



Study Guide



8500 West 159th Street
Overland Park, KS 66223
913.814.7223
VisitGraceChurch.com

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Joy

Study Guide

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Series Overview

Relationships are difficult during the Christmas season. Jesus should be at the center of your relationships if you want to have good relationships with others.

Using This Guide

You may choose to use this guide:

- for personal study and reflection
- as a discussion guide with any group of people interested in knowing more about God.

1-Truth & Trust

Scripture: Mat 1:18

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)

Icebreaker: Two Truths and a Lie

Play a round of Two Truths and a Lie. Each person tells three brief facts about himself/herself. Two of the facts are true. One fact is a fabrication. The group tries to guess which fact is a lie.

Questions for Study or Discussion

- In what circumstances is it difficult to tell the truth (**Mat 1:18**)? What were Mary's challenges in telling the truth? Have you had any challenging experiences in telling the truth that you would be willing to share with your group?

- Read **Zechariah 8:16** and **Ephesians 4:25**. Are there circumstances when you should not tell the truth?

- To what degree can you keep a lie completely hidden (**Job 42:2** and **Heb 4:12-13**)?

- What are some methods to deliver a difficult truth in a kind way
 - ▶ **Psa 85:10**
 - ▶ **Pro 3:5**
 - ▶ **Eph 4:15**

- What is the relationship between truthfulness and trust in relationships (**Pro 27:17**)?

Dig a Little Deeper: God's Truthfulness

Reflect on these verses to reinforce your confidence that God is always truthful with you. In what ways does this help you trust Him?

Psalm 100:5	John 1:17
Psalm 117:2	John 8:32
Psalm 119:151	John 14:6
Daniel 4:37	John 17:17

Application Exercise: How Truthful Am I?

Over the next week, pay close attention to your interactions with others. How truthful are you:

- With others? (To what extent is your truthfulness showing them that they can trust you?)
- With yourself?
- With God?

2-Difficulties & Decisions

Scripture: Mat 1:19-25

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

²² *So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."*

²⁴ *Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus. (NKJV)*

Icebreaker: Solution Seeker

When you have a difficult decision to make, what factors do you consider in making the decision? Make a list of these.

Questions for Study or Discussion

- Joseph had the option of taking Mary to the priest and embarrassing her publicly or having her stoned.

Mat 1:19 and **Deu 22:23**

Before he heard from the angel, Joseph had rejected those two options and was thinking of divorcing her privately. What factors do you think he considered in making that choice?

- When it comes to making a decision, at what point do you pray (**Psa 73:24**)?

- What can we each do to be quiet long enough to hear the leading of the Holy Spirit (**John 16:13**).
- How often do you seek the counsel of friends when you have a difficult decision to make (**Pro 11:14**)? What criteria do you use to decide which friends will offer you the best advice (**Pro 12:5** and **Pro 22:17**)?

Dig a Little Deeper: Will and Plan

As you make decisions, consider the difference in God's will and God's plan. First, be sure you are in God's will. Then seek the plan He has for you.

<i>God's Will: Development</i>	<i>God's Plan: Deployment</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Generic, for all Christians ■ To be more like Jesus (Rom 8:29 and Rom 12:1-2) ■ Attitude, not a place or time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Specific, varies by person ■ Find out what God wants (Php 1:19-20) ■ Physical place and time

Application Exercise: More Like Him

Think about your relationship with Christ.

- Are you becoming more like Him every day?
- Look at how you spend your time. Does this reflect your commitment to Him?
- What changes would help you make progress in becoming more like Him (being in God's will)?

3-Hurts & Healing

Scripture: Luke 2:1-7

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he

was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (NKJV)

Icebreaker: Types of Suffering

Make a list of the types of suffering there are in the world. Consider what [Isaiah 63:7-9](#) says about God's attitude toward suffering.

Questions for Study or Discussion

- What factors make relationships difficult. Make a list of some of them. In what ways can your relationship with Christ affect your relationship with others in spite of those factors?
- In [1Peter 2:20-21](#) and [1Pet 3:15-18](#) what does Peter say about God allowing bad things to happen in our lives.
- What benefit can come from suffering?
 - ▶ [Heb 5:8-9](#)
 - ▶ [1Pet 5:10](#)
- By Paul's example in [2Corinthians 12:8-10](#), what is a good way to respond to suffering and trials in your life?

Dig a Little Deeper: How Do I Respond to Trials?

It's easy to say, "God is good" when things are going well, but what do you say when everything seems to go wrong? Are you the kind of person that responds well to trials? See the table below to assess yourself.

<i>I am a Person who:</i>	<i>Good description of me</i>	<i>Area for Improvement</i>
seeks God's presence [Jer 29:13]	5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1	
obeys God's commands [John 14:23]	5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1	
submits to God's will [John 5:19]	5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1	

Application Exercise: The Person He Desires

Pick one of the items from the Dig a Little Deeper section to apply. Make a plan to focus on improvement in that area. Give Jesus an open door to develop you into the person He desires.

4-Relationships & Christ

Scripture: 1John 1:1-5

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life ² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us ³ that which we

have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

⁵ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. (NKJV)

Icebreaker: Hear and See

Make a list of things that are fun to hear and see when you are in a group.

Fun to Hear	Fun to See

Questions for Study or Discussion

- John **heard** the voice of Jesus teaching with God's authority [1John 1:1]. With his own eyes, John **saw** Jesus perform miracles. John **looked** upon Jesus. This wasn't a mere glance, it was intently gazing in amazement. With his own hands, John **touched** Christ. John wrote about it to share the experience. He wanted us to have fellowship with God. He knew that fellowship was the only way for us to have a spiritual journey filled with **joy** [1John 1:2-5]. In what way do John's words encourage you.

- Think about your relationships. What is different about relationships that center on Christ.

<i>Christ-centered</i>	<i>Other</i>

- Only those “walking in the light” can have fellowship with God and other believers [1John 1:5]. How you could recognize someone who is walking in the light.

Dig a Little Deeper: Light

Reflect on these verses about light.

Psalm 27:1	The Lord is my light...
Psalm 119:105	Thy Word is...a light unto my path
Romans 13:12-14	...put on the armor of light...
1Thessalonians 5:5	...children of light...

Application Exercise: True Fellowship

Pick one of your relationships. Think of intentional ways to develop that relationship into a true fellowship.



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