



## Day 1

### S.O.A.P. – “Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer”

#### Conversation Starter

What has been the most important “spiritual experience” so far in your life?

#### Scripture Observation (5 minutes)

##### Scripture:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. **Luke 1:26-38 NIV**

#### Application (5 minutes)

What is the most surprising aspect of this story to you—God’s kind approach? God’s plan? Mary’s situation in life? Mary’s response?

Consider Mary’s response: surprise/fear, questioning, acceptance, willingness to obey. Take a moment to be thankful for Mary’s willingness to serve in the face of a nearly unimaginable situation.

How has God made you aware of his call to obey in your life? What has been your response so far? Is there any step of faith currently being asked of you now?

God chose Mary to deliver Jesus’ physical body to the world. God chose Christians to be the “body of Christ” in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. How will this change how you approach God, yourself, and others today?

#### Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, thank you for sending your son to this world and empowering and equipping Mary to succeed in serving as his mother. Teach us to follow her example of willingness to serve faithfully, despite questions, fears, and the vast unknown of the future.



## Day 2

### S.O.A.P. – “Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer”

#### Conversation Starter

What do you “magnify” in your life?

#### Scripture Observation (5 minutes)

##### Scripture:

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” And Mary said:

“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.

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.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. **Luke 1:39-56 NIV**

##### Sermon Insights:

When we magnify God – when we begin to see how great, how good, how holy God is – it changes the way we look at the rest of life. Problems look different, fears get smaller, worries begin to fade, the future becomes less intimidating—and it is life transforming.

#### Application (5 minutes)

Elizabeth understandably praises Mary for her faith. Mary’s response? She immediately focuses on praising the Lord! Mary was simply overwhelmed by God’s goodness, power, and actions. Consider Mary’s situation in life and compassion towards her desperate and oppressed people. What means the most to you out of what Mary magnified about God?

Does this challenge your view of God? Why or why not?

How is God different from people when it comes to being “powerful” and “in control”?

#### Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, thank you that you look out for the weakest and the most vulnerable, and that you not only invite everyone into your family, you actively seek out the ones who are hurt, lost, lonely, and missing. Fill us with your compassion and power and willingness to care for those who are hurting most.



## Day 3

### S.O.A.P. – “Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer”

#### Conversation Starter

What do you “store up” and “ponder” in your heart?

#### Scripture Observation (5 minutes)

**Scripture:** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. **But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. **Luke 2:1-20 NIV**

**Sermon Insights:** The Roman Empire was proclaiming the “good news” (“Gospel”) that Augustus Caesar was the “son of God,” the “bringer of peace,” and even used the word for “savior” because of how they described his reign in the middle of a civil war. It is no accident that the same language that was commonly used to describe the emperor is being used for Jesus. This is all foreshadowing what was about to happen in the world—a “system” is about to be overthrown.

#### Application (5 minutes)

Who was closer to being truly close to God and satisfied in life: impoverished sheep herders or mighty kings?

Mary “treasured” and “pondered” these things. She knew she was a part of something amazing God was doing. Where do you fit into what God is doing today? Are you faithfully living out your role with hope?

What do you find yourself thinking about most? Is that a good sign, or do you need to reorient your focus?

#### Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, if we’re not careful, we’ll forget that a cozy little manger scene on the mantle does not adequately describe the chaotic and volatile world in which you sent Jesus. Thank you for allowing us to be a part of your Kingdom on earth!



## Day 4

### S.O.A.P. – “Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer” Conversation Starter

What is the best command, in your opinion, that Jesus ever gave?

### Scripture Observation (5 minutes)

#### Scripture:

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.

God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.” **Matthew 5:1-12 NLT**

#### Sermon Insights:

Jesus ushered in a whole new system, a new world order, and an inverse way of thinking. Christians, are we living this out in our world?

### Application (5 minutes)

The original word for “God blesses” may be translated, “Happy are those who...” Someone once said that each of these “beatitudes” only make sense if God is involved. Agree/disagree?

Which of the beatitudes do you like most? Least?

Which of the beatitudes is the most difficult for you personally?

Who in your life most exemplifies these traits?

### Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, teach us to walk your paths. Help us build trust where we otherwise could be fearful. Thank you for sending Jesus to make a new world!



## Day 5

### S.O.A.P. – “Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer”

#### Conversation Starter

Who are the three most influential people in your life?

#### Scripture Observation (5 minutes)

**Scripture (a continuation of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount”):**

“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

“But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven! **Matthew 5:13-20 NLT**

#### Sermon Insights:

Jesus began to unfold a whole new system, a wholly different world order, in what is perhaps the most influential, most important, most studied, and most remembered talk in all human history called the “Sermon on the Mount.”

#### Application (5 minutes)

Salt can make otherwise bland food enjoyable and desirable. How are Christians supposed to help people find true joy and fulfillment in this life? How does God uniquely use you to encourage others?

Light helps us navigate the darkness with safety and clarity. How are Christians supposed to bring clarity and truth to a dark world?

When Jesus told his followers they must have “better righteousness” than the “teachers of religious law” and Pharisees, that sounded confusing and impossible. These were the experts at reading the Bible, praying, and being religious. How could you become more righteous than they were? The answer is in the first part of the Sermon on the Mount: God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, who mourn, who are humble, who hunger and thirst for justice, who are merciful, whose hearts are pure, who work for peace, and who are persecuted for doing right. These require humility, vulnerability and faith—things powerful religious people tend to avoid at all costs. Let’s be honest...we avoid these things naturally too, don’t we? Take a look again...are you willing to let God develop humility, vulnerability and faith in you?

#### Prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, thank you for sharing with me the path to peace through Jesus’ words and example. Help me trust you by growing in humility, vulnerability, and faith.