

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

It's a Wonderful Life  
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**Main Idea** – While there are several historical inaccuracies associated with the traditional image of the Christmas manger scene, the one truth is that Jesus is at the center. Each of us has an image in our mind about how our life should be. Jesus should be at the center of that image.

### The Christmas story

- One of the most-loved descriptions of the events of Jesus' birth is found in **Luke 2: 10-14 - Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you: you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"**
- Most Christians have an image in their minds of what this scene looked like. This imaginary image has likely been influenced by traditional manger scenes.
- Aside from traditional manger scenes (which contain factual errors) there is much Biblical support for the facts of Jesus' life.
- The book "Science Speaks: An Evaluation of Certain Christian Evidence" by Peter W. Stoner discusses the odds of the over 300 Old Testament prophecies describing the coming Messiah as having happened by random chance. Those odds are so high they are beyond comprehension. In other words, Jesus' birth and life – as predicted by the Old Testament – really did happen by divine purpose, and could not have happened by chance.

### Our image of what our lives should be

- Each of us likely has an image of what our life should be like. This image has been influenced by ideas we have received from different things – such as idealized stories of American life that include successful careers, ample income, nice houses and cars, etc.
- God did not create us to take on an image presented to us by marketing and idealized stories.

## Created in God's image

- The word “image” can be defined as “an exact likeness or semblance.”  
**Genesis 1:26 – Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our *image*, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”**
- God created us to reproduce in ourselves what Jesus is like.
- **2 Corinthians 3: 18 – But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**
- **Romans 8: 29 – For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**
- Jesus came to earth to be an example of how we should live our lives. His image is what we should expect of ourselves, not images and ideas promoted by worldly cultures.

## The traditional manger scene

- The first manger scene was created by St. Francis of Assisi in 1223 to help Christians perceive the importance of Jesus' birth.
- Most Christians know manger scenes contain historical inaccuracies that a careful reading of the Bible will identify.
- However, the important truth of manger scenes is that Jesus is at the center.
- We should live our lives with Jesus at the center. If we put other things at the center of our lives (success, money, education, recognition, family relationships, pets, hobbies, ministry work, etc) we will also be creating a false history.
- We must manage all the different components of our lives as we keep Jesus at the center of everything.
- If we move anything else to the center of our life, that one thing will not be able to withstand the weight of everything else.
- Only Jesus at the center can handle the entirety of life, so that we can sustain all the other things.
- A manger scene looks wrong without Jesus at the center. So, too, will our life look wrong without Him at the center.
- **Colossians 1: 15-17 (NIV) – The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”**

### **How to put Jesus at the center of your life**

1. Invite Jesus to the center of your life. We must consciously ask Him to be the center.
2. Involve Jesus in every aspect of your life.
3. Ignite a fresh passion to know Him more.
  - If you put anything, or anyone, other than Jesus at the center of your life, that thing will not sustain you. Only Jesus at the center can keep your life manageable and productive.
  - The beginning of a new year gives us the opportunity to rededicate ourselves to placing Jesus at the center of our lives.

### **Reflective Questions for It's a Wonderful Life**

1. Can you identify some of the factual errors portrayed in traditional manger scenes? (You may have to consult the gospels of Matthew and Luke.)
2. According to the Scripture passages identified by Pastor Stephen, what does it mean to have been created in God's image?
3. How does this image influence how we are to think about our lives? How is having been created in God's image the same as, and different from, images our American culture presents?
4. If you have been able to place Jesus at the center of your life, how does this influence how you interact with: your family, your job, your identity as an American?