

# Leader Guide



**Speaker:** Brandon Bradley

**Series:** Forgotten Ornaments

**Title:** Downward Mobility

## Key Texts

- Luke 1:26–38 (Mary’s surrender) Matthew 1:18–25 (Joseph’s obedience)
- Matthew 1:23 / Isaiah 7:14 (Immanuel – God with us)
- Genesis 3:15, 1 Corinthians 1:20–25
- Romans 12:2 (being transformed, not conformed)

## Big Idea

In a world obsessed with **upward mobility**—more, bigger, better—Advent reveals a God who moves the opposite direction.

**Downward mobility** is:

Voluntarily stepping down from what I could cling to, so that someone else can be lifted up—in the pattern of Mary, Joseph, and especially Jesus.

## Sermon Outline

### Our Culture’s Shiny Ornament: Upward Mobility

- Constant pull toward “more, bigger, better, higher.”
- Shows up in:
  - Work (titles, promotions, looking impressive).
  - Online (image management, “highlight reel” pressure).
  - Stuff (upgrades, new, shiny, “under the tree”).
  - Parenting (kids’ success tied to my identity).
- Unspoken creed: “If I don’t climb, I’ll be crushed. If I don’t move up, I don’t matter.”
- Even in church life: “Is it working?” can quietly become “Is it getting bigger?”
- The Christmas story doesn’t look like “success” by our standards:

In a world climbing up, **God comes down**.

### Mary: Choosing Downward Mobility Instead of Control (Luke 1:26–38)

- Mary = poor, young, female, from Nazareth (low on the social ladder).
- Angel announces a miraculous conception and eternal kingdom.
- Real cost:
  - Shame, whispers, suspicion, danger.

- “Holy Spirit did this” is not a convenient cover story.
- Her response: “I am the Lord’s servant... May your word to me be fulfilled.”
- Contrast with Eve (Genesis 3):
  - Eve: Ponders... “Did God really say...?” Reaches for autonomy—to “be like God.”
  - Mary: Surrender instead of control. Trust over self-protection.
- God writes salvation into the margins; victory comes through vulnerability.

## Joseph: Choosing Downward Mobility Instead of Defending Reputation (Matthew 1:18–25)

- Joseph: righteous, respected tradesman, future mapped out.
- “Found to be pregnant” → feels like betrayal and public scandal.
- “Divorce her quietly”—merciful, but still protects his own name.
- God interrupts through a dream: “Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife...”
- Obedience means:
  - Publicly tying his life to her scandal.
  - Accepting assumptions and whispers.
  - Raising a child surrounded by questions.
- Joseph trades **reputation** for **faithfulness** and lets God be his vindicator.

## Jesus: Immanuel, the Ultimate Downward Movement

- “They will call him Immanuel... God with us” (Matthew 1:23).
- Not God **above** us or **against** us, but God **with** us in our mess.
- “Downward staircase” of Jesus life:
  - Heaven, Nazareth (conception announced), Bethlehem manger
  - Carpenter’s shop, Eating with sinners, Touching the sick
  - Washing feet, Cross, Tomb
  - What looks like foolishness/weakness (manger, cross) is the wisdom/power of God (1 Cor 1).
- Mary and Joseph hang their lives in the same shape as Jesus’ life.

## What Downward Mobility Is *Not*

- Not enabling abuse. Not excusing injustice. Not becoming a doormat.
- Jesus named sin, confronted evil, and set boundaries.

## What Downward Mobility *Is*

- Voluntarily laying down status, rights, comfort, or advantage
- For the sake of love and obedience to God
- In the pattern of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.
- Letting the pattern of Jesus reshape the pattern of our lives (Romans 12:2).

## Four Practices for Advent

1. **Relational Humility**
  - Choose one relationship where you will not defend your reputation this week.
  - Listen, own your part, resist the urge to “win.”
2. **Financial Generosity**
  - Give up one gift/luxury you had planned for yourself.
  - Redirect it to someone in need or a ministry that cannot repay you.
3. **Presence Through Time and Attention**
  - Offer one protected block of time to serve or be present:
    - Lonely neighbor, single parent, church ministry, etc.
4. **Hidden/Secret Act of Kindness**
  - Do one completely anonymous act of love or generosity.
  - Tell no one—let it be a “forgotten ornament” the Father alone sees.

## Heart Questions (This is Me)

These are aimed at personal reflection, emotion, and spiritual posture.

1. **Where do you feel the pull of “upward mobility” most strongly right now?**
  - Work? Online? Family? Finances? Reputation?
  - How does that pressure affect your joy, peace, or contentment?
2. **Which part of Mary’s story resonates with you emotionally?**
  - Have you ever felt God inviting you into something that might damage your image or interrupt your plans?
  - How did that feel?
3. **What part of Joseph’s story hits closest to home?**
  - When have you felt misunderstood or misjudged, and wanted badly to defend yourself?
  - How did you respond?
4. **When you think of Jesus’ “downward staircase,” what stirs in your heart?**
  - Which “step down” (manger, serving, cross, etc.) most moves you right now—and why?
5. **Do you tend to trust God more with your comfort or your reputation?**
  - Where do you notice fear rising up when you imagine “stepping down” in obedience?
6. **How do you honestly feel about the idea of “downward mobility”?**
  - Does it feel freeing? Threatening? Confusing? Encouraging? A mix of all of the above?

## Head Questions (This is What I Need to Think About)

These help the group engage the text and theology.

1. **Read Luke 1:26–38.**
  - What details in the passage highlight how “low” Mary is on the social ladder?
  - How does her response in v.38 contrast with Eve’s response in Genesis 3?
2. **Compare Eve and Mary.**
  - In what ways is Eve’s choice an example of “upward mobility” (grasping for more, for autonomy)?
  - In what ways is Mary’s response an example of “downward mobility” (surrender, trust)?
3. **Read Matthew 1:18–25.**
  - Where do you see Joseph trying to do the “right thing” while still protecting his reputation?
  - How does the angel’s message reframe what true righteousness and obedience look like for him?
4. **Read Matthew 1:23 and reflect on “Immanuel – God with us.”**
  - How does the name “Immanuel” capture the idea of God’s downward movement toward us?
  - Why is it important that God is not just “above us” but “with us”?
5. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:20–25.**
  - How do the manger and the cross look like “foolishness” or “weakness” in the world’s eyes?
  - Why does Paul insist that this is actually the wisdom and power of God?
6. **Read Romans 12:1–2.**
  - How does being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” connect with learning to value downward mobility over worldly success?
  - What “pattern of this world” do you see most clearly in the pursuit of upward mobility?
7. **Clarifying the concept:**
  - In your own words, what is the difference between healthy, Christlike “downward mobility” and being a doormat or enabling abuse?
  - Why is keeping that distinction clear so important?

## Hands Questions (This is How I Need to Act)

These are for concrete steps and shared accountability.

1. **Of the four suggested practices, which one is the Spirit highlighting for you?**  
Relational humility, Financial generosity, Presence (time/attention), Hidden act of kindness  
Be specific: What exactly will you do? With whom? By when?
2. **Relational humility:**
  - Is there one relationship where you sense God inviting you to stop defending your reputation, listen more, or own your part?
  - What would a “Selfless ornament” step look like in that relationship this week?
3. **Financial generosity:**
  - What is one specific purchase or luxury you could lay down this Advent?
  - Who or what ministry could you joyfully bless instead?
4. **Gift of presence:**
  - Name one person or group (lonely neighbor, single parent, family, ministry) who needs your presence more than your presents.
  - When and how will you intentionally give them time and attention?
5. **Hidden/secret kindness:**
  - Brainstorm some anonymous ways to quietly lift someone else up (pay a bill, leave a gift card, shovel snow, etc.).
  - Which one will you actually do—and how can you ensure it remains “forgotten” in terms of human recognition?
6. **Group-level action:**
  - As a group, is there a shared act of downward mobility you could practice together this Advent?
    - Serving a specific family in need?
    - Adopting a ministry project?
    - Doing something anonymously for someone in the church or neighborhood?
7. **Accountability and encouragement:**
  - How can this group lovingly check in with one another over the next week or two about the step each person chose?
  - What kind of encouragement or prayer support would help you actually follow through?

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## Suggested Closing Prayer Prompt (Leader)

Consider closing by praying something like:

“Lord, in a world obsessed with climbing, teach us the way of Your Son, who came down.  
Help us lay down control like Mary, release our grip on reputation like Joseph,  
and follow the self-giving love of Jesus.  
Show each of us one concrete step of downward mobility this Advent,  
and give us the courage to obey.  
Let the ‘forgotten ornament’ of selfless humility shine in our lives for Your glory.  
In Jesus’ name, Amen.”