

### MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ trust God’s provisions and plans more than their own.

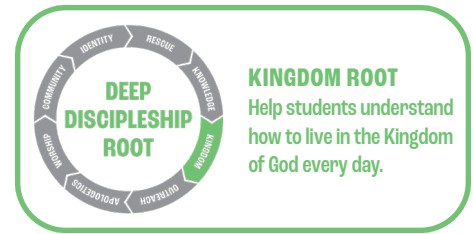
### SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 1:18–25; LUKE 2:1–7

### BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Naturally, Joseph assumed the worst about his betrothed bride. Who wouldn’t? Despite his hurt and probably angry feelings, Joseph didn’t make a rash decision. He took time to consider the right thing to do (Matt. 1:20). His friends and family were likely providing Joseph with their opinions on the matter, as well. They may have suggested punishing Mary to the fullest extent of the law (Deut. 22:23–24). God’s call on Mary’s life was incredibly difficult, and Joseph didn’t have it much easier.

Check out the *Teacher Prep Video* for this lesson: <https://vimeo.com/816581336>



**FACILITATOR NOTE:** We’re giving you a lot of teaching material. Don’t feel like you should cover everything here. You know your group better than anyone. Choose the material that will best fit your students and skip over the rest.

## OPENING

### PRAYER

Start your small group by asking the Lord to bless your discussion and time together.

*OPTIONAL: Give students an opportunity to lead the prayer.*

1–2 minutes

### OPENING QUESTIONS

- How was the week? What’s the best thing that’s happened? Anything major going on?
- When has your life not gone according to your hopes or plans?

3–5 minutes



## EXPLORE

### EXPLORE GOD’S WORD

Joseph was set to marry, start a family, and grow his business. He was faithful to God and showed evidence of being a gracious man. God interrupted what plans Joseph may have had for his life and asked Joseph to believe the impossible. His pledged bride was pregnant with a child that was not his own, and Joseph was asked to get married and raise the Son of God as his own. His obedience to this challenge is an example to us all. When God interrupts our lives, we can respond with trust and faith in his plans. *Disciples of Christ trust God’s*

3–5 minutes

*provisions and plans more than their own.*

### Read Matthew 1:18–19 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- How would you describe your ideal plan for school, work, and family over the decade ahead?

Answers will vary. The hope here is to have students map out a picture-perfect plan for their future. Some might already have this planned out for themselves, while others might need time to consider the possibilities.

- How would you feel if God interrupted that plan with something significantly different?

Remind your students how Joseph's hopes for his life, work, and family were seriously interrupted. Matthew 1:24 shows that Joseph faithfully followed the commands of the angel of the Lord despite this not being his plan. It could be beneficial to share an example of when God changed your plans for his.



ASK INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

*Say something like:* Joseph had his entire life ahead of him and was set to start a family. Before his plans could even begin, God asked him to trust in a new path for his life. His willingness to be obedient to this interruption helped change the world!

### Read Matthew 1:20–25 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- What difficult task have you been asked to do in your life?

Answers will vary but point back to Joseph's calling to believe the impossible. His obedience was life-changing. Try to help students go beyond surface-level answers to this question.

- What other examples in the Bible can you think of where people are asked to trust God with the unbelievable?

Answers will vary. Possible answers include: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Gideon, etc.

- What can you learn from examples like these, including Joseph, when considering how they trusted the Lord?

Answers will vary. The Bible doesn't always share the details of the exact hardships these people faced. Still, the end result was always advancing God's plan of redemption and salvation to the world. It's worth it to trust him despite any challenges we may face.



ASK INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

*Say something like:* Before hearing from the angel of the Lord in his dream, Joseph was likely full of doubt in Mary. God asked him to believe the unbelievable and to get busy living out a life very different than the one Joseph had envisioned for himself.

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** If you have extra time, go through the next set of questions. If not, skip to the **Connection** section.

### Read Luke 2:1–7 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- If God asked you to do the impossible, how would you stay focused on trusting him during difficult times?

Answers will vary but remind students that difficulties come for us all. Joseph must have doubted the plan when he got to Bethlehem and found the inn was full. When such hardships arise in our lives, remember God's strength, faithfulness, provision, resources, plan, wisdom, and purposes. We might doubt ourselves and question our methods, but we can gain confidence by trusting God's way.

- What would help you be prepared to accept a change in your plans for your life ahead?

Instead of holding on too tightly to hopes and plans we establish for ourselves using our own intelligence, we can simply submit to God's authority daily (Prov. 3:5–6).



ASK INTENTIONAL QUESTIONS

*Say something like:* Joseph is a great example of someone who had his life interrupted but was willing to lay down his plan and accept the Lord's call for his life. May we be so flexible because we trust in our good God!



## CONNECT &amp; APPLY

## CONNECTION

5–7 minutes

Show your students how Scripture connects to their lives: Use the example below OR share a personal story of how the plans for your life were changed, and you had to accept the new course with grace and trust.



SHARE PERSONAL STORIES

*Example:* Stories of normal people having their lives interrupted can be found across history. While real-life historical examples are readily available, many popular fictional characters also accept a new path for their lives after an extraordinary disruption. In the DC Comics story of Superman, simple farmers in Smallville, Kansas have their lives drastically changed when they discover a young boy in a space pod. Jonathan and Martha Kent adopt and raise Kal-El, whom they name Clark Kent. This child had special powers, and the Kents raised him to have strong character and use those supernatural gifts for good.<sup>1</sup> While this story is fiction, it's easy to see parallels to Joseph and Mary, whose average lives were disrupted when they were asked to raise Jesus. Accepting this challenge must have been a significant test of faith and trust, as they would need help from God every day to carry out this new calling.

- How can you make your own plans and still be prepared to accept interruptions?

Answers will vary. Remind students it's okay to make plans. It's wise to be prepared. But we must understand that those plans may not be God's plans. We can make plans as long as we value his ways above ours and are willing to forgo our plans for his.

## MARK OF A DISCIPLE

2–3 minutes

Disciples of Christ trust God's provisions and plans more than their own.

Use the *Mark of a Disciple* to reinforce the lesson and challenge students to apply it to their lives.

## APPLY IT

5–10 minutes

What are some ways you can regularly remind yourself to trust in God's plan for you? When the Lord asks you to do something unbelievable, even like loving someone who did you wrong, you can be ready to accept the challenge with trust.



MAKE LIFE APPLICATION

*Be specific:*

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do it?
- Is there someone who can keep you accountable?



HOLD STUDENTS ACCOUNTABLE

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** Allow students who are comfortable to share their plans for application. This may encourage or spark ideas for other students, plus add a level of accountability.



**CLOSING****PRAYER***2–3 minutes*

Take a moment to ask for prayer requests. Take time to let your students pray for each other's applications in the upcoming weeks. Spend some time praying that your students remain faithful to God's path for them.

*Write down any prayer requests mentioned and ask your students about them at your next meeting.*

**MEMORY VERSE**

*Send the memory verse graphic included in your download to your students later this week to keep the conversation going.*

MEMORY VERSE:

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”

Proverbs 16:9 (ESV)

**NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> “Superman Profile,” *Superman homepage*, September 20, 2010, <https://www.supermanhomepage.com/comics/comics.php?topic=comics-superman>.

