

COME

STUDY #1

LONG READING: GENESIS 42-47

SHORTENED READING: GENESIS 44:14- 45:5

THINK ABOUT IT

Joseph's brothers came into his presence many times, only knowing him as a ruler, not realizing he was their brother. The first time, in Chapter 42, they came in fear before a ruler who was accusing them of being spies. The second time, in Chapter 43, they were worried, bringing double the amount of money needed to cover the grain they had gotten before and the grain they were then going to purchase. The third time, also in Chapter 43, they came bearing gifts, feeling honored because they were to eat with a powerful ruler. The fourth time, in Chapter 44, they came before the ruler in humility and mourning, thinking that they would not be able to bring Benjamin back to Jacob. Their mourning quickly turned to fear when Joseph revealed his true identity. The brothers feared revenge! Because of their guilt, the brothers are terrified to be in the presence of this ruler who just caught them stealing and they are fearful for Benjamin! Yet Joseph reassures them that it was God's will that he be sent ahead of them to Egypt. Their fears are calmed. Finally, think about the final time they come before the powerful ruler in Chapter 46. Israel is reunited with all his children.

DISCUSS/JOURNAL

- 1- What do you think the brothers were experiencing each time they came into the presence of Joseph?
- 2- In what ways, with what attitudes, have you recently come into the presence of God?
- 3- In what ways do you think God wants us to come into Their presence?

PRAY

TRY THIS: When we pray together, we are usually quiet, folding our hands and closing our eyes. Try coming into God's presence in a different way this week. Draw a picture with bright colors and dwell on the joy that you experience in God's presence. Try kneeling on the ground and come into God's presence in humility. Try standing tall with your arms stretched high and come with confidence knowing that God wants to be with you. Be creative and think of unique ways to come into God's loving presence.

COME

STUDY #2

READING: 2 CHRONICLES 1

THINK ABOUT IT

God chooses to come to YOU. Do any of us sit in absolute wonder of that truth? People are never the same after God comes into their presence, and Solomon was certainly no exception. What were the feelings and emotions running through him? Did he think, act, and live differently as a result of talking with God? And God didn't just come to talk; God came to give a gift of Solomon's own choosing! Yet Solomon remains bold AND humble in his request, despite God's offer of the world. He boldly asks for the tools to be a better leader for God's people. The greatest desire of his heart is to be great for God! In turn, God is pleased and chooses to bless Solomon even beyond his request. We know that God is not a genie in a bottle just waiting to grant our wishes. But what a blessing when God does grant us the desires of our hearts! What a great God we serve! God comes to us and delights to bless a bold AND humble heart beyond what we ask or think.

DISCUSS

- 1- Has God ever come to you in a way that has changed your life? How did God come? How were you changed?
- 2- How do your desires align with God's kingdom? Do your requests delight the Lord?
- 3- What do you think it looks like to ask both boldly and humbly in your own prayer life?

PRAY

TRY THIS: Write out a list of three prayer requests for your life. Spend time praying for each item and ask God to give you wisdom about each issue. Perhaps God will speak to your heart like Solomon. Maybe God will bless you with an encouraged heart, a kind word, or patience as you wait. Maybe God will assure you with an answer. Maybe God will cause you to change your request. Watch and see how God comes to you.

COME

STUDY #3

LONG READING: EXODUS 3- 4:18

SHORTENED READING: EXODUS 3:1-15; 4:1-18

THINK ABOUT IT

In 1998 DreamWorks released the movie, *The Prince of Egypt*, which tells the story of Moses and the exodus of a captive Israel from Egypt. This movie offers a beautiful interpretation of a foundational story filled with color and song, as well as a key scene when Moses approaches the burning bush. The animation shows wonderful moments for Moses: first, when he first realized he's stepping onto holy ground, then when he feels the power of God—including God's anger, and finally when God envelops him a presence that sparks deep wonder. A similar scene is found in William Young's, when multitudes of beings come together to worship Jesus and each individual has a light that mingles with the lights of those around them. Both of these scenes draw a beautiful picture of coming into a moment of intense intimacy with God. When you read this story about Moses, did you think about what it would have been like to come into the presence of God in this very tangible way? What must it have been like to dwell with God as the holiness of that fire flickered on your cheeks, warmed your face? God wants us to come close, to draw near and feel that fire flicker. God desires to envelop us with holy presence. This may not always be easy for us. God may call us out of our comfort zone as we see with Moses in this story. But just as Moses did, we need to come into the presence of God not only prepared to commune, but ready to listen carefully. Even if what we hear is a challenge that brings us into the presence of Pharaoh to stand up for those oppressed.

DISCUSS

- 1- Where do you come into the presence of God most often? Does that presence ever come with challenge?
- 2- Have you ever felt like you came into God's presence in a more unusual way? Not the burning bush of Moses, but an experience that might compare? How did it feel? How did God speak to your heart?
- 3- Are you setting aside special time to "come into the presence of God?" Do you believe that when you come and listen, God will speak?

PRAY

TRY THIS: Read Chapter 3:2-6 again, one verse at time. After each verse, just be quiet with God. Ponder the words you read. Think about Moses--what he saw, how he reacted, how he felt when coming into the presence of God. Spend time before God, demonstrating a willingness to hear His voice. Pray that God speaks. Listen.

COME

STUDY #4

LONG READING: MATTHEW 1:18- 2:18

SHORTENED READING: MATTHEW 2:1-12

THINK ABOUT IT

For the last study of each week of Advent, you will be asked to consider individuals from the Christmas story. Ironically, for this first week of Advent, we turn to the last of the characters described in the Christmas story. The magi didn't come to Jesus when he was in the manger. They followed the star for a very long time, which led them to a house (not a barn), where they eventually found a young child (not a baby). They likely traveled for many months before finding Jesus. They came to the Christ child with great patience and faith. They came to Jesus bearing gifts. They came to Jesus bearing their hearts. They were overjoyed and came to worship Jesus in reverence and awe. Do you come to Jesus in patience and faith? Do you come to Jesus bearing your heart and your gifts? Do you come to Jesus in reverence and awe?

DISCUSS

- 1- What does following God in faith and patience look like for us today?
- 2- What do you think the magi felt when they first saw and worshiped Jesus after searching for so long?
- 3- How do we come before God as individuals and as a church family? Do we come boldly? Joyfully? Angry? Lovingly? Tired? Sad? Happy? Frustrated? Be honest. None of these answers are wrong, but a challenge to look at how we come to God and how we are prepared and listening for when God comes to us.

PRAY

TRY THIS: Go for a walk around your neighborhood, as if you're on a journey like the magi, looking for Christ. Have each member of the family take turns praying for the people living in the homes you pass. Ask that they may come into the presence of Jesus this Advent season in a meaningful way. Let's cover our neighborhoods in prayer! Be patient and continue in faith, watching for God's answers.