



SESSION ONE



God Has a Face

Key Verses

The Word became a man and lived among us. We saw his glory—the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father. The Word was full of grace and truth. . . . No man has ever seen God. But God the only Son is very close to the Father. And the Son has shown us what God is like.

John 1:14, 18

LEADER PLANNING

Materials Needed:

- Copies of this lesson plan (1 per facilitator)
- *Because of Bethlehem* book (optional)
- Student Handouts and pens (1 per student)
- Read a Story Script (3 copies)
- Bibles
- Flip chart and marker (1 per group)

Preparation:

- **Set the Stage:** Assign the reading of page 3 from *Because of Bethlehem* to a person other than yourself, if you prefer.
- **Read a Story:** Assign reading parts to 3 students ahead of time.

SESSION ONE OUTLINE

Set the Stage: I Love Christmas (3 minutes)

Setting: Large Group

Materials: *Because of Bethlehem* book (optional)

Preparation: Assign the reading to a person other than yourself, if you prefer

Tell Your Story: Christmas Traditions (5 minutes)

Setting: Pairs

Materials: Student Handouts (1 per student)

Read a Story: Dr. George Harley (10 minutes)

Setting: Large Group, with option to break into small groups for discussion

Materials: Read a Story Script (3 copies)

Preparation: Assign reading parts to 3 students ahead of time

Study God's Story: God with Us (10 minutes)

Setting: Small Group

Materials: Bibles

Christmas Practice: Prepare Him Room (20 minutes)

Setting: Small Group

Materials: Flipchart and marker (1 per group), Student Handouts and pens

Christmas Challenge: Give more space to Christ in your life

Christmas Focus: Read *Because of Bethlehem*, chapters 1–3

Christmas Carol: "Joy to the World" (2 minutes)

Setting: Large Group

Materials: Student Handouts



SET THE STAGE: I LOVE CHRISTMAS (3 MINUTES)

Materials:

- *Because of Bethlehem* book (optional)

Preparation:

- (Optional) Assign the reading of page 3 from *Because of Bethlehem* to a person other than yourself.
- As students enter, distribute **Session One Student Handouts**.

Today we are starting a series on Christmas, based on a book by Max Lucado (*loo-CAY-dough*), *Because of Bethlehem*. We are encouraging everyone in our church to read this book together to help us all connect with each other and with the purpose of Christmas in a fresh way this year.

Let's take a poll to see what your favorite holiday is. Raise your hand if Easter is your favorite holiday. How about the Fourth of July? Whose favorite holiday is Thanksgiving? Who votes for Christmas? Wait, there's one more to vote on . . . whose favorite holiday is your birthday?

Max Lucado opens *Because of Bethlehem* with some fun reasons why he loves Christmas. Listen to this:

Read Because of Bethlehem out loud. Read from the book (page 3) if possible to reinforce the value of reading the book.

I love Christmas. Let the sleigh bells ring. Let the carolers sing. The more Santas the merrier. The more trees the better.

I love Christmas. The ho ho ho, the rooty toot toot, the thumpety, thump, thump, and the pa rum pa pum pum. The "Silent Night" and the sugarplums.

I don't complain about the crowded shops. I don't grumble at the jam-packed grocery store. The flight is full? The restaurant is packed? Well, it's Christmas.

And I love Christmas.

Bring on Scrooge, Cousin Eddie, and the "official Red Ryder, carbine-action, two-hundred shot range model air rifle." "You'll shoot your eye out!"

The tinsel and the clatter and waking up "to see what was the matter." Bing and his tunes. Macy's balloons. Mistletoe kisses, Santa Claus

wishes, and favorite dishes. Holiday snows, warm winter clothes, and Rudolph's red nose.

I love Christmas.

That covers all my favorites, too! How about you? Now we're going to give you a chance to talk about what you love about Christmas.



TELL YOUR STORY: CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS (5 MINUTES)

Materials Needed:

- Student Handouts and pens

*Have students pair up with someone next to them. Read aloud the instructions for the **Tell Your Story: Christmas Traditions** exercise on the Student Handout, and have students take turns choosing a favorite Christmas tradition and sharing it with each other.*

Tell Your Story: Christmas Traditions

*At the beginning of the *Because of Bethlehem*, Max Lucado describes some of the Christmas traditions he looks forward to each year, even the uncomfortable ones such as crowded shops and Scrooge. Take turns choosing your favorite traditions on this list and share with your partner how they help you enjoy the season. And if your favorite isn't on this list, you can add it and share that too!*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decorations (decorating home or Christmas tree, going to see the lights, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Performances (school programs, church Christmas pageants, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor activities (snow skiing, ice skating, snow shoeing, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment (concerts, movies, plays, favorite television shows, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food (cooking or eating special meals or desserts) | <input type="checkbox"/> Church (weekly services, candlelight Christmas Eve service, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crafting (making decorations or gifts) | <input type="checkbox"/> Family traditions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteering (serving those in need) | <input type="checkbox"/> Visit to Santa |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gift shopping | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gatherings (parties, overnight guests, etc.) | |

READ A STORY: DR. GEORGE HARLEY (10 MINUTES)

Materials Needed:

- Read a Story Script (3 copies)

Preparation:

- Assign reading parts to 3 students ahead of time.
 - Narrator
 - Dr. George Harley
 - Villager (male)

*At the conclusion of the **Tell Your Story** discussion time, you may wish to share your own favorite Christmas tradition, then introduce today's story.*

Christmas is about a baby, a baby who was sent to earth from heaven so we would know what God is like. Without the coming of that baby, we would always feel distant from God, unconnected, like he doesn't really know what our lives are like as human beings. Something powerful happens when people discover God has a face. Maybe you don't remember when you first discovered that. Maybe the notion of God as a human—entering as a baby into the world *he made*—has lost its power in your life because you're so used to it. Let's look in on a time when it took a tragedy to help people connect with each other and with God.

Narrator: In 1926, George Harley started a medical mission among the Mano tribe in Africa. The villagers welcomed the doctor and even helped him build a clinic and a chapel. Harley and his wife had a baby named Robert, and for the next five years, Dr. Harley treated thousands of patients in his clinic, but not one person visited his chapel.

Dr. Harley: One day when Robert was five years old, I looked out the window of the clinic and saw him running across the field, but suddenly he fainted. I ran out and picked up my little boy, and he was hot with a fever. I tried every treatment I knew, but nothing helped. The fever raged, and soon the disease took our boy's life.

Villager: Later, I saw Dr. Harley carrying a wooden box through the jungle, and I asked him about it. He told me his son had died, so I helped him carry the box with his son in it. We came to a clearing in the forest. We dug a grave and put the box in it.

Dr. Harley: But after we covered up the grave, I just couldn't stand it any longer. I fell down on my knees in the dirt and began to sob. My beloved son was dead, and there I was in the middle of an African jungle, eight thousand miles from home and family. I felt so alone.

Villager: When Dr. Harley started crying, I was shocked. I squatted down next to him and stared at him. He just kept crying. Finally I leaped up and ran through the jungle, screaming again and again, as loud as I could, "White man, white man—he cries like one of us!"

Narrator: That night as Harley and his wife grieved in their cottage, there was a knock at the door. Harley opened it. There stood the chief and almost every man, woman, and child in the village. They were back again the next Sunday and filled the chapel to overflowing. They wanted to hear about Jesus. Everything changed when the villagers saw the tears of the missionary. Everything changes when we see the face of God.¹

Following the reading, have a brief discussion to help the students make the connection between this sad story and how we react when someone shares their pain with us. Have the discussion with the whole group, if possible. If your group is larger than 50 students, break into discussion groups at this time and have the group facilitators lead this discussion.

- What caused the villagers to come to the chapel after staying away for five years?
- How does it make you feel about your leader or parent when they let you see that they are sad and hurting? Do you respect them less or more? Do you feel more distant or more close to them?
- Why do you think the villagers were willing to hear about Jesus after they saw Harley cry, but not before? [*Before: They didn't think Harley was like them, so they didn't think they needed Harley's Jesus. After: They saw Harley as a person with hurts just like them, so maybe they wanted to know how his Jesus could help them too.*]



¹ Adapted from Max Lucado, *Because of Bethlehem* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), 18.

STUDY GOD'S STORY: GOD WITH US (10 MINUTES)

Materials Needed:

- Bibles

At this time, if your group is larger than 10 students, break up into discussion groups of 4 to 6, with an adult facilitator or student leader.

Have the students look up the Key Verses, John 1:14, 18, in their Bibles. Choose 2 students to read the verses out loud to the group. The scripture is provided on the Student Handout in case the students don't have Bibles.

The Word became a man and lived among us. We saw his glory—the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father. The Word was full of grace and truth. . . . No man has ever seen God. But God the only Son is very close to the Father. And the Son has shown us what God is like.(John 1:14, 18)

- Jesus could have come to earth as a superhero instead of a vulnerable human. If Jesus had come to earth as a superhero to show God to us, how would that affect our feelings about God? *[We might feel more distant, fearful, disconnected]* Would it make it easier to relate to him or harder? Why? *[A superhero can use powers we don't have to solve his problems]*
- If he had been a superhero, how would that change what we think Jesus understands about us? *[Jesus wouldn't know what it's like to be tempted, tired, pressured, in pain, lonely]* What problems would we have trusting that he “gets us”? *[Jesus might say he gets us, but we would doubt it because he wouldn't be able to relate to the things that drag us down]* Why is it important that Jesus “gets us”? *[If we don't feel like Jesus gets us, we won't trust him to be able to help us when we need it]*
- Look again at John 1:14, 18. What other benefits or good things do we experience because “the Word became a man”? *[We get to see God's glory, we experience God's grace and truth, we get to see God, Jesus models being close to his Father, we get to know God]*
- If the Word had not become flesh, how would that affect how you feel about God and what you think God feels about you? *[We wouldn't have any way to relate to God, or understand him. We wouldn't know how much he loves us — we would have more fear of him.]*



CHRISTMAS PRACTICE: PREPARE HIM ROOM (20 MINUTES)

Materials Needed:

- Flip chart and marker (1 per group)
- Student Handouts and pens (1 per student)

Christmas celebrates the coming of the Christ child, the Word made flesh. But do we get so caught up in our favorite traditions, such as those we shared at the beginning of our lesson, that we find ourselves during Christmas with “no room at the inn,” like the unfortunate innkeeper in Bethlehem? If we want to arrive at Christmas with a heart wide open for the Christ child, we need to be intentional about making room for him now.

On your Student Handout you'll find a series of 5 scales. On one end of the scale is a negative way to respond to Christmas, and at the other end is a positive way to respond. Read through the descriptions of each end of the scale, and circle the number on the scale that rates how you think you'll handle the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Give students about 5 minutes to complete the self-assessment on their Student Handout on their own.

On each of the following scales, circle the number that indicates how you will probably behave during the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Entitled	vs.	Servant
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
I deserve it all—gifts, attention, happiness.		I put others before myself.
<p>ENTITLED: I expect my parents and friends to give me a great Christmas. After all, I've been good all year! It's all about me!</p> <p>SERVANT: I am on the lookout for what people need, especially now—mom might need help around the house, a friend might need a listening ear, or someone might need a warm coat or a hot meal. It's all about them!</p>		
Stressed	vs.	Rested
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		
I'm stressed, tired, overcommitted.		I'm getting the rest I need, and I'm enjoying Christmas.
<p>STRESSED: I have so many things I have to do in December! Recitals, school programs, service projects, parties, tests. It's no wonder I'm stressed!</p>		

RESTED: I am able to stay healthy even though there is a lot going on. I get enough sleep every night, I have space in my life to relax and have fun, and I don't say yes to everything.

Meltdowns

vs.

Harmony

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO MY WAY . . .

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

I explode, pout, or complain.

I stay even-tempered and kind.

MELTDOWNS: The more tired, busy, or worried I get, the more meltdowns I have. When things don't go my way, watch out!

HARMONY: I am able to express my feelings with kindness and maintain good relationships with my friends and family, even when things don't go my way.

Taker

vs.

Giver

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

The more presents for me, the better.

Giving gifts is more fun than receiving them.

TAKER: The highlight of Christmas is opening my gifts. I also love writing detailed lists so people know exactly what to get me to make me happy. I love the presents!

GIVER: I get more joy out of giving gifts than receiving them. Finding or making the gift that is just right and makes someone happy is the best part of Christmas. I love making someone smile!

Santa

vs.

Jesus

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Christmas is all about Santa.

Christmas is all about Christ.

SANTA: To me, Christmas is summed up in one word: Santa. I'm all about the tree, the presents, the lights, the fun traditions. I'm not too concerned about Christmas having any great meaning—it's just a lot of fun!

Jesus: Christmas is all about Christ, and I try to focus on the real Gift of Christmas throughout the season. I am so thankful that Jesus came to earth as a baby, and I try to make room for him in my heart no matter how busy I get.

After the students have completed the assessment, review all 5 scales as a group.

Now that you have thought about how you respond during the Christmas season, let's talk about our answers and think about some ways that we can make more room for Christ.

On the flip chart, record ideas from the group about ways to make room for Christ. Here are some possible prompts for this discussion:

- Is there something you might have to let go of?
- Is there a new tradition you can try?
- Is there a way you can welcome God into every moment?

As you complete your discussion of a scale, before moving on to the next scale ask the students to copy their favorite idea(s) from the list onto their worksheet in the Student Handout.

ENTITLED VS. SERVANT (Putting Others First)

STRESS VS. RESTED (Schedule)

MELTDOWNS VS. HARMONY (Emotional)

TAKER VS. GIVER (Material Desires)

SANTA VS. JESUS (Spiritual)

CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE: Choose one of the 5 scales and find one way, even if it is small, to give more space in your life to Christ this week. Next week, come prepared to share with our group what change you made.

CHRISTMAS FOCUS: A great way to make room in our lives for Jesus this Christmas is to read a Christmas book. We are challenging all our students to join with the rest of the church and read *Because of Bethlehem* this month. Reading this book will not feel like homework—we promise! It will give us a fresh look at the characters and events of the Christmas story, and it will help Christmas be more meaningful than ever before. This week we are reading the first 3 chapters.

PRAY TOGETHER: We are going to pray for each other now about the specific areas each person mentioned where they need to make room for Jesus.



CHRISTMAS CAROL: “JOY TO THE WORLD” (2 MINUTES)

Materials Needed:

- Student Handouts

Gather the discussion groups together and close your time by singing a Christmas carol about preparing room for Jesus. Point out the bolded phrase in the song the students may not have noticed before. You may wish to develop a tradition here, such as circling up and joining hands to sing your closing song.

“JOY TO THE WORLD”

Joy to the world! the Lord is come; Let earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare Him room, And heaven and nature sing, And heaven and nature sing, And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.	No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as, the curse is found.
Joy to the world! the Savior reigns; Let men their songs employ; While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.	He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love, And wonders of His love, And wonders, wonders, of His love.

SPECIAL NOTE TO LEADER: *Be sure to allow time prior to Lesson Three to collect and prepare the items needed for the Rest Stops in the Christmas Practice prayer station activity.*