

Dawn of Hope

Jesus Comes While We Seek Him (December 13th, 2020)

PREPARATION

- Familiarize yourself with this Study Guide.
- If you missed it, watch the sermon online [HERE](#).
- Spend some time in prayer before your group gathers.
- You **always** have the option to use some or all the questions and/or prepare your own questions.
- Review the learning objective to focus the conversation, read the primary scriptures as a group, summarize the main points, ask the questions, and use supporting texts to enhance the concepts.

DISCUSSION

Opening Prayer: (1-2 minutes)

In light of what God is saying through this week's message, here's a suggestion of how your group can invite God into your time together.

Thank the Father for loving us so much that He came to us in the person of Jesus to sacrifice Himself on our behalf while we were still sinners! Pray that as we navigate the chaotic waters of our cultural moment that we would humbly listen and obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we seek to love one another, just as He has loved us. Pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to remind us of the spiritual victory we have over sin in Jesus Christ! Pray that over the Holiday season that the Spirit would open our hearts to find the right words to speak, see new opportunities to serve our neighbors, and continue to transform us into the likeness of Jesus!

Discussion: (45-60 minutes)

What's Going on This Week

This Sunday, Pastor Larry led us into the third week of our Advent series titled *Dawn of Hope*. Pastor Larry brings our attention to *Luke 1:8-13* to show us how everyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus are called to step into *kingdom movement prayer*. By pointing us to the story of Zachariah, Pastor Larry reminds us of the incredible privilege we all have to enter the most Holy Place of God when we pray! He challenges us to see prayer as both a personal and communal action. Finally, he challenges our church to either start right now or never give up praying because the prayers of God's people are how God will reveal His plans for kingdom movement!

“Christians are leaky vessels who need to stay right under God's fountain to be kept full all the time!” – D.L. Moody

Suggested Questions

Check-In: *Icebreaker* – When you think about the phrase *once-in-a-lifetime*, what experiences come to mind?

Study Tip: As a priest, offering incense would have been seen as one of the highest honors apart from being the High Priest. Zachariah's offering of incense does not take place *behind* the veil in the Holy of Holies, but directly *before* or *in front of* the veil inside the Holy Place. When the Lord was setting up the tabernacle and the priesthood through Moses, God gave ritual sacrifice instructions as well as regular maintenance instructions. God calls the priesthood to maintain the function of three specific items: the lamps on the golden lampstand (Ex. 27:20), the table of the bread of presence (Ex. 25:30), and the altar of incense (Ex. 30:8). *However, before they could approach these items in Holy Place, the Lord required a morning and a twilight lamb to be offered as a burnt offering* (Ex. 29:38, 42)! This week, we zoom in on the altar of incense. This crucial item was placed directly in front of the *cherubim*-laced curtain that *guarded* the presence of the Lord. For the Israelites, the altar of Incense would have generated a thick cloud of smoke allowing the people to be shielded from the Lord's glorious presence. The altar was placed before the Lord's presence to replicate how the Lord appears in clouds of glory throughout the Bible (Ex. 19:9; 40:34; Matt. 17:5; Acts 1:9; Rev. 1:7). In this instance, Zachariah was chosen to approach the closest possible item to God's presence! For the Lord, the cloud of incense would have ascended to Him and given off a particular pleasing aroma. Since the Lord was pleased, the altar of Incense brings the Lord into the midst of His people without destroying them. *What is something that ascends to the Lord, brings Him pleasure, and sets us before the Lord's presence?* It is no wonder why incense is so closely related to the act of prayer (Ps. 141:2)! In this study guide, reflect on the amazing reality that we have been given MORE access to God behind the Holy of Holies by the blood of the permanent sacrificial **lamb** (Jesus)! Additionally, just as Daniel met Gabriel at the time of the evening sacrifice to hear insight about the return of Israel (Dan. 9:20-23) and Zechariah meets an angel and is told of what is to become of the son of Elizabeth and him, pay attention to how your time in the midst of God's presence will be the way that God continues to reveal His story to you!

Objective #1: Reflect on your current attitude towards prayer.

Primary Texts: **Luke 1:8-9**; 10:38-42; Psalm 141:2; Hebrews 10:19-22; 1 John 5:14-15 – Pastor Larry begins by pointing out the amazing once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that Zechariah had to enter the Holy Place of the temple to offer incense. He then uses other New Testament scriptures to remind us of the amazing privilege Jesus has given us! When our heart longs for the Lord's presence and we pray to Him, we are taken into the presence of God inside of the Holy of Holies by the sacrificial blood of Jesus! **As you reflect on Pastor Larry's sermon and you read these passages, what stands out to you about the importance of prayer? On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your prayer life (1 = non-existent, 10 = in constant prayer)? Explain why you chose this number!**

Objective #2: Explore how praying in community might take your prayer life to the next level!

Primary Texts: **Luke 1:10**; Matthew 6:9-15; Romans 12:3-8; Ephesians 4:25 – Next, Pastor Larry points to the multitude of God's people outside of the temple praying for Zechariah to show that even though we may be praying as individuals, we are not praying in isolation. Even when we pray individually, we pray in alignment with God's people whether they are gathered with us or they are not. **Which passage challenges you the most in terms of the communal nature of prayer? What is your experience with prayer in Christian community and how might a proper understanding of the communal nature strengthen your praying relationship with God?**

Objective #3: Determine some action steps personally and communally to grow in prayer!

Primary Texts: **Luke 1:11-13**; Is. 9:2-7; John 5:17; Rev. 5:8-10; 8:1-5 – Finally, Pastor Larry points to the appearance of an angel and the revelation of God's plan to Zechariah to prove that prayer is what reveals God's kingdom plan moving forward. Therefore, Pastor Larry points out that it is always too early to give up praying and it's never too late to start! **What are some of the action steps that the Lord is calling you to take in order to draw closer to him in prayer? How can we as a group continue grow in our communal prayer life both in our group meeting and throughout the week?**

Closing Prayer: (5-10 minutes)

In light of what God is saying through this week's message, here's some suggestions of what your group could talk about with God in prayer.

Thank our Heavenly Father for sending His son at the perfect time! Praise the Son for emptying himself by becoming a human lying in a manger so that he might release us from the bondage of our spiritual enemy! Ask that the Holy Spirit would continue to equip us to live, love, and forgive like Jesus over the Christmas Season. Finally, pray that we as a church would have the courage and boldness to proclaim the gospel of Jesus as we celebrate his coming and share time with our friends, family, and loved ones.

THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

- **2020 Daily Reader:** Interested in diving deeper? You can spend the next 8 weeks walking with us through the entire Bible as you to put on your kingdom lens through this difficult season! You can find the daily reader at 3Crosses.org/fall2020

-**Stay up to date with Coronavirus Ministry Opportunities:** Help us out by pointing the people in your Community Group to 3Crosses.org/coronavirus. If you or anyone in your group is looking to serve food in our pantry, access spiritual care, or seek financial assistance, you can find all you need at 3Crosses.org/neighborhood

- **Pray and Fast with 3Crosses on December 15th:** Check out 3crosses.org/pray to join us as we pray and fast for our upcoming Christmas outreach as well as all the turmoil in our community, our nation, and our world!

-**Community Groups 2021:** For more information about joining a group, leading a group, or general inquiries, contact AJ at avanegas@3crosses.org