



## Week 2

*"Sing to Yahweh, you His faithful ones, and praise His holy name. For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor, a lifetime. Weeping may spend the night, but there is joy in the morning. When I was secure, I said, 'I will never be shaken.'" Psalm 30:4-6*

*"'Comfort, comfort My people,' says your God. 'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her time of forced labor is over, her iniquity has been pardoned, and she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.' A voice of one crying out: Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert.'" Isaiah 40:1-3*

### Devotion: The Importance of Preparation

Whenever we're on mission with God like Joseph and Mary were as they waited for the birth of Jesus, we have to prepare.

No one plants seeds one day and expects a harvest in the morning. There are things to do. We are called to

cultivate our lives and rest in the fact that God has our future in his hands.

In the story of the prodigal son, Jesus tells the story of a father. This father knew that he couldn't control the will of a rebellious, spiteful son. He just gave him what he asked for and let him go. But after the son left with his share of the farm in his back pocket, the father began to prepare for a celebration. He started fattening a calf. He bought a ring and a robe. There were things to be done. Their relationship was broken, but he still had hope as he watched every afternoon for a familiar figure to appear over the horizon.

**Preparation is a statement of faith.** It's committing to trust even though you're hurting and heartsick.

Every detail of the Christmas story tells us that Mary and Joseph endured more than their fair share of trials as they waited for the arrival of Jesus. Mary left town. Joseph refused to reject her on the basis of an angelic dream. We can just hear the neighbors gossip about the scandalous events of Mary's pregnancy. But they prepared and endured it all to be on a much greater mission than any carpenter's family could imagine.

### Application: Preparing for God's Plan

As you prepare for Christmas and all God has in store for you in the new year, be challenged to prepare for all that's in store in the following ways:

- **Eliminate distractions.** Don't allow the stress of the Christmas season to distract you from what is really is important. Spend more time with the family and less time at the mall. Simplify your life. Be still and listen to God's voice. "... keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of faith ..." (Hebrews 12:2a).
- **Notice God's hand.** Reflect on this past year. Perhaps you, like many, have faced financial difficulty. Or maybe you've escaped danger or disease through an unforeseen miracle. Perhaps this year has been a time of suffering or relationship disasters. How has God carried you through all these things? Remember the words of Joseph in the Old Testament: "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good ..." (Genesis 50:20).
- **Discern God's will.** Ask God to give you direction. "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).
- **Unite in a mission.** Mary and Joseph undertook an amazing mission on the way to Bethlehem. It certainly must have strengthened their bond as

they conquered many obstacles and challenges. There's nothing more powerful than a couple, a family, or a church rallying around a cause.

### Today: Ways You Can Prepare

**Share:** Discuss ways your family or Bible study group can prepare for future challenges.

**Evaluate:** Identify distractions that will keep you from truly worshiping Christ this Christmas.

**Pray:** Ask God to help you see what He wants you to do.

**Express:** Go on mission as a family or with a group of friends. Find a family or an organization you can help as they prepare to celebrate Christmas.