





# ENGAGE (15 MINUTES)

**THE POINT** FOLLOWING GOD'S PLAN WILL REQUIRE CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE, BUT IT'S WORTH IT.

## LEAD OPTION 1

Select two volunteers to come up front. Ask the students to sit across from each other at a table and blindfold one student. The blindfolded student must pour a bowl of cereal and spoon-feed it to his or her partner, while the partner gives limited directions (i.e., up, down, left, right). The partner cannot use his or her hands to assist. Say, **“Without much direction in life, we run into all kinds of struggles. Even if it’s difficult, following God’s plan is worth it.”**

## LEAD OPTION 2

Decorate the room with various directional signs or maps. Say, **“God has a plan for our lives, and we can trust it’s for our ultimate good.”**

## LEAD OPTION 3

Search the Internet for “Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live.” Play the video as you begin the session. Say, **“God calls us to make changes to our lives in pursuit of following Him and His plan for our lives.”**

**NOTE:** Always make sure you preview any video clip you show students and ensure that it is appropriate for your church and ministry.



For **free online training** on how to lead a group visit **MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife**

For **free Midweek Options** for your group, visit **lifeway.com/BSFLWin19fullpicture**

## LEADER PACK ELEMENTS

*If you have the optional Leader Pack, consider one of the following:*

**ITEM 2:** As you teach the session, consider using the *Your Plans vs God’s Plans* poster to engage students in the point. Ask students to provide examples of when their plans have changed unexpectedly. Get started by providing your own example of a time when God changed your plans.



# THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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Throughout high school, I spent almost every day involved in athletics, and during the spring I competed in track and field. One day while I was running sprints, apparently I hadn't warmed up very well, because I tore my Achilles tendon. Ow! To this day, it's one of the most painful things I've ever experienced, but beyond the physical pain, I experienced suffering on a different level. Everything I had planned for the year changed in a single moment. Baseball, which was my favorite sport—Out! Riding my dirt bike—Over! For the next few months, things I had looked forward to were, from my perspective, taken away from me. And honestly, it was difficult to handle.

➤ **Describe a time a change of plans was difficult for you to deal with.**

Joseph surely had plans—marrying the girl of his dreams, working hard, raising a family. However, God stepped in with a change of plans, and given the things Joseph would experience in the coming months, this certainly wasn't easy. Scripture doesn't record Joseph's words, but we do see his response: he acted in obedience. Through Joseph's life we see that, although change is never easy, changing in order to follow God's plans is always worth it! The changes God makes are always for our highest good.

## THE SETTING

Matthew was a disciple of Jesus who wrote to explain the gospel to non-Christian Jews. He focused on the aspects of Jesus' ministry that would speak to his own people. In typical Jewish fashion, he began his Gospel with a genealogy that spanned the distance from Abraham to Jesus (Matt. 1:1-16). Matthew then located the birth of Christ in the context of a Jewish family and began to tell the story of Jesus' parents, beginning with Jesus' father.

### **FACT:**

THE YOUNGEST MARATHON RUNNER IN THE WORLD IS BUDHIA SINGH, WHO FINISHED 48 MARATHONS BEFORE HIS FIFTH BIRTHDAY.<sup>1</sup>



# IMPART

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## MATTHEW 1:18-19

*The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. **MATTHEW 1:18-19***

Breakups are hard, plain and simple. No matter how much drama or disagreement came before, there's still a great sense of loss. At some point we cared deeply for the person, otherwise we wouldn't have been together. Moving forward, there's likely to be a sense of loneliness. Relationships among common friends become awkward. It's tough!

As difficult as high school breakups can be, it doesn't compare to the loss experienced when married couples separate. Technically, Mary and Joseph weren't married. However, in the first century, an engagement was a legally binding pledge. The parents of the bride and groom arranged their children's marriage. After they negotiated a marriage contract, the relationship became legal. Others even called the couple husband and wife; however, they did not live together until the actual marriage ceremony occurred. To break the engagement required a divorce, and adultery was grounds for that divorce. That's why, when Joseph learned his plans had been changed by Mary's pregnancy, he considered the option of divorce.

Mary was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Let that sink in for a moment. I'm sure Joseph's mind was blown by the very idea. What in the world could that mean?

The virgin birth is an essential piece of our faith, because this is the only way Jesus could be God in the flesh. Jesus is:

- **Fully Man:** Because Jesus was born to a woman, He is one of us and able to die for our sins.
- **Fully God:** Because Jesus had no earthly father, He didn't inherit Adam's sinful nature. He is therefore holy and His sacrifice was sufficient to pay for the sins of the world.

Mary's divine pregnancy certainly changed Joseph's plans, but Joseph's actions were admirable. Instead of creating a public scandal, Joseph chose the high road by planning a respectful, quiet divorce. His love for Mary and his sense of righteousness drove his actions, even though the law allowed for a public stoning (Deut. 22:22-24). This was a huge change of plans; however, it didn't change his love for Mary or his desire to live righteously. So Joseph sought to quietly move on from this painful chapter of his life. But God had yet another change of plans in store for Joseph.

### DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 14)

- 1** *What can we learn from Joseph's initial response regarding Mary's situation?*
- 2** *What options exist when we find ourselves where we didn't plan to be?*



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## MATTHEW 1:20-23

*But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us." MATTHEW 1:20-23*

Joseph had every right, even according to the law of God, to deal harshly with Mary. However, because he had a righteous character, even as a young unmarried man, he chose to deal mercifully with her. This seemed like a good, even honorable plan, but it wasn't God's plan. He called Joseph to change course. Sometimes God calls us to adjust our plans, not because they are bad, but because they are not best.

**Leader:** Ask students to share about a time when gossip has been hurtful. This could be a difficult moment for some, so make sure your group is able to respectfully approach the topic. Share your own story, if you'd like.

**VERSE 19:** Leviticus 20:10 teaches the consequences of adultery are for both parties to be stoned. Joseph chose mercy over justice for Mary's perceived adultery.

This put Joseph in an awkward situation. If he followed the angel's command—"Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife"—he would look weak to his friends and neighbors, and others may even see him as involved in Mary's perceived moral failure. Many would misunderstand, and gossip was as much a problem then as it is now. However, no matter how tough the situation was, Joseph knew the true story of Mary's pregnancy, as well as God's plan for his life, and he was committed to obeying God.

As Joseph listened to the angel's description of the Messiah, that He would save God's people from their sins, Joseph no doubt recalled the Old Testament prophecies from Isaiah 7:14.

**VERSE 23:** Scholars have debated whether the meaning of the word in Isaiah 7:14 is "virgin" or "maiden." Matthew, writing under the Spirit's inspiration, ends all doubt when he quotes the Old Testament passage.

For Jesus, which means "Savior," to save us, it was necessary that He be with us. Through Jesus' coming to earth, God's presence is intimately with His people. And even though Jesus ascended to heaven, God is still with us today. The Holy Spirit dwells in us to teach, guide, comfort, encourage, and empower us. Sometimes our circumstances may cause us to feel like God is not with us. That's when we need to take God at His word and trust He is present. The birth of Jesus attests to the truth God is with us.

### DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 15)

- 3** *What do the names given for the Messiah in these verses reveal about His purpose?*
- 4** *What evidence do we see in this passage of God's greater plan at work?*
- 5** *Why is it difficult to set our plans aside to follow God's plans?*





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## MATTHEW 1:24-25

*When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.* **MATTHEW 1:24-25**

Obedience can sometimes be tough. After all, parents ask us to do all sorts of ridiculous things like cleaning our rooms and eating our vegetables. Thank goodness by the time we're teenagers, we have a lot more freedom to make our own choices! Many people value liberty above almost anything else, and submitting to others, even our parents, is met with great resistance. However, God has established authority and influencers as ways to help us live healthy lives.

God's Word contains many promises. It also has many commands, and when we understand those, we have a choice to make. We can choose to obey immediately or not.

We often have good intentions to follow through, but we wait. When this happens, our drive to follow the Lord cools, and we end up doing our own thing. Obedience flies out the window. When we discover the things God calls us to, the time to obey is right then. Even delayed obedience is disobedience.

Mary's pregnancy changed Joseph's plans, so he devised a fair and decent way of dealing with this unexpected difficulty. But God intervened, and Joseph's response serves as a great example to us. As soon as the Lord told him what to do, he did it! No matter what difficulties the future held, he kept with the initial plan and married Mary in obedience to God.

Joseph's plans changed in other ways too. Even though Mary was now fully his wife, Joseph did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Matthew wanted the truth of Jesus' virgin birth to be very clear. Joseph would be bringing up someone else's son—God's Son—as his own, even if it meant living the rest of his life with the stigma of immorality from Mary's first pregnancy.

**Leader:** Help students identify authorities in their lives. Ask them to share when it's easy to submit and when it may be very difficult

**VERSE 25:** Some teach the "perpetual virginity" of Mary. However, the Bible teaches that Joseph and Mary had children together, including Jesus' brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, as well as an unknown number of sisters (Matt. 13:55-56).

Even though God altered Joseph's plans dramatically, he faithfully obeyed. Joseph played a key role in the Messiah's birth and early years. Joseph shows us the value of obeying God immediately every time!

*Sometimes circumstances make us feel like God is not with us. That's when we need to take God at His word and trust He is present. #BSFLfullpicture*



### DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE (P. 15)

- 6** *Who have you seen trust God even when it didn't make sense? Explain.*
- 7** *What keeps us from quickly saying yes to God's plans?*
- 8** *When have you had to adjust to God's plan and trust and obey?*





# LIVE IT OUT (10 MINUTES)

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## ▶ CHRIST

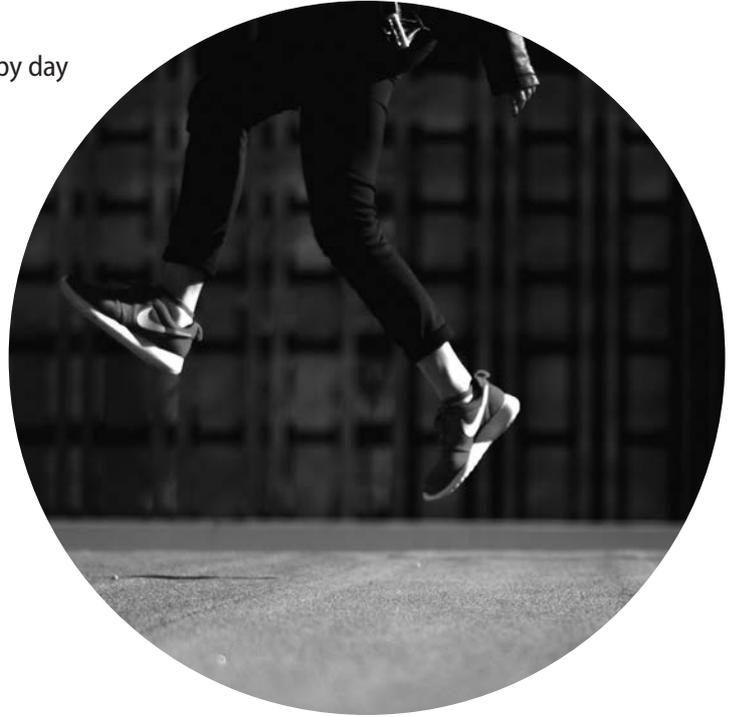
Living in a relationship with Jesus means following Him day by day and living in obedience to God. This means:

- ▶ Spending time in God's Word in order to know Him.
- ▶ Understanding how God's Word calls us to live.
- ▶ Choosing moment by moment to obey.

**9** How are you currently pursuing God in His Word?

**10** What specifically is He calling you to?

**11** How will you live these out this week in order to grow in your relationship with Christ?





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## ► COMMUNITY

Sometimes, the things God calls us to can be difficult. In these moments, the encouragement and support of friends and family is very important.

**12** What difficult things do you need to obey?

**13** How could the support of others help you live in obedience to God?

Share these things with someone you think can help you. Also, make it a point this week to encourage a friend who may be struggling to live in obedience.

## ► CULTURE

In our culture, the words *obedience* and *submission* can be difficult for some people to swallow. However, the truth is to live as we'd want and with no regard for God's commands leads to suffering and destruction.

**14** How will you help a non-believing friend see obedience to God leads to blessings?

**Pray every day this week that God would use you as an example to lost friends of living in obedience to Him.**