

# **life groups' study guide**



*Life Groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for spiritual growth, caring for one another, and reaching out to others.*

## **Generosity: Putting Others First**

It Starts in the Heart. Mary: Putting Others First

Bottom Line: Generosity starts in the heart. Mary chose what was better for everyone, rather than herself.

Items needed: Paper (8.5X11) cut into shape of a heart, pens/markers, Bibles

### **Get Started:**

Christmas time offers us tons of opportunities to hear stories about people who have gone above-and-beyond for someone else. I'm sure many of you have either been on the receiving end OR the giving end of one of those stories. (Share a brief story of your own)

Q: Let's hear about your experiences! When have you received a gift that just blew you away? When have you had the opportunity to be the giver of such a gift?

(give about 8-10 minutes to share stories.)

Q: Have you ever spent a long time planning one of those gift-giving experiences? How long did you plan it? What kinds of things went in to making it an awesome experience for the recipient?

It's a lot of fun – and so rewarding – to give to others during the Christmas season. The challenge comes in being willing to give of ourselves – and to put others first – all during the year.

Q: When have you seen someone “putting others first” in the last week? Month? Year?

Q: When have you put others first this week? This month? This year?

Q: Why do you think some people put others first as a lifestyle, when others put only themselves first?

Q: Where do you fall in this category? Would you say you are an others-first person regularly, randomly, or hardly ever?

Q: From where do you think the drive to put others first comes?

### **Get the Scoop:**

We’re going to take a look at an amazing, humble young woman who was not only the recipient of an amazing, well-planned gift, but was also the giver of a gift bigger than she could ever dream.

Read Luke 1:26-38.

There’s a lot to digest in that passage. Let’s break it down bit by bit so we can better understand what’s happening, what the consequences may be for Mary, and how her reaction showed her faith.

Read 1:26-27.

Q: What do you know about the Jewish betrothal traditions? (Allow students to share what they’ve learned. Share the following information as needed.)

*(Girls could be betrothed – or promised to – a Jewish man through family connections. This betrothal could happen as early as age 12. Most of these marriages would take place about a year after the betrothal. No one knows how old Mary was when her betrothal was announced. )*

Read 1:28-30

Q: How do you think you would have reacted if greeted this way?

Q: 1:29 tells us “Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.” What do you think she was thinking?

Read Luke 1:30-37, 2 Samuel 7:16

Q: What had been promised, and how was it going to be fulfilled?

Q: Obviously, Mary had questions (vs. 34). What do you think you would have been feeling at this point?

Q: What consequences potentially lay in store for Mary because of this virgin pregnancy/birth?

*(Jewish betrothals could be broken if the wife-to-be was found pregnant. If this happened, the young woman could be rejected by her fiancé; if her own father refused to care for her, she could end up as a beggar or a prostitute in order to earn her living. She would remain unmarried for her entire life. She would be ridiculed by friends/acquaintances, if her fiancé decided to go ahead with the betrothal, there would be trust issues, etc.*

Read Luke 1:38

Q: How is Mary's response an indication of her heart/faith?

Q: How would you have responded in a similar situation?

### **Dig In:**

God's announcement of a child to be born had been met with various responses through scripture.

Read Genesis 18:9-15

Q: How did Abram's wife, Sarai respond?

Read Luke 1:13, 18-20

Q: How did Zechariah respond to the angel's message of his wife's pregnancy?

Q: What was the consequence of his doubt?

Q: How was Mary's response different?

We often convince ourselves that we must be successful, smart, important, etc, to be used by God. Take a look at Mary...

Q: What are some words you'd use to describe her (before this incident?)

(poor, young, female, Jewish, limited education)

She was an unlikely candidate – from the world's perspective – but, God looks at our heart when choosing to use us in uncharacteristic ways.

Check out vs. 38 one more time. Mary's submission paints a beautiful picture of her heart. She was old enough to know the traditions and social norms of the day. She knew what this could mean for herself, her family, and her future. But, she chose to humbly submit to God's plan.

### **Take It Home**

I would have been scared to death, if I was Mary. And, she may have been. But, she chose to believe that the God – the creator of the universe – was big enough to handle not only this miraculous conception and birth, but the hard things that would come as a result. She was aware of the promise, and was willing to chance ridicule and difficulty to be a part of the bigger plan of salvation and hope for her people and the world.

*\*Mary chose to do what was better for everyone, rather than herself. \**

Give each student a heart-shaped paper. Give them time to put a bit of distance between themselves and the other students. Ask them to write down the answer to the next question (in italics) on the heart. They can continue to write the answers to each of the questions on the heart, as they have room.

Q: *What hard thing is God asking you to do right now – at this point in your life?*

Q: How have you responded to this request?

Q: How could your obedience be a gift to someone else?

Q: How could unwillingness to submit affect someone else?

Q: What's holding you back?

Q: What does this tell you about your own heart/faith?

Q: What is your next best step in submission to God's request/desire?

Direct students to find a partner.

Say: "Share the one thing you feel God is asking you to do right now. After you have shared, we'll pray together through a directed-prayer time. I will give you the focus, and you'll pray for your partner regarding his/her specific situation."

Prayer prompts:

Thank God on behalf of your prayer partner for His desire to use him/her, etc.

Pray for your partner's faith in response to the opportunity God has placed before him/her.

Pray that he/she will be confident in God's direction, ability to use him/her.

Pray that he/she will have peace regarding this direction.

Pray that he/she will have the strength to submit...even if it's uncomfortable or hard.

Pray that he/she will have the courage to continue in obedience

Pray that he/she will sense God's peace in the midst of the hard obedience.

Pray that he/she will take the next best step that he/she mentioned earlier.

Close your prayer time by thanking God for \_\_\_\_\_(you choose!)

Close prayer time.

Follow up throughout the week to see how they're doing with their next best step in response to this God-request.