?*

*-How did God make Himself known to you?*

*Reflect on the Present-What implications does your salvation experience have on your day to day life?*

*-How are you growing in your appreciation and understanding of your salvation on a weekly basis?*

### GROW

If you think back to our last session together, remember what was concluded: Jesus came to the earth, God taking on human flesh, in which He came to provide salvation for his people, not only his people, but all people! It was a great time of celebration for many from all walks of life. As we continue to move further this week we are going to discuss salvation, what it means on our spiritual journey, and what we need to do to help others experience this same freedom as well.

As we look at the world around us, one thing stands out in particular, we live in a very fallen world! One episode of the nightly news shows evidence of this: murder, theft, corruption, hate, war, greed and so most everyone would agree that we live in a very different place than Adam and Eve did in the Garden. There is clear evidence that the world is in desperate need of a bailout and we are not talking about a monetary bailout, but a spiritual bailout. As indicated in our last session, since time began people have been trying to bail themselves out through whatever means possible: worshipping idols they hope could redeem them or doing good deeds in hope of being good enough, but ultimately,

thousands of years of doing this has proven to be a failure over and over again. But, God provided someone who would not fail and He was going to do what we could not do on our own.

### **Jesus Saves You from Something**

To need a savior, one must have to be saved from something and that something is sin. The Bible declares throughout this foundational truth very clearly: God is perfect and holy, while man is flawed, sinful and unholy.

#### **Read Matthew 1:18-21 and Romans 5:6-14**

*How does this truth affect you, at one time you were an enemy of God?*

*How did you feel, before you met Christ? Helpless and dead? Like God was your enemy?*

*Or, before you met Christ, did you feel a void in your life that you continually tried to fulfill? Describe that process.*

*-What things were you looking to? Relationships? Career success? Financial Gain?*

Matthew records the purpose for Jesus coming: “He will save His people from their sins.” And the Romans text indicated, we have all sinned at one time or another, cutting us off from our Creator and we were described as “helpless, dead, sinful” in which the wrath of God would burn against us. Although this is very graphic, this is where all of man has been since the fall, and one word describes it well: separation. But the best news of all though, as even indicated in the passage, Jesus came to save you from the separation, from the helplessness and has made you alive instead of dead! This was the purpose of the plan of God, He sent Jesus 2,000 years ago to die for you! God desired you and He came to earth to prove it! Though we were dead, though we were helpless and though we deserved eternal punishment... Jesus has made us alive, by taking our punishment upon Himself! Therefore, Jesus came to save us all from sin and to make a relationship with God possible.

### **Jesus Saves You for Something**

Jesus did not come just to give us all a fire insurance card, He actually came to save us for a purpose. There is no question to what our main purpose as followers of Jesus is: to devote ourselves fully to Him in living lives that continually give Him worship. There are other purposes though that directly tie into that main purpose of our lives. First, God did not intend for us to do the Christian life alone, but rather in community with other believers for growth, encouragement, accountability and edification.

#### **Read Ephesians 4:25-32 and Acts 2:43-47**

*How do our lives reflect this type of devotion? Where do we need to make changes?*

*Do you have a 2 a.m. friend in your life? Is there someone who is mentoring you? Who are you mentoring?*

+Next Step: Find someone in the church or your community group to spend time with outside the church and community group. Plan things to do together, pray for one another, do life together!

+Next Step: Find someone who can mentor you and help you grow. Plan times to study together, pray together, and be willing to be asked each other the tough questions in life.

+Next Step: Find someone you can mentor in the church. Pour your life into them, pray for them, study with them, spend time with them, and help them along in their spiritual journey with Christ.

*How has being in a community group directly affected your walk with God? What positive steps have you taken because of the support of your community group?*

+Next Step: Within your community group, share verbally how being in that community group and knowing these people have helped your walk with God.

Secondly, Jesus saved us we are to be witnesses to others, so that they might receive the same salvation that we ourselves have received. The Christmas narratives clearly point out that this message is not something to keep hidden, but should be declared to others.

#### **Read Luke 2:15-18**

*It is clear that the shepherds began telling others about the baby Jesus immediately, who in your life needs to hear the story of salvation?*

+Next Step: Write down the names of people who need Jesus that are in your circle of influence. Begin to pray for them.

*What steps can you take in your life, to be a good witness of Jesus to others?*

+Next Step: Share your testimony with someone you know: a co-worker, friend, neighbor or family member.

+Next Step: Invite someone or a family to the Christmas Eve service and attend with them.

+Next Step: Get involved with local ministry partners and look for opportunities to share the message of Jesus with others.

+Next Step: Attend Discover Your Mission class. Classes are offered regularly throughout the year.

+Next Step: Attend Ready, Set, Go class-Go on a mission trip! Classes are offered regularly throughout the year.

Finally, Jesus saved us for service within the body. Jesus is our prime example of service, as He came to be a servant to humankind. The Messiah washed the feet of the disciples, Christ healed the sick and cured diseases, the Savior went to the cross in an act of service. In Ephesians 4:11-13, it is clear that all the members of the body are to do their part in 'doing the work of service' for 'unity and building up the body'. Each one of us is meant to have a role in the church and Christ has gifted us differently, to work together as one, to do His work!

*Where might you serve in the church that directly ties in with your gifting?*

+Next Step: Attend *Discover Your Design* to discover your unique gifting and ways to get better involved in service. Classes are offered regularly throughout the year.

+Next Step: Serve at an event as a community group helping out ministries in the church.

+Next Step: Identify roles within your group that people can do to be a more effective community group.

*How might you be a better example of Christ's service within the body?*

### **Jesus Saves You by Something**

One of the most important truths that we need to continually remind ourselves of is this: it was Christ who saved us, not us!

#### **Read Ephesians 2:8-10**

The passage makes it very clear, we did nothing to earn or deserve our salvation, it was Christ's work that did it! There is no work or effort we could have ever made to inherit eternal life, it was only through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross that has brought us salvation. It was just our, 'Yes, I trust in You Jesus', the accepting of His gift that saved us! It was the biggest Christmas gift we have ever received, and just like we give gifts to others, it is because we love that person. God loved us and gave us this gift and its ours to keep!

### **SURRENDER**

*Since we have all been saved for something, what is your next step as a follower of Jesus?*

*As you earlier thought about your salvation experience, and how it affects your everyday life, what steps can you implement to improve that? i.e. how can we walk better in our daily lives in Christ?*

*Who can you tell your story of salvation to this Christmas season? Ask someone to hold you accountable.*

*Write down your next steps.*

## A TIME FOR RECONCILIATION

### CONNECT

*As you look at the current state of the world, where do you see the need for reconciliation the most? The workplace? The home? Our country? In the world?*

*Discuss a time in the past when you had to reconcile a broken relationship with another individual. How did you feel before you were reconciled? How did it feel once you were reconciled to that person?*

*Who might you have wronged this year or with whom has a relationship gone sour recently, that you might need to reconcile with them? What would it take to restore this relationship?*

### GROW

As we look at the world around us one thing that continually pops up and invades the lives of all of us at times is conflict! We see conflict with our work place with other employees or our bosses, at department stores when the last ‘Elmo’ doll is on the shelf and also in our family lives. As we look at our country we see conflict all over the place with different political parties, different movements such as the Tea Party Movement or Occupy Wall Street, or between different religious thoughts of our very diverse country. In our world, we see wars, riots, and even geographical boundary conflicts. Conflict is present all the time, all over the world—it would seem that this world is a disastrous place to live in.

#### Peace with God

Even though the conflicts around us and in the world affect us all greatly, there is another conflict that trumps all others: conflict with God. As we read last session in the book of Romans, before we met Jesus, we were enemies of God. We were separated from God because of our sin, our purpose was nothing short of meaningless, and our destiny was on course for wrath. But often one of the best ways to resolve a conflict is with a mediator, and that is exactly why God sent Jesus: to be the mediator between a Holy God and sinful man. Jesus came to serve as mediator to bring us peace with God.

#### Read Zacharias Prophecy in Luke 1:67-79

*As you read this prophecy what words stand out to you as reconciliation language?*

#### Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-19

*Although we have been fully reconciled to God in a grand scheme of things, when is the last time you had conflict with God?*

*What resulted in your life because of this conflict?*

*What did you do to get right with God during this conflict?*

Getting back on the right track with God should be our main priority if we are at odds with Him. There would be no greater time to do that than right now! God is always waiting for you, always wanting you to come back to Him if you have strayed. If you are in conflict with God this season, look to Jesus and make things right with God in your current situation.

### **The Peace of God**

Even though at times we might fail and be in conflict with God, one gift we have all been given is the peace of God. Jesus was born and lived among us to bring us a peace in our souls that no other person or thing could provide. As the Christmas story points out in Luke 2:14, “Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth among men with whom He is pleased.” The angel proclaimed this and the Shepherds hurried to find the child that would bring peace with God and give us the peace of God in our lives.

**Read John 14:25-28 and Philippians 4:6-8**

*How do these passages give you peace in your relationship with Jesus?*

*Is your life characterized by fear, anxiety and a troubled heart, or do you have the peace that Jesus and Paul describe that Jesus gives?*

*If you are troubled, anxious or fearful, what steps can you take this season to become to experience the peace of God?*

+Next Step: Read through scripture, especially the gospels, and let these words be a comfort to you. Journal about the peace God gives you.

+Next Step: Become a person of continual prayer. When you become anxious or fearful, immediately take it to God and ask Him to give you peace.

+Next Steps: Find another person or couple of people who can you share your heart with and pray for each other. There can be confidence in knowing that others are praying for you and it can be a comfort to others to know you are praying for them.

*If you are filled with peace, how can you help others to achieve that same sense of peace that you have?*

+Next Step: Seek out those who might not have peace with someone or something. Share the peace you have and be an encouragement with them.

### **Peace with Others: Within the Church**

Not only did Jesus come to give peace to us with God, but He also desires for us to be reconciled with one another. Jesus came to mend the vertical as well as horizontal relationships we have. With as many

church splits and conflicts that happen far too often, we are in desperate need of this truth in our hearts and we must live out these truths as we do life together with others. Conflict has the potential to arise in nearly any situation, but it is our choice whether we act positively or negatively towards the situation.

Even in the early church there were conflicts present. For example, the church at Ephesus was experiencing very real problems: because both Jews and Gentiles were being saved, their former prejudices and hostilities began to creep into the church. As these two groups of people, formerly at odds, would have to rub elbows with one another, worship together, serve together, hostility and conflict arose.

### **Read Ephesians 2:11-18 and Romans 14:18-19**

*In Ephesians, what does the text speak about in regards to the two groups' situation? What did Christ do that changed the situation?*

*How important does reconciliation and unity play into the success of the church?*

*What situations in our own church do you see potential for conflict? What part can you play in being a peace-maker, rather than a conflict-feeder?*

+Next Step: Seek out someone in the church you might have had a disagreement with or have wronged. Apologize and seek to work through the issue. Pursue reconciliation with that person.

+Next Step: Identify any family relationships that you know need mending. Make a plan for how you will take the initiative in getting things right with these folks.

+Next Step: Read the Bible and pray with your spouse and children every day. As you saturate your lives with God's Word, allow that to be the foundation for maintaining peace and unity.

*From Romans, how can we be better 'maker's of peace' and 'build one another up' in the body?*

+Next Step: Identify how you become a better encourager. It's as simple as sharing with those you care about how much you value them. Make it a regular practice of giving encouragement to your community group members and others in the church.

### **Peace with Others: Outside the Church**

Not only are we to strive for peace with other Christians, but Paul commands us to strive to be peaceful with all men. There could be no greater witness to Christ's work in your life than living in such a way that it is evident to those who are far from God. Conversely, when we chose not to live a Godly life in front of others, it can be one of the most damaging things in our witness to them. Paul commands us, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." For a reason, God has planted you among people who do not know Him and you might be the person who is able to be an example and speak truth into their lives. If at all possible, this season and beyond, let us live as Paul describes Chris-

tian conduct in Romans 12.

### **Read Romans 12:14-21**

*Who is someone far from God in your life who you might need to be reconciled with? How will you bring peace to them this season?*

+Next Step: Seek out a co-worker or neighbor with whom your relationship is not in harmony. Seek to bring that relationship into harmony. You be the one to take the initiative.

*How might our witness be improved with those outside of the church, if we tried to live by these truths in Romans?*

The depth and gravity of what Christ accomplished through His life and death is a challenge to fully comprehend. He was the one who finally brought provided the way for man to be reconciled to God. This is something that both Jews and Gentiles celebrated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but it did not stop there. We are also able to celebrate because He did the same thing for us! Not only is His work something that brought celebration, but His work brought salvation to all those who would trust in Him. He came to save people from their sins and to give them a purpose for living. Our lives no longer are meaningless, but through Christ and His work done for us, we have a reason to live, and to live in truest form of life! Finally, He made enemies of God into sons and daughters. When no one else was able to help restore our relationship with God, He became our perfect mediator.

## **SURRENDER**

This is certainly a season to be grateful! No matter what you might be going through in your job, the status of your family, economic uncertainties, or whatever circumstances that trouble you, we can stand firm on one truth: God is in control! He knows you and loves you! His purpose for our lives will never be thwarted. If there is any comfort this season, know that God has brought us salvation, reconciled us to Himself, and for that we have something to celebrate in all seasons, regardless of circumstances!

*Who do you need to share the reconciliation message of Christmas with?*

*What friend, relative or neighbor do you know who struggles with anxiety, fear and lives a life without peace? What can you do to help that friend this season and beyond?*

*Who in the church do you need to get right with, even if you were wronged? Ask someone to hold you accountable.*

*What truth of God are you most thankful for this season?*

*What are your next steps in your walk with God?*