

# Talk About It

Small Group Discussion Guide

## Holy Night

December 7-10, 2023

### Start Talking

What Christmas song could you listen to repeatedly, and what song do you never want to hear again?

### Main Idea

We are in Week 2 of our Christmas teaching series titled "Holy Night". Today we are discussing waiting. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in 1928, "Waiting is an art our impatient age and culture has completely forgotten." The same could probably be said of us today! We don't like to wait for traffic lights, lines at a restaurant, and sometimes even microwave ovens! But contrast short-term waiting to longer seasons of longing—waiting and waiting for something that just hasn't happened yet. Or healing over a hurt or loss that hasn't come yet. Israel waited and longed for their Messiah to come. They were subdued under the reign of many other kingdoms during the 400 years between the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and the first book of the New Testament, Matthew. For 400 years, they heard no word from the Lord. No prophets. No signs. Generations of Israelites lived and died for centuries with nothing but faith to pin their hope on. Similarly, many Old Testament figures had seasons of waiting—Jacob worked for Laban for 14 years, Jacob had a dream but was beaten, sold, and imprisoned before the dream was realized, and David waited decades from the time God said he would be king to when it was realized. We have examples to look to, but what do you do in those seasons of longing? What happens to your faith when God's timing and process are completely different than yours? How well do we do, living in the "gap"—the time between the promise and the fulfillment? Does our faith waver and we try to grab back control? Or can we somehow anchor ourselves to the character and promises of God that can buoy our faith during those seasons of waiting? Let's tune into what we can learn about the strength of faith during seasons of waiting!

### Personalize It

1. When did you go through a season of waiting or longing in your life? What was it, how long did it last, how was it fulfilled, and how was your faith impacted as a result?
2. Are you waiting or longing to see something in your life today? In the life of a loved one?
3. In seasons of waiting, why should we keep doing what we know we are supposed to do? What difference is it making?
4. When did God answer one of your prayers in a completely different way or time than you expected?
5. What was the illustration of the grass seeds? How does that relate to seasons of longing and faith?

### Let's Do It! Commit to a step and live it out this week!

1. How well do you know God's promises? Write down at least 3 of His promises (5 is better!) and put them where you will see them this Christmas season—on your mirror, with your money, on the

dashboard of your car, on the refrigerator—places you will see them often so that you will be able to quickly recall and believe them when the next season of waiting and longing comes.

2. Do you need to hear that “God sees you; God loves you; God is near to you”? Who in your life might be in a season of longing right now and needs to hear that, too? God is still present even when He is silent. Pray to ask God if He wants you to share that message with someone.
3. What can you do to anchor yourself to God in the season of waiting? What will you do today to prepare for that season?

## Let's Pray

Father, waiting is hard! And we don't like to do it! We confess that we have allowed the world's culture of impatience to affect our hearts. We have grown complacent in demanding service on our terms and timing. Not just with wait staff or at traffic lights, but when we come to You with our needs. We demand answers and prompt resolution to our questions and our pain. And we sometimes grow a little arrogant and angry when You don't do things our way. We forget Your sovereignty, Your wisdom, and Your love. And that those things together will ALWAYS provide what we need, when we need it, and in the way that we need it. Help us to remember Your promises found throughout Your word so that we can extinguish Satan's lie that You have looked away. Like the Israelites during 400 years of silence, strengthen us to be diligent to do the things we know we should do to keep our faith strong no matter how long the silence lasts because we KNOW that You are still present. Thank you that we can trust Your character, Your promises, and Your love...even while we wait. We love You. Thank You for loving us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Key Scriptures

### Malachi 4:4-6 (NLT)

<sup>4</sup> “Remember to obey the Law of Moses, my servant—all the decrees and regulations that I gave him on Mount Sinai for all Israel. <sup>5</sup> “Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives. <sup>6</sup> His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

### Psalms 27:12-14 (NLT)

<sup>12</sup> Do not let me fall into their hands. For they accuse me of things I've never done; with every breath they threaten me with violence. <sup>13</sup> Yet I am confident I will see the LORD's goodness while I am here in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup> Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.

### Hebrews 11:1-2 (NLT)

<sup>1</sup> Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. <sup>2</sup> Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation.

### Hebrews 10:23-25 (NLT)

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. <sup>24</sup> Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. <sup>25</sup> And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

### Hebrews 11:13 (NLT)

<sup>13</sup> All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.