Session 1: Emmanuel, God with Us

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: God has sent his son to dispel our darkness, saving us from sin and death.

Head Change: To know Jesus promises his presence to anyone who receives him.

Heart Change: To feel God's nearness in every circumstance.

Life Change: To rely on Christ, even when our path is dark and unclear.

OPEN

What do you love most about Christmas? What holiday traditions do you get most excited about this time of year?

Christmas is one of our most important and beloved holidays, but it takes place during the darkest time of the year. That is a strange contrast, but it's not an accident. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. It reminds us that God has entered our wintry darkness of sin to bring us light, love, joy, and peace. Jesus has come so that we might be with God now and into eternity.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how J.D. answers the following questions.

What is the meaning of the name Emmanuel? Why is it an important name for Jesus?

What other names does God give to Jesus?

Watch Session 1: *Emmanuel, God With Us* (11 minutes).

REVIEW

In the book of Isaiah, God uses multiple names to describe Jesus. God calls him Emmanuel, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, and Everlasting Father. These names are rich with meaning—meaning that will change your life. In this first session, J.D. Greear discussed the first name, Emmanuel, and the powerful truth of God being with us.

Emmanuel literally means "God with us." **In what ways have you recognized that God is with you? What, if anything, can make you think he is not with you?**

It can be easy to feel disconnected from the people and promises of the Old Testament. But, while we are not in the same situation as the ancient Israelites, we all are living in some kind of darkness, be it the darkness of fear, betrayal, illness, loss, or hopelessness. **What darkness are you currently living in?**

What in your life do you wish God would rescue you from?

Think about God's promise to his people. He promised he would send Emmanuel, God with us. J.D. said that if God is with you, he will work everything out for your good and his glory. This is good news! **In what ways would your life change if you believed that every situation would work out for your good?**

What could it look like for you to glorify God in your current circumstances?

J.D. said Jesus took on death so that we would only have to experience its shadow. If you trust Christ, your current darkness is passing. **In what ways does seeing your darkness as a passing shadow change your perspective on your circumstances?**

If you are not a Christian or are just learning about Jesus, the name Emmanuel is an invitation. God came because our lives were shrouded in darkness. If you feel like you are in darkness, know that for *you* a child has been born. To *you* a son has been given. Jesus came for *you* in your darkness. **What, in your mind, makes Jesus's arrival good news? What questions do you have about Jesus?**

J.D. taught us that all of our greatest problems are rooted in a separation from God. We often look for God's gifts apart from him. **What are you hoping for most in life? What "light" do you wish for more than anything else?**

God has not abandoned us to darkness. He knows what we need and sent Jesus to enter our darkness so that we could receive his light. **How might what you long for be fulfilled in Jesus?**

The birth of Jesus is a gift of light in our darkness. But like any other gift, you must receive it. **Do you believe that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with you? What would it look like to live as if God is with you?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

This series focuses on the names of Jesus in the book of Isaiah. These names were given during a very uncertain time in Israel's history, when God's people were threatened by all sorts of dangers. They cried out to God for help and he promised to send the Messiah, Jesus, to rescue them from their darkness. This promise is as relevant to us today as it was when Isaiah was written.

You may feel pretty distant from Isaiah and the ancient Israelites, but when we read God's promises you will find that they comfort and encourage you, no matter what darkness you are going through today.

Read Isaiah 7:10–14.

Ahaz, the leader of God's people, is facing down two armies, one from Syria and one from Ephraim. In the midst of this chaos, God promises Ahaz that neither army will overcome his people. It seemed like an unbelievable, even overly optimistic promise. **Put yourself in Ahaz's shoes: what are his options at this point in the story?**

In verse 10, God goes a step further, offering to give Ahaz a sign to confirm his promise. **Why do you think God offered Ahaz a sign to confirm his promise?**

What biblical promises are difficult for you to believe?

Ahaz, surprisingly, refuses the confirming sign. He passes on God's offer, thinking that he is being tricked into "testing the Lord." **When have you felt like asking God for something is improper? Do you ever feel like you are bothering God? Why?**

In the Old Testament, asking God for a confirming sign showed that a person didn't trust God. If God made a promise, he kept it. Asking for a sign before trusting his Word was essentially like yelling, "Prove it," to God.

But here, God *offered* Ahaz a sign—Ahaz's choice of a miracle. God wanted Ahaz to have unshakable faith in his promise. All Ahaz needed to do was pick his miracle but instead he said, "I will not." This doesn't prove Ahaz's righteousness; it shows us he didn't think he needed God's help. **Do you ever feel like you don't need God's help with something? What situations do you feel like you need to handle on your own?**

God does not rescind his offer but chooses what Ahaz's sign will be: a child. The sign is strange; Ahaz is asking for protection and God gives him a baby. **If you were Ahaz, what would you think of a baby as a sign?**

God was not playing a cruel joke on Ahaz. Instead, he was offering Ahaz and his people exactly what they needed: his presence. The child, Emmanuel, is a promise: God is with us. **What good does God's presence in your current circumstance offer?**

In what ways is his presence the best gift to face your darkness?

The promise God gave to Ahaz in Isaiah 7 is extended to us (Matthew 1:22–23). God has seen us in our distress and darkness and sent us a miracle, a child called Emmanuel. He did not come to defeat the armies of Syria and Ephraim but our true enemies, sin and death. In Jesus, that promise is offered to us, the church. God has met our true need by wiping away our sin and offering us his presence. **What encouragement does God's provision give you in your current circumstances?**

No matter what you are going through today, God offers you his presence. He wants to be with you so that you can have peace and assurance of his goodness. **In what ways do you need God today? This week?**

In what ways does God's presence feel like enough, or not enough, for what you are going through?

LAST WORD

In the dead of winter, when we are surrounded by darkness, we celebrate the light of Jesus. We gather in decorated homes to give one another good gifts as signs of our love.

This is Christmas: that in our darkness and spiritual coldness, God has sent light into the world and has given us the gift of his Son as a sign of his love. More than that, Jesus took on our sin, rose from the grave so that we might be saved, and promises to be with us until he returns.

Christmas is not just a sentimental holiday; it is the good news that for us a child is born, a Son has been given, and his name is Emmanuel, God with us.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Read Matthew 1:18–23 and 28:16–20. Take note of the promise of Emmanuel in both Jesus's birth and Great Commission. He came to us and is with us even now.

Pray: Pray to see God's presence in your life more clearly. Even though he may feel far away, his presence never leaves us.

Memorize: Memorize John 1:11–12, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

An additional Christmas resource from J.D. Greear you may find helpful is his book Searching for Christmas.

Session 2: Wonderful Counselor

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, eager to guide us from darkness into his light.

Head Change: To know no problem is too big for Jesus to handle and no sin too bad that he will stop loving us.

Heart Change: To feel confident in approaching Jesus for counsel and guidance.

Life Change: To tell Jesus our fears, sorrows, and sins so that we might be healed.

OPEN

Are you more likely to ask for too much advice or to never ask for advice at all? Why?

Some of us are eager to ask for advice but often feel paralyzed at the prospect of making a decision. We want to confirm the decisions we are about to make are smart and can struggle with decision anxiety. Some of us rarely ask for advice, thinking that it reveals some kind of weakness.

When we look at Jesus, we find a Wonderful Counselor who is eager to guide us. But we must turn to him in honesty and be willing to act on whatever guidance he gives us.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how J.D. answers the following questions.

What is the deeper Hebrew meaning of Wonderful Counselor?

What three questions must we answer if we want to be helped by Jesus, our Wonderful Counselor?

Watch Session 2: *Wonderful Counselor* (10 minutes).

REVIEW

Christmas can be a very difficult season for many people. It can highlight the loss of a loved one, reawaken old family arguments, and make us painfully aware of our loneliness. But even in that darkness, we can have hope because Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor.

What, if anything, makes Christmas difficult for you? What do you do to cope with the difficulty?

In Isaiah 9:6, God calls Jesus our Wonderful Counselor. In Hebrew, Wonderful Counselor roughly translates to "a guide whose goodness goes beyond words." **In what situations in your life do you want help from a good guide? What kind of help are you looking for?**

J.D. taught us that while God cares about our immediate problems and is ready to help us for our good and his glory, he is more concerned with taking care of the root of all of our problems: our separation from him. Think about the way you pray. Sometimes, we only pray when we need

temporary, situational help from God. **What situations cause you to pray? What would it look like for you to pray for God's nearness in your current circumstances?**

It is easy to think of a counselor as someone who simply listens to and sympathizes with our problems. But, as J.D. taught us, Jesus is much more than a sympathizer—he is an authoritative guide. Jesus not only hears and sympathizes with you but is also able to guide and rescue you. **In what ways might your prayers change knowing that Jesus can hear and sympathize with you? That he can guide and rescue you?**

J.D. pointed out that all of Jesus's miracles were meant to fix problems. These weren't small problems either—he fed hundreds of hungry people, healed incurable diseases and conditions, and silenced a storm that threatened to kill his disciples. There is no problem too big for Jesus. **What problems in your life seem too big to be fixed? How have you prayed about these problems?**

J.D. asked three questions we need to answer before approaching our Wonderful Counselor. The first is: Are you ready to be honest with him, even about the painful and secret parts of your life? **What worries you about talking about, or even praying about, your secret sins or problems?**

There is no problem Jesus cannot deal with. He has authority over all of your problems. On top of that, there is no sin too dark, no secret so bad, that he will turn you away or stop loving you. He wants to step into your problems. **What reassurance does it give you that you can neither stump nor scare away Jesus?**

The second question J.D. asked was, "Do you want to be healed?" Many of us want to be healed but may not want to change. **What parts of your life are off-limits to change? What would you do if God asked you to change those parts of your life?**

The final question J.D. asked us was, "Are you ready to do what Jesus says?" Jesus is our guide, and he will lead us by his Word and his Spirit. **Do you trust him enough to let him call the shots? What does it look like for you to trust and do what Jesus says?**

Jesus has more to give us than we often imagine, but we must give up doing things our way. **Now that you have thought more deeply about Jesus as our Wonderful Counselor, in what ways might your relationship with him grow?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

It may be intimidating to approach God with your problems. What if he ignores you? What if he rejects you? What if you only receive judgement instead of mercy? These questions may seem reasonable, but they stem from thinking that God is like an angry boss, not a Wonderful Counselor. When we approach God with our problems, our sins, and our hopes, he sympathizes with our weaknesses and is eager to help us.

Read Hebrews 4:12–16.

Verses 12–13 teach us about God's omniscience. God knows everything, including our motivations. **What worries you about God knowing everything about you?**

For some of us, Jesus is the last person we want to talk to after we sin. He knows everything, even our selfish motivations for doing good. But when we approach God's throne, we don't find disappointment or judgment. Verses 14–16 show us a very different picture of Jesus than we might expect. **What do we receive when we approach the throne of God? What stands out to you about the character of Jesus in verses 14–16?**

Jesus came as a person, just like us. He knows what it means to be tempted, to struggle, and to suffer. As a result, he sympathizes with, or suffers alongside, us and extends mercy and grace whenever we need it. **What does it mean to you that Jesus sympathizes with your weaknesses and pains?**

Jesus is not waiting on his throne to smite us. He invites us to his throne so that he can give us grace. He knows what you are going through and is eager to meet your needs. He is our God and our Wonderful Counselor. **In what ways does Jesus's empathy change the way you think about approaching him?**

What can you bring to Jesus this week? Where in your life do you need grace and mercy from the throne of Christ?

LAST WORD

Jesus wants us to come to him with our problems, our joys, our questions, and our hopes. He is both willing and able to help and heal us. But we have to come to him in full honesty, be willing to change, and be ready to do what he says. In him, we have a guide better than words can describe.

Loosen your grip on your secrets, your fears, your determination to follow your own counsel and

allow Jesus to guide you. When you hand over your life to Jesus, light will dawn in your darkness.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Read John 5:1–15. Examine the way Jesus treats the paralyzed man. Think about your problems and ask yourself, "Do I want to be made well?"

Pray: Pour your heart out to God. Tell him what scares, bothers, and concerns you. Confess your sins to him. Then take time to read his Word and listen for his guidance.

Memorize: Memorize Hebrews 4:15–16, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. Instead, we have one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet he never sinned. So let us keep on coming boldly to the throne of grace, so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

An additional Christmas resource from J.D. Greear you may find helpful is his book Searching for Christmas.

Session 3: Everlasting Father

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: In Jesus, we find a father who pursues us with unending and redeeming love.

Head Change: To know our Everlasting Father sees us as his beloved children.

Heart Change: To feel seen, known, accepted, and loved by our Everlasting Father.

Life Change: To behold God's great love for us.

OPEN

What is your favorite memory of your father or someone who was a father figure to you?

Fathers are incredibly influential in our lives. Even if a father is absent, it can change the course of a child's life. Sadly, many of us have wounds from our fathers that have never fully healed. Our fathers loom large in our lives, to the point that we are even tempted to think of God as just a bigger, more powerful version of our earthly fathers. But this is totally backwards. God, our Everlasting Father, is far greater than you can ever imagine and redeems us where our earthly father failed.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's

teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how J.D. answers the following questions.

What are the four different types of fathers J.D. described?

In what ways do our views of our earthly fathers affect our view of God?

What type of father is God?

Watch Session 3: *Everlasting Father* (11 minutes).

REVIEW

We are all deeply influenced by our fathers, for good and for bad. Our relationship, or lack of a relationship, with our fathers influences our view of God, *the* Everlasting Father. We often project the hurts and hang-ups we received from our earthly fathers onto God. But, as J.D. taught, we need to flip that perspective. Instead of seeing God as a heavenly version of our earthly fathers, we need to see our earthly fathers—in their faults and in their goodness—as flawed representatives of our Everlasting Father.

What is/was your earthly father like?

What kind of relationship did you have with your father as a child? As an adult?

In what ways do you want to be like your earthly father?

What do you wish you could change about your earthly father?

The good news we find in Jesus is that our heavenly Father is far greater than our earthly fathers. Even the best father is just a shadow of

who God is as our Father. J.D. mentioned a few different types of fathers in the video, each one very unlike our Everlasting Father.

The first type of earthly father J.D. discussed was the Never Satisfied Dad. This type of father is a task master, a father whose expectations we can never meet. **In what ways have you viewed God as a task master?**

If you see God as a Never Satisfied Dad, what do you think he sees when he looks at you?

Our Everlasting Father is not holding a list of our failures, shortcomings, and unmet to-dos. To show us an accurate picture, J.D. referenced Zephaniah 3:17:

"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

Instead of piling work and expectations on to you, God "quiets you with love." **In what ways does this verse shape your perspective of God?**

We might also see God as a Time-Bomb Dad, slow to show affection and quick anger. **If you see God as a Time-Bomb Dad, what do you think God wants from you?**

God is not a Time-Bomb Dad, ready to blow up when we don't meet his expectations. God, your Father, looks for ways to love you. J.D. used Psalm 23:6 to show us what God's love looks like: "Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

You don't have to fearfully avoid God. He does not follow you with judgment and simmering anger. His eager love should make us want to be with him, rather than hide from him. **What does it mean to you that God's love is characterized by goodness and mercy?**

The third type of father J.D. talked about was the Emotionally Distant Dad, the kind of father who was around your whole life, but you never were close to. We were made to feel that he was too busy for us or that we were not a priority in his life. **What do you think God's priorities are?**

God loves us so much that he could not stand being separated from us. He sent his Son to die in our place so that we might spend eternity with him. God actively works to be near and known by you. **In what ways have you sought to be near and known by our Everlasting Father?**

The final earthly father J.D. taught on was the Absent Father. This father left us with a life soundtrack of rejection and unimportance. **When you think about your own life's soundtrack, what does it say about you? What does it say when you meet your goals? What does it say when you fail?**

Jesus is our Everlasting Father. Jesus did not abandon us when we—his enemies—killed him. Our sin rested on his shoulders and he did not walk away. Even death cannot separate us from him. You are more important to Jesus than you can imagine. **What does it mean to you that Jesus is your Everlasting Father?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Read the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32.

If you grew up in church, you have probably heard or read this parable before. This time, let's focus on the father and his love for his wayward son. **What surprises you about the love of the father in this parable?**

In verses 18–19, the younger son practices an apology he plans on giving to his father. **Have you ever practiced an apology before asking your father's (or your father figure's) forgiveness? What worried you about approaching him? How did he react to confession and repentance?**

In verses 20–23 the father does not wait for the son's apology before kissing him and welcoming him home. In fact, he does not even let the son finish his apology and orders a feast of celebration in his son's honor. **According to verse 24, what is going through the father's head?**

This parable is Jesus's picture of God's love for us. Our Father rushes out to meet us with love and celebration. **In what ways do you feel like you have to earn God's love or make him appreciate you?**

What does it make you think or feel knowing God loves you and simply wants you to "come home"?

This is the only parable where Jesus does not end with an application. This parable is meant to make us recognize God's love for us as a restored son or daughter. We are meant to sit in awe of God's great love for us. **What makes you question God's love for you?**

What could you do today to, as J.D. said, behold God's love for you?

LAST WORD

It is easy to think that God is like our earthly fathers or father figures. But that perspective is backwards; on their best day, our fathers are hazy pictures of the majesty of our Everlasting Father. God is not distant. He is not angry. He is not waiting for us to get our act together.

God, your Father, loves you deeply. He wants to be with you. He sent Jesus so that you might call him Father and be called his son, his daughter. He is your Everlasting Father.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Read Luke 15:11–32. J.D. pointed out that this is the only parable without an application. As a result, we are simply meant to "behold" our loving father. As you read this passage, make a note of everything the father does so that you might "behold" all of his goodness.

Pray: Pray that God would show you his goodness as your heavenly Father. Ask that his love might be overwhelmingly apparent to you as you seek to know him more closely.

Memorize: Memorize 1 John 3:1a, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

An additional Christmas resource from J.D. Greear you may find helpful is his book Searching for Christmas.

Session 4: I AM

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: God meets our deepest needs and is our ultimate source of satisfaction.

Head Change: To know Jesus is our provider and is sufficient for our greatest needs and brokenness.

Heart Change: To feel overwhelmed by the provision God freely offers to us.

Life Change: To trust in Jesus as your source of salvation.

OPEN

How would you describe yourself? What names or descriptions do you think are true of you?

In this series, we have looked at what J.D. calls the names of salvation. They are the ways God described Jesus through the prophet Isaiah. As we finish this series, J.D. explains how we should put our faith in Jesus when we are in need.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how J.D. answers the following questions:

What is the importance of the name I AM?

What does it mean to "take the Lord's name"?

Watch Session 4: *I AM* (9 minutes).

REVIEW

The name Yahweh, meaning "I am," was the name God gave himself—he used it over 6,500 times to refer to himself in the Old Testament. It may seem like a strange name, but through it we see that God is the fulfillment to our deepest needs. He is the source and supply for our security, courage, strength, and salvation.

In what ways do you feel insufficient for, vulnerable toward, or anxious about your current circumstances?

In this session, J.D. mentioned a few times when God came to his people in need and said "I AM." He is our healer, our sanctifier, our righteousness, the ever present one, our shepherd, our provider, and our defender. **In what ways do you need God today?**

When we pray, we can sometimes ask only for the things we think we need to solve our problems but forget to ask God to be our I AM. **In what ways can you seek God's presence and ask for his involvement in your current circumstances?**

Jesus also used the name I AM for himself. He called himself the bread of life, living water, the door to salvation, the good shepherd, the way, the truth, and the life. In our greatest areas of brokenness and pain, our needs are met in Jesus. **What do you feel like you need right now to be secure, happy, or whole? In what ways could Jesus meet that desire?**

J.D. finished this series with two questions, the first of which he directed towards Christians: "If you know Jesus, are you living in the fullness of his name?" Jesus wants us to trust him as Emmanuel, our Wonderful Counselor, and our Everlasting Father. Think back on the names of Jesus we have studied so far. **In what ways can you trust Jesus more deeply as Emmanuel, God with us? As your Wonderful Counselor? Your Everlasting Father?**

You have access to all of who Jesus is. The great I AM is the power of life in us. **What can you do right now to give your present troubles and shortcomings to God, your I AM?**

The second question J.D. asked was directed to those who have not trusted Jesus: What does your heart call Jesus? **Who is Jesus to you? If you were to pray to Jesus, what "name" would you call him?**

The names in this study are the names of salvation. Jesus is Emmanuel, your Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, and your I AM. If you aren't a Christian, consider this question this week: Will you believe on Jesus's name for your salvation?

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Let's take a deeper look at Scripture and figure out how we what it looks like to live "in the fullness of Jesus's name." Read Colossians 3:1–17.

What is the command for Christians in verses 1–4? What do you think it means to be "hidden in Christ"?

If you are a follower of Jesus, you are meant to identify with him. In all the ways that we are weak, he is strong. He is our righteousness and our redeemer. **What does it look like for you to define your identity in Jesus?**

Verses 5–11 describe who we were before trusting Christ. **As you read through these verses, which of the listed characteristics best describe you apart from Jesus?**

Which of these characteristics do you still carry with you? What would it look like for you to put them aside?

Colossians goes on to list who we should be now that we know Jesus. Verses 12–16 describe what it looks like to be hidden in Christ. **Which of these characteristics is most difficult for you to "put on"?**

What can you do to practice that characteristic, especially in times when it is not easy?

What role could your community play in helping you grow in these Christlike characteristics?

Verse 17 ties a bow on this passage by giving us an overarching principle to follow as we seek to be more like Jesus. **What practical steps can you take to remind yourself to do everything in the name of Jesus today? This week?**

In what ways are you giving thanks to God the Father in everything that you do?

LAST WORD

The Advent season is a bright sign pointing to Jesus. In the darkness of winter, a light has dawned. Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given. He is Emmanuel, God with us, so we never have to be alone or afraid. He is our Wonderful Counselor, eager to guide, comfort, and heal us. He is our Everlasting Father who loves us more deeply than we can imagine and longs to be near to us.

Jesus is our I AM. In our greatest deficiencies, brokenness, and darkness he is our way, our truth, and our life. He simply asks we take on his name and live in the fullness of who he is. As we celebrate Christmas—in carols, time with family, decorations, and gift giving—let's look for all of the ways Jesus is the source of our peace, joy, and hope.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Read the Christmas story in Luke 2:1–20. As you do, think of the gift Jesus is to us and the good news this holiday announces.

Pray: Pray that you would take on the names of Jesus for yourself and trust God to be all that you need each day.

Memorize: Memorize Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

An additional Christmas resource from J.D. Greear you may find helpful is his book Searching for Christmas.