



A 4-SESSION SERIES FROM THE PROPHETS & THE GOSPELS ON

# CHRISTMAS

FROM OUR ANNUAL **TEACHING STRATEGY**

BY THE STUFF YOU CAN USE TEAM



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# OVERVIEW



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**GET  
ALIGNED!**



If your church is also using Grow Students, this series aligns with the series *Restored*, from Volume 5 of Grow Students.

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

Christmas means family gatherings, cherished traditions, joyful memories, and new connections. But for some of us, the holidays also bring up painful memories and complicated relationships. We sing carols about Jesus' arrival on the first Christmas bringing hope, joy, and peace, but it's pretty clear there are still places where hope, joy, and peace aren't quite complete. In this 4-part series from the Old Testament prophets and New Testament Gospels, we'll see how the arrival of the Prince of Peace on the very first Christmas began God's big story of restoration — for us personally and for the whole world too. That's why, even in the midst of brokenness, this Christmas can remind us that **a broken world** can be restored, **what's broken in us** can be restored, **our hope** can be restored, and **we have a role to play** in God's plan of restoration.

## THIS SERIES AT A GLANCE

### SESSION 1

In this session, groups will see how God's plan for restoration has been in motion since the beginning of time.

- **THE BIG IDEA:** Our broken world will be restored.
- **THE BIBLE:** Genesis 3:6–8, 23; Jeremiah 33:14–16; Matthew 1:1

### SESSION 2

In this session, groups will see how Jesus embodies both the power and empathy needed to restore anything broken in us.

- **THE BIG IDEA:** What's broken in us can be restored.
- **THE BIBLE:** Malachi 3:1–2; Mark 1:1–5, 7–8; Matthew 1:21–23

### SESSION 3

In this session, groups will discover the role hope can play in restoration when we have doubts, questions, or are in our lowest moments.

- **THE BIG IDEA:** Our hope can be restored.
- **THE BIBLE:** Zephaniah 3:14–17; Luke 2:25–32, 36–38; Matthew 5:4

### SESSION 4

In this session, groups will discuss how restoration is an ongoing process and we get to play a role in it.

- **THE BIG IDEA:** We have a role to play in God's restoration plan.
- **THE BIBLE:** Luke 1:26–38; Romans 12:1



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This resource was created by our team here at Stuff You Can Use! We're a team of pastors, volunteers, church planters, writers, editors, designers, programmers, video creators, and more. We live in three countries, twelve states and five time zones, but somehow we all manage to hang out on Zoom at the same time. We're here to make ministry a tiny bit easier for you — and we really like making things for you!

## CONNECT WITH THE TEAM!



## ALONG WITH . . .



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# SESSION 1

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



### THE BIBLE

Genesis 3:6–8, 23; Jeremiah 33:14–16;  
Matthew 1:1

### THE BIG IDEA

Our broken world will be restored.

**WHAT?** *What are we talking about?*

**NOW WHAT?** *What do we do about it?*

#### STORY

*Tell a funny story about a Christmas tradition that went horribly wrong for you. Then ask others to share their stories.*

#### QUESTIONS

- On a scale of Buddy the Elf to Ebenezer Scrooge, how are you feeling about this Christmas?
- What's your favorite Christmas carol? Share a few of the lyrics.

#### SAY . . .

Our favorite Christmas songs are all about hope, joy, and peace — but in reality, the holidays can be a reminder of pain, conflict, and brokenness. Throughout this series, we're going to talk about making peace with those conflicting realities.

**SO WHAT?** *Why does it matter?*

#### VIDEO | "Restored," Session 1

*Play the video for this session.*

#### DISCUSSION

- What are some of the ways the Christmas season exposes brokenness in our relationships? Are you noticing any of that brokenness this year?
- How does the Christmas season draw more attention to the brokenness in our communities or the world more broadly?
- What are some examples of decisions from past generations still causing pain in the world today? What about for you personally?
- How is the hope of Christmas more than just optimism?
- This Christmas, how can we remind each other of God's ability to restore?
- What are some ways our holiday celebrations could reflect the truth that Christmas isn't about ignoring the world's brokenness but restoring it?

#### ACTIVITY | Restoration Reminders

*Throughout the week, encourage your group to reach out to each other anytime they notice brokenness in the world, your community, or their families. Each time something is shared, commit to praying God would make that wrong thing right.*

#### PRAYER



# SESSION 1

## VIDEO SCRIPTS



### THE BIBLE

Genesis 3:6–8, 23; Jeremiah 33:14–16;  
Matthew 1:1

### THE BIG IDEA

Our broken world will be restored.

**HOST 1:** Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_.

**HOST 2:** And I'm \_\_\_\_\_. Merry Christmas, and welcome to the first session of our Christmas series, Restored.

**HOST 1:** Christmas means many things to different people. For some of us, Christmas is a magical season full of joyous memories, family gatherings, and cherished traditions.

**HOST 2:** For others, Christmas is just another holiday on the calendar — one that forces us to decorate and spend a big chunk of our budget on unnecessary gifts for other people.

**HOST 1:** And for some of us, Christmas may bring back memories, but not the warm-fuzzy kind.

**HOST 2:** Why is it that a day meant to be filled with peace, goodwill, joy, and family can be so painful and complicated? We all want to get into the Christmas spirit (no one wants to be the Grinch in the room!), but life is full of brokenness that doesn't magically heal on Christmas morning.

**HOST 1:** And when we see something broken, it's natural to want to fix it. We know that family should be a safe place, but for many, it's the opposite. We know everyone should have equal opportunities for happiness and success, but society isn't always fair.

**HOST 2:** We look around our world, see so many problems, and wonder if it's even possible to fix them all. And more importantly, we question where God is in the midst of the mess.

**HOST 1:** These are excellent questions that deserve answers, so let's talk about them. But before we can talk about this Christmas, we've got to go back in time. We're going back before last Christmas, or your childhood Christmases, or even the very first Christmas — back to the very beginning. I'm talking about the very beginning of the world.

**HOST 2:** The first few chapters of Genesis outline the story of God creating the whole universe and humans in particular. But this story is more than just an explanation of how the world came to be. In it, there are a few important themes that continue to matter today.

**HOST 1:** First, as each element of creation came into existence, it pleased God, but humanity was especially exciting. God called humans “very good” and set us up to be the ones taking care of the rest of creation.

**HOST 2:** Second, God wanted humans to be free to enjoy the world that had been created, but there was one stipulation: Genesis says the first humans weren’t permitted to eat from a certain fruit tree. But . . . they did. From this passage of Scripture, we’re told there was a good and peaceful world, until humans made a series of decisions that changed everything.

**HOST 1:** This is how Genesis describes this moment: **“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden,”** Genesis 3:6–8 (NIV).

**HOST 2:** Adam and Eve made the decision to do the one thing they knew they weren’t supposed to do and it changed their world — and ours too. When God showed up to interact with them, these two even tried to hide from God because they were aware of what they had done wrong.

**HOST 1:** God discovered them and explained that their decisions would result in hard work and pain for the rest of humanity. Their saga ultimately wrapped up with this statement: **“So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken,”** Genesis 3:23 (NIV).

**HOST 2:** From this early moment to today, perfection and peace in this world has been an unattainable goal. God created a good and peaceful world for humanity to enjoy and protect, but human decisions led to conflict, chaos, and death. Did God’s plan for us die forever in the garden?

**HOST 1:** No, God didn’t walk away from humanity. Through a series of leaders and prophets, God consistently promised a day of restoration was coming. One day, a leader would rise up who would bring all people back to God and back to their created purpose. Over time, God revealed where this leader would be born, what they would do, how they would speak, and even which family they would be born into.

**HOST 2:** Then, God gave the world an update through the prophet Jeremiah during a time when God’s people — the Israelites — were broken, afraid, and looking for a sign that God was still at work. Through Jeremiah, God said, **“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior,’”** Jeremiah 33:14–16 (NIV).

**HOST 1:** This “righteous Branch” thing is about the “family tree” of humanity. A future King was coming who God would use to restore the whole world, from Adam and Eve, through King David, and beyond. And for a long time, this was all humanity knew about God’s plan.

**HOST 2:** Jeremiah was able to share hope with the people of Israel, but this hope was always based on a future hope. Things were still broken and nobody knew when or how they would be restored. They just trusted it was true.

**HOST 1:** Then, several centuries later, something amazing happened that altered the course of human history forever. Something that had nothing to do with any human decision and everything to do with God’s decision to restore what we had broken.

**HOST 2:** A baby was born. And this is how that child’s story starts: **“This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham,”** Matthew 1:1 (NIV).

**HOST 1:** I know, that doesn’t sound like a very exciting beginning to a story, but what makes this statement so important — and the list of names in the 15 verses that follow — is that it reveals how God’s plan unfolded over centuries! Each of these people, for generations, knew what it was like to wait for the future Savior God had promised.

**HOST 2:** Jesus’s ancestors included all sorts of people — men, women, kings, laborers, shepherds, widows, religious people, not-so-religious people, and more. And every single one of these people, mentioned by name in Jesus’s family tree, was a part of God’s big plan to restore the world.

**HOST 1:** Christmas reminds us of the plan God set in motion at the beginning of time — a plan to solve problems we created and make wrong things right. God did not leave humanity all alone and broken outside the garden. God had a plan for the world’s restoration all along.

**HOST 2:** Jesus was the long-awaited leader who brought hope and a new way of living to his followers. He allowed us to once again believe broken things can be fixed.

**HOST 1:** Even when it seemed as though God’s plan was ruined, through Jesus’s birth, we now see that **our broken world will be restored.**

**HOST 2:** When we look around the world today, we see brokenness both close to home and far away. We see pain, injustice, heartbreak, and suffering everywhere. We see relationships, policies, families, systems, and people who are hurting and in need of restoration.

**HOST 1:** Sometimes even the well-meaning decisions of one person or group of people can be the source of pain for someone else. On a global scale, that’s how we end up with systems of injustice that cause people harm. But on a personal scale, it’s also how we end up with families full of people who keep hurting each other because they don’t know any other way.



**HOST 2:** Sometimes decisions made by past generations are the cause of brokenness that still exists today.

**HOST 1:** Sometimes our own poor decisions hurt not only ourselves, but also cause pain for those closest to us as well. These decisions may cost us opportunities or relationships.

**HOST 2:** It doesn't take long for a feeling of smallness to sink in. It's not hard to feel hopeless when there are constant reminders of our brokenness.

**HOST 1:** Human decisions have caused brokenness since the beginning of time. But from that moment on, God's plan has always been restoration.

**HOST 2:** Restoration is rarely a quick process and it doesn't always look the way we'd like it to, but Christmas is a reminder of God's faithful work to carry out the process of making broken things whole again. Jesus was born as the fulfillment of God's plan. Jesus is the answer to brokenness and the beginning of restoration.

**HOST 1:** I know it can be hard to fully embrace the joy and hope of the Christmas season when you see how much is still broken in the world — or in your world. But the arrival of Jesus doesn't gloss over or ignore the reality of that pain.

**HOST 2:** No, the message of Christmas isn't a message of unfounded optimism. It's a reminder that, because of Jesus, **our broken world will be restored**. Because restoration was always God's plan.



# SESSION 2

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



### THE BIBLE

Malachi 3:1–2; Mark 1:1–5, 7–8;  
Matthew 1:21–23

### THE BIG IDEA

What's broken in us can be restored.

**WHAT?** *What are we talking about?*

**NOW WHAT?** *What do we do about it?*

### QUESTIONS

- If you could be significantly better at something by next Christmas, what would you choose?
- If a Christmas miracle could instantly remove one bad habit from your life, what would you cut?

### SAY . . .

It's typically not hard for us to think of things we'd like to change about ourselves, but doing something to bring about change often feels impossible. But there's a reason Christmas makes us think about miracles. Let's find out why.

**SO WHAT?** *Why does it matter?*

### VIDEO | "Restored," Session 2

*Play the video for this session.*

### DISCUSSION

- How easy is it for you to believe people can change for the better? Why?
- Why do you think Malachi said it would hard for people to endure the coming of the promised Messiah?
- Why is it so profound that Jesus was called Immanuel ("God with us")?
- What's one area of your life Jesus has already restored (or is restoring)? Tell us about it?
- We all have brokenness in us that still needs to be restored, but how can we become aware of it?
- Even in our brokenness, what would it look like to be present with one another like Jesus is present with us? How could it help us be restored?

### PRAYER

### RESPONSE | Confession Journal

*"Confession" can bring up expectations of awkward conversations and specific religious rituals, but confession is simply the practice of being vulnerable about our struggles and shortcomings. Spend some time this week writing down the broken areas of your life that still need restoration. Then share it with someone you trust.*



# SESSION 2

## VIDEO SCRIPTS



### THE BIBLE

Malachi 3:1–2; Mark 1:1–5, 7–8;  
Matthew 1:21–23

### THE BIG IDEA

What's broken in us can be restored.

**HOST 1:** Hey, I'm \_\_\_\_.

**HOST 2:** And I'm \_\_\_\_\_. Welcome to the second session of Restored. In this series, we're looking at the Christmas story through the lens of restoration. In other words, we're answering the question *what does the birth of Jesus have to do with making broken things whole again?*

**HOST 1:** In our first session, we saw how Jesus's birth was a huge historical moment that showed how God never gives up on restoration. This is big news for anyone who feels defeated or overwhelmed by all the things that are wrong in the world. God is not walking away from the plan to make what is wrong right.

**HOST 2:** But what about the places inside each of us that feel broken or wrong? If we're being honest, we all have a tendency to sabotage our ability to grow and to be the best versions of ourselves.

**HOST 1:** Have you ever felt this way? Maybe you wanted to cut a harmful habit out of your life and it seemed impossible. Or you tried to add a healthy rhythm to your life and couldn't gain any traction. All too often, we get drawn back into the broken patterns and unhealthy behaviors that bring us down. So how can we restore that broken part of us that keeps us from growing and being who we want to be?

**HOST 2:** One of the prophets who talked about the coming of Jesus and helped the people of Israel hold onto hope when all seemed lost was Malachi. Malachi's primary message was about justice — God's way of making wrong things right. He encouraged the people of Israel to remain just in their interactions with others and stay faithful to God as they waited for the promised Savior.

**HOST 1:** The prophet Malachi delivered this message concerning the one God promised would come: **"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap,**" Malachi 3:1–2 (NIV).

**HOST 2:** Malachi was talking about two different people here: a messenger who would come and prepare the way for the Promised One, and the actual Promised One, or “the messenger of the covenant.” This was another encouragement from a long line of prophets asking the people to be faithful and to remain patient.

**HOST 1:** But Malachi’s message included an extra description of the coming Savior. He compared him to a refiner’s fire or laundry soap. This person would show up with the intent of purifying and cleaning up what was flawed inside of the people.

**HOST 2:** This certainly gave the Israelite listeners of Malachi’s message something new to consider – not only was this Savior coming to restore brokenness in the world but also to restore the brokenness in each of us. Hundreds of years after Malachi recorded his prophecy, the first promised messenger arrived on the scene: a man known as John the Baptist.

**HOST 1:** The Gospel of Mark, a book written by one of Jesus’s followers to describe some of the events that took place in Jesus’s life on earth, described the entrance of John the Baptist this way: **“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way — a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River,”** Mark 1:1–5 (NIV).

**HOST 2:** Before Jesus began traveling, teaching, and starting a revolution of restoration, John was already preparing the way for Jesus by preaching about the need to be forgiven. Sounds a lot like what Malachi promised would happen, right? John’s message focused on two key points. First, John was there to point people to Jesus. He had a message to deliver, but above all else, he spent his time declaring that someone greater was coming soon!

**HOST 1:** Second, John called the people to change. He told anyone who would listen to change their heart and life because God was on the way. John knew a true encounter with God had the power to transform people inside and out. That’s why he called out corrupt religious and political leaders and the broken systems they supported — systems that harmed others while keeping them in power.

**HOST 2:** John invited people from all corners of the nation with all types of backgrounds and stories to join him, admit their brokenness, and allow God to give them a fresh start and a new purpose.

**HOST 1:** John spent much of his time baptizing people in the water as an outward sign of the inward decision they made to turn over their broken parts to God. In fact, this is where John got his nickname, “the Baptist.”

**HOST 2:** John couldn’t remove what was broken inside of people or make them whole again, but he did point them to the one who could. John believed in the power of God to restore.

**HOST 1:** John preached that Jesus was the manifestation of restorative power here on earth. He said, **“After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit,”** Mark 1:7–8 (NIV).



**HOST 2:** John understood his place in this story. He knew he wasn't the Promised One. He didn't have the power to save or restore, but John believed there was someone who could — and he was on the way.

**HOST 1:** For centuries, the prophets promised a long-awaited Savior that would bring restoration and wholeness, not just to a broken world but also to broken people. John the Baptist acted as a messenger to prepare the people for the one who would restore the brokenness in our lives. All of that waiting culminated in the birth of Jesus.

**HOST 2:** In the midst of the traditional Christmas story narrative, the author of the Gospel of Matthew made a powerful statement. He said, **"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')"** Matthew 1:21–23 (NIV).

**HOST 1:** God with us. Through Jesus, God walked with humanity. Jesus is a reminder that God isn't far away or high above us, but is with us in both our darkest seasons and in our everyday moments.

**HOST 2:** Through Jesus, God was born into a world full of broken people, in order to restore us and make us whole again.

**HOST 1:** At the birth of Jesus, the wait was finally over. The One humanity had hoped for, for all those years, had finally arrived. He arrived ready to cleanse, refine, and restore each of us.

**HOST 2:** Jesus showed up on the scene with the power to "baptize with the Holy Spirit" and the ability to be "with us" in the midst of our brokenness and struggle. This unique combination of power and understanding is what makes the Christmas story good news to each of us.

**HOST 1:** The Christmas story is a message of joy, of peace, and of celebration, not in spite of our brokenness and sin, but because of it. Why? Because if you've ever felt like your story is too broken or too riddled with big mistakes, then Jesus's promise to restore broken lives is good news.

**HOST 2:** If forgiveness and restoration sounds like a nice thought for other people, but you believe the lie that you're too far gone, then you're selling short the power of Jesus's presence.

**HOST 1:** If it seems like your life is consistently messy — like you take a big step backward for every step you take in the right direction, or you have those nagging habits and hang-ups you just can't shake — then you are underestimating how much Jesus knows and understands you.

**HOST 2:** If your brokenness feels like too much for you to handle, then Jesus says, "I'm here. Immanuel. I'm with you."

**HOST 1:** Whatever your story looks like, it's a story Jesus came to improve, repair, and use. You're not here on accident and your story is beyond valuable. Because whatever brokenness you think might separate you from being a part of God's plan, **Christmas reminds us what's broken in us can be restored.**



# SESSION 3

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



### THE BIBLE

Zephaniah 3:14–17; Luke 2:25–32,  
36–38; Matthew 5:4

### THE BIG IDEA

Our hope can be restored.

**WHAT?** *What are we talking about?*

**NOW WHAT?** *What do we do about it?*

### QUESTIONS

- What's one thing about the Christmas season that never fails to brighten your day?
- When you're having a bad day, what usually helps you turn things around?
- How often do you encounter a bad day that just can't be turned around — not even with Christmas cheer.

### SAY . . .

The Christmas story is often portrayed as a story of joy and happiness. But surrounding this moment in time are stories of pain, grief, and lost hope. For those of us who are experiencing those types of emotions this holiday season, what can Christmas mean for us?

**SO WHAT?** *Why does it matter?*

### VIDEO | "Restored," Session 3

*Play the video for this session.*

### DISCUSSION

- Growing up, how free did you feel to express difficult emotions like sadness, frustration, or grief? How did that shape you as you grew up?
- Do you know anyone who seems to model a healthy balance of all their emotions? If so, tell us about them.
- How is the Christmas story a story of both grief and hope?
- How do you think Simeon and Anna held onto hope for so long? How can we do the same?
- This Christmas, are you feeling more grief or more hope? Why is that?
- How can we hold onto hope together this Christmas?

### PRAYER

### ACTIVITY | The Gift of Hope

*This week, give someone the gift of hope by praying for them — choose someone who is going through a hard time. Then reach out, let them know you're thinking of them, and do or say something to remind them there is hope.*



# SESSION 3

## VIDEO SCRIPTS



### THE BIBLE

Zephaniah 3:14–17; Luke 2:25–32,  
36–38; Matthew 5:4

### THE BIG IDEA

Our hope can be restored.

**HOST 1:** Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_.

**HOST 2:** And I'm \_\_\_\_\_. Welcome to session three of Restored. In this series, we're exploring the idea that there is brokenness all around us (even at Christmastime), but that brokenness is not the end of our story.

**HOST 1:** It might seem strange to talk about brokenness at Christmas — the season of peace, joy, and celebration. Yet how can we go on with the holiday when there is so much wrong in the world, and in our own lives?

**HOST 2:** Are we just supposed to ignore any negative situations or emotions we might feel in order to *seem* merry and *pretend* to enjoy the season?

**HOST 1:** For many of us, we see brokenness in the world, in our politics, in a strained relationship, in death and sickness, or in other hardships. In all of these situations, there's a specific kind of pain we feel. It's grief. We're mourning the loss of something we once had — maybe the loss of a relationship, or a person, or a situation. Maybe it's the loss of hope itself.

**HOST 2:** Grief is a fair and reasonable reaction when we encounter brokenness in the world or in our lives and relationships. In fact, when we consider how bad things can be, mourning almost seems like the most reasonable response to our realities.

**HOST 1:** Throughout this series, we've looked at several different prophets who led the people of Israel and pointed them toward the future coming of Jesus. One of God's prophets was a man named Zephaniah. He spoke on God's behalf to the Israelites (God's chosen people) during the reign of a man named King Josiah.

**HOST 2:** “Man” is a questionable term. You see, Josiah was only eight years old when he became king, and the nation he inherited was a mess. Now let’s pause and consider exactly how overwhelming that statement is. Can you imagine what it would be like if you became the ruler of a nation right now, let alone when you were eight years old?

**HOST 1:** Just wait, things get even worse.

**HOST 2:** Israel had an agreement to follow and worship God and to be a nation founded on love for one another and love for God. But throughout their history, they made many decisions that went against this agreement.

**HOST 1:** At the time Josiah became king, the Israelites were worshipping other gods and were completely ignoring the One True God who they had promised to serve. Additionally, Israel’s people had turned against each other. People were hoarding power and wealth for themselves while ignoring the needs of others in their community.

**HOST 2:** Because this was such a big job for young Josiah, he wisely looked to the prophets for help, including the prophet Zephaniah. But Zephaniah’s message wasn’t an easy one to hear. He called out the things that were broken and painful about Israel.

**HOST 1:** Now, with all that was going wrong in the nation of Israel, it would have been easy for Zephaniah and the boy-king Josiah to lose hope and be consumed by mourning and grief. That would have been the appropriate response to all the brokenness in Israel, right?

**HOST 2:** But even when so much was so obviously wrong, Zephaniah had this to say: **“Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, ‘Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing,’”** Zephaniah 3:14–17 (NIV).

**HOST 1:** Instead of a message of mourning, Zephaniah had a message of joy for God’s people. This wasn’t because things were perfect — because they weren’t good. It was because Zephaniah believed God would be faithful to restore things in Israel to how they should be.

**HOST 2:** It takes faith and hope to believe in restoration in the face of suffering, but Zephaniah held onto these things on behalf of a young king and an entire nation.

**HOST 1:** Zephaniah didn’t try to convince the people that everything was fine. He didn’t ignore their brokenness. But he did say one key thing: **“The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you.”** God was still with them in the middle of their pain and their mistakes. That is a reason for hope, and a cause for singing and celebration.



**HOST 2:** Also notice that Zephaniah didn't tell the people to *try* to rejoice. Rather, he *commanded* it: **"Sing . . . shout aloud . . . be glad and rejoice with all your heart."**

**HOST 1:** This wasn't meant as a request to shut out how they really felt, ignore their problems, and just put on a happy face. This was a command to actually be joyful. But is it possible to even do such a thing? Can true joy and peace exist even in the midst of mourning, pain, and brokenness?

**HOST 2:** Zephaniah believed a better day was coming and a future leader would one day bring restoration, but that had no impact on the current reality of the people.

**HOST 1:** Can hope for something in the future lead us out of mourning and into joy right now?

**HOST 2:** When Jesus was born, there were two people just like Zephaniah who had been rejoicing without knowing what their hope would ultimately lead to.

**HOST 1:** First, there was Simeon. We find his story in the Gospel of Luke: **"Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts."**

**HOST 2:** **"When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel,'" Luke 2:25–32 (NIV).**

**HOST 1:** Simeon had been told by God that he would get to see the promised Savior in his lifetime. This Savior would restore all of the brokenness in the world. Day after day Simeon waited, prayed, trusted, and waited some more. His whole life led up to this one moment with a small baby in the temple courts. According to Simeon, it had all been worth it.

**HOST 2:** There was also a woman in this story, a prophet named Anna. **"She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem," Luke 2:36–38 (NIV).**

**HOST 1:** The widow Anna proclaimed the same truth for 84 years, but her hope was ultimately fulfilled in seeing the Savior, Jesus, with her own eyes.

**HOST 2:** Generations of prophets like Zephaniah lived and died proclaiming the coming day when a Savior would show up. But unlike other prophets who kept hoping and believing without seeing, God showed up to change the world in Simeon and Anna's own lifetimes.

**HOST 1:** Hundreds and hundreds of years rolled by with devout people of God holding onto the only thing they had — hope. Hope didn't fix corrupt systems or turn people's hearts back to God. Hope didn't save Israel from military failures or being taken captive by more powerful nations.

**HOST 2:** Hope didn't save the many prophets who lost their lives declaring God's message. Hope didn't solve a single problem, but hope did allow those brave enough to hold onto it a chance to find joy in the midst of the brokenness.

**HOST 1:** The Christmas story reminds us that the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of the hopes of hundreds of prophets over centuries of history. Because of this fulfillment, we can expect even greater things to come. In the words of Jesus, we can continue to hold onto hope. Jesus said, **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted,"** Matthew 5:4 (NIV).

**HOST 2:** The solution to mourning is not just smiling more and pretending the pain doesn't exist — the solution to mourning is comfort. And in the midst of so much brokenness in our world, the ultimate source of comfort is the hope we have in Jesus.

**HOST 1:** So how can you be hopeful in your current situation? How can you discover that you're not alone and God is with you? How can you be hopeful on behalf of the world?

**HOST 2:** Many things in our world may seem beyond repair. But what would it look like to rejoice because God can restore even the most broken situations?

**HOST 1:** This Christmas, we really can have a reason to rejoice because no matter what kind of pain and brokenness we've experienced, **Christmas reminds us our hope can be restored.**



# SESSION 4

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



### THE BIBLE

Luke 1:26-55; Romans 12:1

### THE BIG IDEA

We have a role to play in God's restoration plan.

**WHAT?** *What are we talking about?*

**NOW WHAT?** *What do we do about it?*

#### QUESTIONS

- If someone promised to solve one annoying problem for you as a Christmas present, what problem would you want them to solve?
- If you had the power to permanently solve one big problem in the world, which problem would you want to solve?

#### SAY . . .

Christmas might be the time of year we talk about "peace on earth," but the truth is, there's still a lot wrong with the world. So how do we reconcile this Christmas promise with our current reality? Let's talk about it.

**SO WHAT?** *Why does it matter?*

#### VIDEO | "Restored," Session 4

*Play the video for this session.*

#### DISCUSSION

- What's one problem or injustice in the world that overwhelms you the most? Why is it so overwhelming?
- What does Mary's response to the angel's invitation show us about our role in God's plan for restoration?
- Which would be the most difficult for you to sacrifice for those around you: your position, your time, your reputation, or your recognition?
- Have you ever tried to be part of the solution for the problem that overwhelms you? What happened?
- What are some practical sacrifices you could make that could help restore something that's broken?
- How do you imagine our community getting involved in restoring something that's broken, in Jesus' name?

#### PRAYER

#### REFLECTION | My Sacrifice

*How could your group give up some of your position or privilege, your time, your comfort, or your reputation to help restore something broken in your community? Brainstorm some next steps together. Then commit to doing it.*



# SESSION 4

## VIDEO SCRIPTS



### THE BIBLE

Luke 1:26-55; Romans 12:1

### THE BIG IDEA

We have a role to play in God's restoration plan.

**HOST 1:** Hey, I'm \_\_\_\_\_.

**HOST 2:** And I'm \_\_\_\_\_. Merry Christmas and welcome to our final session of Restored.

**HOST 1:** This series has been quite the journey through Scripture, from Genesis, to the prophets, to the Gospels, to today. Even though Christmas is usually a time when we focus on hope, and joy, and peace, we've been talking a lot about brokenness.

**HOST 2:** That's because there's a lot that's broken, both in us, in our relationships, and in the world around us. And that brokenness doesn't go away just because we decorated a tree or bought some people presents.

**HOST 1:** So today, we want to address a question you may have been asking since we started this series. If God's plan has always been to restore what is broken, and Jesus was supposed to be the solution to the problem of brokenness, why are things still broken 2,000 years later?

**HOST 2:** Yeah, it's cool to see how the prophets held onto hope that one day their Savior would arrive . . . but what now? Maybe we can believe Jesus can restore the brokenness in *us*, but what about all the brokenness in the world *around us*? Why isn't that fixed yet?

**HOST 1:** Well, the truth is this — Scripture isn't lying when it tells us Jesus came to restore everything that was broken. The miracle of Christmas isn't just something that happened long ago. It's a miracle that's still changing us, and the world, right now — but not always in the ways we might expect.

**HOST 1:** The full story of Jesus's birth can be found twice in the Bible — once in the Gospel of Matthew and once in the Gospel of Luke. Today we're going to look at Luke's version of the Christmas story.



**HOST 2:** Luke told the story of Jesus from a different perspective than the other Gospel writers because he (unlike the other Gospel writers) was not Jewish. Therefore, Luke's account of Jesus's birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection was unique among the Gospel narratives.

**HOST 1:** Luke, as a follower of Jesus who came from outside the Jewish faith, knew God's plan for humanity included every person, no matter their ethnicity, social standing, or religious background. He wanted everyone to know Jesus was good news for them too — especially people who were usually passed over by the religious leaders of the time.

**HOST 2:** Maybe that's why Luke wrote down the stories of more women than any other Gospel writer. Women were often overlooked in that society, but Luke seemed to notice the way Jesus always elevated and honored women.

**HOST 1:** One of the women whose story Luke told is Mary, the mother of Jesus. When we meet Mary, she is an unmarried young woman. An angel greets her and declares she would become pregnant and give birth to a son who would be the promised Savior the people had been waiting for. Mary was understandably terrified of this proclamation and had a few very reasonable questions in response, but the angel assured her, **"no word from God will ever fail."**

**HOST 2:** Not long after this unbelievable revelation, Mary did become pregnant and she began to come to grips with her new reality. In an effort to process and express her emotions, Mary wrote a song. It went like this: **"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation."**

**HOST 1:** **"He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors,"** Luke 1:46–55 (NIV).

**HOST 2:** It's easy to look at Mary's story in hindsight and agree with her decision to express joy in this moment. She was about to be a key player in the life of the most religiously and historically significant human to ever walk the earth. I mean, she was Mary, mother of Jesus! God was about to change the world and she got to be a part of that.

**HOST 1:** But before we get too future-minded with our perspective, remember, Mary was a real teenage girl with real emotions having a real baby. She would experience a real pregnancy with all the discomfort and labor pains that came with it.

**HOST 2:** She would have to deal with real looks of judgment and assumptions from people who didn't know her story and simply saw an unmarried girl with a huge pregnant belly.

**HOST 1:** Mary had a real person in her life named Joseph who would have to find a way to understand the situation she had gotten herself into. She probably had plans, dreams, and hopes for her future before the angel showed up, and now all of those would have to be paused, altered, or sacrificed.

**HOST 2:** Yet Mary trusted that God had good things in store — not only for herself, but for all of Israel and even for the whole world. In her song, Mary imagined a future where the coming Savior — her unborn child — would restore the world, fix the broken things, fill the hungry, bring order to chaos, and perform mighty acts. But all of that would require major sacrifices on her part.

**HOST 1:** Mary believed that these promises of goodness and restoration were worth whatever sacrifices she had to make along the way. On that very first Christmas, Mary gave up her own plans in order to say “yes” to God’s plan of restoration. Because of Mary’s sacrifice, Jesus was born.

**HOST 2:** Jesus grew up and spent a few years teaching and ministering to people, until he was killed by the religious and political leaders of his day. This was a sacrifice too. Jesus willingly laid down his life for the sake of all people.

**HOST 1:** By coming to earth as Jesus, God also made a sacrifice. From the beginning of the plan for restoration, God knew Jesus’s story would ultimately end in pain and suffering, but that sacrifice was necessary to bring about a new way of living and relating to God.

**HOST 2:** We too are called to consider what it means to sacrifice. A man named Paul, who had sacrificed his pre-Jesus career and relationships to become a missionary and share the good news of restoration with people all over the world, wrote these words a few decades after Jesus’s death and resurrection: **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship,”** Romans 12:1 (NIV).

**HOST 1:** Now, our sacrifice is not a way to get God to like us or make ourselves more worthy of the restoration Jesus offers. God loves us just the way we are. And this isn’t about sacrifice for sacrifice’s sake. Instead, we’re invited to sacrifice parts of ourselves for the sake of others. We’re invited to sacrifice as a part of God’s grand restoration process.

**HOST 2:** Just like Mary. Just like Jesus. Just like Paul. Today, God is inviting you and me to be part of God’s restoration plans. And that often happens through our own living sacrifice.

**HOST 1:** Does the Christmas story impact our present world? Yes! But only when you and I accept this invitation to be part of God’s restoration plan.

**HOST 2:** When we take Paul’s advice to offer our bodies as “living sacrifices,” we’re making a decision to use whatever we have and whatever we hold dear to bring God’s restoration to a broken world.

**HOST 1:** So what do you have to sacrifice? We can't provide an exhaustive list because the options are never-ending, but here are a few thoughts to consider. 1) **You can offer your position or privilege.** If you're in a position of influence within a company, family, country, or wherever you may live, work, or study, you have the ability to make things right for those around you. It may not feel like much to use your seemingly small platform to treat people with equality or pay people well, but your ability to utilize this position matters.

**HOST 2: 2) You can give your time and resources.** These things are valuable and shouldn't be thrown aside. If you can invest in a community in need or a relationship that's struggling, it's a sacrifice worth making.

**HOST 1: 3) You can sacrifice your comfort and reputation.** How would you respond to hurting people if you weren't afraid of what people would think about where you stand socially, politically, or otherwise? Maybe by sacrificing your desire to protect your reputation you could bring restoration to circles you've otherwise avoided.

**HOST 2: 4) You can give up your need for recognition.** We all want to be honored, get the credit, and have the final say. But what if instead, you elevated and amplified the voices of others, especially the voices and stories of others who are typically on the margins of society.

**HOST 1:** The world is still full of brokenness and people who need someone to help them find the restoration promised by God. **Christmas reminds us we have a role to play in God's restoration plan.**



# MARKETING

## CHECKLIST



### BEFORE THE SERIES

#### ✓ TO DO

	Customize your <b>Group Leader Hub</b> web pages for this series.
	Customize and send the <b>Group Leader Email</b> for this series. Then text them a link to the email.
	Review the <b>suggested Social Media Posts and Captions</b> for this series.
	Post the <b>Title Graphic</b> on social media with this caption:  We're starting a new series about what Christmas means in a broken world. It's called Restored. See you there!

### AFTER SESSION 1

#### ✓ TO DO

	Post a short clip from the Teaching Video for Session 1 on social media.
	Post the <b>Big Idea Graphic</b> for Session 1 on social media with this caption:  In session one of Restored we saw how God's plan for restoration has been in motion since the very beginning. We messed things up, but <b>our broken world will be restored.</b>
	Customize and send the <b>Group Leader Email</b> for this series. Then text them a link to the email.



## AFTER SESSION 2

### ✓ TO DO

	Post a short clip from the Teaching Video for Session 2 on social media.
	Post the <b>Big Idea Graphic</b> for Session 2 on social media with this caption:  In session two of Restored we saw why Christmas is good news for people who've been broken (and who've broken things) – because <b>what's broken in us can be restored.</b>
	Customize and send the <b>Group Leader Email</b> for this series. Then text them a link to the email.

## AFTER SESSION 3

### ✓ TO DO

	Post a short clip from the Teaching Video for Session 3 on social media.
	Post the <b>Big Idea Graphic</b> for Session 3 on social media with this caption:  In session three of Restored we met people from Scripture who held onto hope when it seemed impossible. <b>Christmas reminds us hope can be restored.</b>
	Customize and send the <b>Group Leader Email</b> for this series. Then text them a link to the email.

## AFTER SESSION 4

### ✓ TO DO

	Post a short clip from the Teaching Video for Session 4 on social media.
	Post the <b>Big Idea Graphic</b> for Session 4 on social media with this caption:  In the final session of Restored we saw God invite ordinary people to be part of some extraordinary plans. <b>Christmas reminds us we have a role to play in God's restoration plan.</b>
	Get ready for the next series!



# SOCIAL MEDIA

## POSTS & CAPTIONS



Need some help deciding what to post on social media before and during this series? Here's our suggestion: each session, share the media we've provided in your Graphics and Videos folder using the captions below.



### BEFORE THE SERIES

We're starting a new series about what Christmas means in a broken world. It's called Restored. See you there!

### AFTER SESSION 1



#### BIG IDEA (SESSION 1)

In session one of Restored we saw how God's plan for restoration has been in motion since the very beginning. We messed things up, but **our broken world will be restored.**

### AFTER SESSION 2



#### BIG IDEA (SESSION 2)

In session two of Restored we saw why Christmas is good news for people who've been broken (and who've broken things) — because **what's broken in us can be restored.**

### AFTER SESSION 3



#### BIG IDEA (SESSION 3)

In session three of Restored we met people from Scripture who held onto hope when it seemed impossible. **Christmas reminds us hope can be restored.**

### AFTER SESSION 4



#### BIG IDEA (SESSION 4)

In the final session of Restored we saw God invite ordinary people to be part of some extraordinary plans. **Christmas reminds us we have a role to play in God's restoration plan.**

