



THE WAY Sermon Study Guide

Week 6: The Way in Times of Hardship

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Most people know what it's like to receive *that* call—the message that suddenly changes everything. Sometimes it brings joy. Other times it brings heartbreak. Either way, those moments have a way of flipping our worlds upside down.

The Christmas story begins with exactly that kind of disruption. But in the midst of unexpected calls and interrupted plans, comes the promise of hope and an invitation to surrender, obedience and trust. This week we reflect on the story of Mary and Joseph, and consider what faith looks like when life doesn't unfold as expected.

Read Luke 1:26-38

Faithful *surrender* sounds like: “Lord, I’m yours.”

You know the moment when life rings and everything changes. Mary knew it too. Told that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of God, this angelic announcement arrived while she was betrothed—a status that carried serious social and legal implications. Her pregnancy could mean shame, exclusion, and even danger. Yet she received God's word with a simple, brave yes. *“I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.”*

Mary doesn't know how the story will unfold. She simply trusts the One who is calling her. Her response offers a powerful picture of faith—not as blind optimism, but as surrendered trust in the character of God.

1. Can you recall a moment when your plans were unexpectedly disrupted? How did you respond?



2. What emotions do you imagine Mary felt when she received this news? How is her response different from simply ignoring fear or pretending everything is fine?

Read Matthew 1:18-25

Faithful *obedience* takes a step, even when the path is hard.

When Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant, he assumes she has been unfaithful. As a lawful man, he knows he cannot proceed with the marriage under those circumstances, but his decision to quietly break the betrothal reflects a desire to protect Mary from unnecessary harm. Faced with betrayal, Joseph chooses compassion. Before he has clarity, Joseph acts with integrity. And when God speaks through the angel, Joseph responds with obedience.

It wasn't easy or convenient. Obedience will cost Joseph his reputation, comfort and the life he assumed he would have, but *“Joseph did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.”* No argument. No conditions. Just obedience.

1. What stands out to you about Joseph's response to his situation?
2. Can you think of a time when obedience to God felt costly or uncomfortable? What helps you take a step of obedience when the outcome is uncertain?

Read Luke 2:1-7

Faithful endurance means *trusting* God's got you.

If two divine interruptions weren't enough, Mary and Joseph soon face a third, and this one comes without angels or heavenly reassurance. The decree for a census forced Joseph and a heavily pregnant Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This journey was no small inconvenience. Roughly 150 kilometres on foot through rugged terrain, it would have taken at least a week, likely longer. This was not a scenic stroll, but a physically demanding and potentially dangerous journey.

Many scholars suggest they travelled through the Jordan Valley, passing places steeped in Israel's history: the Plains of Jezreel, Beth-shan, the Jordan River crossing, and eventually the Jericho Road, notorious for danger and hardship. Each location echoed stories of battle, loss, rescue, and God's faithfulness across generations. Mary and Joseph were walking through the very landscape of God's promises—with the fulfilment of those promises growing within Mary herself.



Mary and Joseph walked hard miles they didn't choose, carrying promises they couldn't yet see. That is often how endurance feels: ordinary feet on a long road, guided by a faithful God. When the journey is steep, rehearse the stories that steady your soul and let memory become fuel for trust.

1. Where are you experiencing a “long road” season that requires endurance?
2. How does remembering God's past faithfulness shape the way you face present challenges?

Read Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus' time in the wilderness echoes the same pattern seen in Mary and Joseph's story. Faced with hunger, temptation, and isolation, Jesus chooses surrender, obedience, and trust. He refuses shortcuts and remains faithful to God's way.

Scripture makes it clear: faith does not promise ease, but it does promise hope. The manger cradle in Bethlehem points to a cross and an empty tomb, where hope took on flesh, suffered, rose, and now reigns. In every twist and turn of life, our hope in Christ holds us firm. It allows surrender when plans fall apart, obedience when the cost feels high, and trust when the road is long.

1. What does hope mean to you right now?
2. How is Christian hope different from optimism?

Optional reflection activity

Christmas can amplify grief, memories, joy, pressure, and exhaustion all at once. In those moments, the invitation is not to have everything together, but to bring the whole experience—joy and heaviness alike—before God.

Is there a grief or a “what should have been” lament you are carrying? Try writing it in a sentence and bringing it before the Lord. As you listen for His voice, ask Him:

- Where are you calling me to surrender?
- Where are you inviting me to obedience?
- And where do I need to trust that you are faithful, even when I cannot see the outcome?



Suggested Closing Prayer

Lord God, Thank you for your faithfulness through every season.

We bring before you the unexpected parts of our lives—the interruptions, the disappointments, and the long journeys that we did not choose. Help us, like Mary, to say, “Lord, I’m yours.” Give us courage, like Joseph, to obey even when it costs us comfort or certainty. And teach us to trust you when the road feels long and hard.

Remind us that you are with us, that you are at work even when we cannot see it, and that your promises never fail.

In Jesus’ name,
Amen.