

ENCOUNTERS WITH

Immanuel

Group Guide: Week 1

CONNECT BREAK THE ICE AND GET PEOPLE TALKING

- Describe a time in your life when you had a plan that seemed sensible and well thought out, but it landed up getting drastically changed.
- Do you enjoy thinking about the “unknowns” in your future? Why or why not?

READ & DISCUSS UNDERSTAND & APPLY THE SCRIPTURE'S MEANING

For the next few weeks, we'll be looking in a sort of mirror: we'll be reading about people's encounters with Jesus and how he changed and ministered to them, and then turning to Jesus and seeking a life-changing encounter with him ourselves.

This week we'll be encountering Jesus alongside Joseph. Pastorally speaking, we want to dive into the subject of *fear* this week. Seek vulnerability with one another; be honest with each other's fears, and avoid pat answers to them. God's answer to Joseph's fear was *not* a one-size-fits all answer, but was deeply personal and contextual. And while fear is never the final state for God's people, real faith only comes about after honestly expressing that fear. Your goal should be to foster that vulnerability and honesty; it is okay if not everyone leaves with their questions perfectly answered and their fears resolved.

READ	DISCUSS
Matthew 1:18-20	There are a dozen good reasons for Joseph to have fear in this passage: Mary's pregnancy and his possible marriage to her threatens his status, his marriage, his future family, his honor, and all of his future plans. Underneath all of these rests uncertainty—the fact that Joseph does not have authority over his own fate. When you think about your own life, whether in the present or the future, what uncertainties make you anxious or fearful?
Matthew 1:21-25	God's answer to Joseph is <i>His own presence</i> . Not simply in an emotional or spiritual way (although those as well!), but in the person of his Son, who will be the one who will ultimately be given all authority. God's answer to our prayers and our fears is that He is with us, and we are called to express our fears to Him and seek His help. That may not always look like an immediate obvious solution to our problem, but it does mean that God is working in our uncertainty for our good and the good of all the world. Is there a fear you need to express to God? Is there something God is calling you to do by faith, even against the current of fear?

PRAY RESPOND TO THE PASSAGE IN PRAYER

Read Matthew 1:21-23 slowly and thoughtfully. Is there a fear you want to bring before God and Christ? Is there something you want to be saved from or a place where you want God to be with you? Invite God into those places, and seek His thoughts on them.

Discipleship Check-In

- Have you read your Bible consistently the past week?
- Who is someone you're praying to share Jesus with this week, and what's one way you can love them well?