

Life Group Notes 12/21/2025 Mark

Warren The Stars are Brightly Shining Week 4

No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at tbeachhead@comcast.net. Thank you for taking the time.

– *Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.*

Remember: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our heart and guide our discussions.

Leaders: *please pre-read these notes and choose the direction that is appropriate for your group. Scan the detailed questions that follow the AI-generated study questions, to see if you want to add any more detailed questions.*

Be cognizant of your group's time and be sensitive. *Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.*

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 12/21. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. ***The purpose is to minister to one another***

Important: At [the very end of these notes](#), I've included passages that were mentioned in this week's message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week.

Footnotes are added to supply detail, and to enhance the study. Use at your discretion, and know any questions are welcomed. This week's footnotes cover:

1. [On Jesus in our midst.](#)
2. [On the identity of the Magi.](#)

The new format begins with a summary of the notes, followed by study questions. This week, notes in full detail can be found beginning on page 4:

Section I: Summary

Here's "co-pilot's" AI summary of the Sermon Lifegroup Notes:

Key Themes

1. God's Presence and the Importance of Gathering

- The notes open with a reminder that the Holy Spirit brings believers together, referencing Matthew 18:19-20, where Jesus promises to be present when two or three gather in His name. This presence is not symbolic but literal, fulfilling the prophecy of Immanuel—"God with us".

2. The Role of Signs in Scripture

- The study explores how God uses signs—celestial events, dreams, prophets, and wonders—not to entertain, but to confirm and guide people toward Jesus. The Magi's journey, guided by a star, is contrasted with the religious leaders who, despite knowing scripture, missed the significance of the times.

3. Discernment vs. Distraction

- Pastor Mark emphasizes that signs are invitations to seek Jesus, not distractions or ends in themselves. True discernment involves paying attention to what God is doing in the world, interpreting events through the lens of scripture, and responding with faith and readiness.

4. Biblical Warnings and Current Events

- The notes draw parallels between biblical prophecies (Isaiah, Matthew 24, 2 Timothy 3) and current global events: spiritual awakenings, wars, disasters, moral shifts, and polarization. These are presented as signs that require awareness, perseverance, and hope, not fear.

5. The Call to Readiness and Mission

- The ultimate goal is faithfulness, readiness, and being on mission. The return of Jesus is described not as a threat but as a promise, meant to inspire hope and action. Believers are encouraged to stay spiritually awake, rooted in scripture, and active in loving others and sharing hope.

Practical Application

- The notes include SOAP (Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer) journaling prompts for daily study, encouraging participants to engage with specific passages throughout the week.
- There are follow-up actions: praying with someone, recording perceived "signs of the times," and reflecting on personal takeaways and steps for perseverance.

Notable Quotes

- "The signs are invitations...not explanations. The sign is not the thing itself. The sign is only to point us to Jesus. If your attention is drawn with fascination towards an event, and is not more attracted to Jesus, it's a distraction."
- "Discernment is not about getting more information. It's about paying attention."
- "For believers, the return of Jesus is not a threat, it's a promise."

This summary captures the heart of the week's study: to be attentive to God's signs, rooted in scripture, and ready to respond with faith, hope, and love as the world awaits Christ's return

Section II: Study questions**Opening Reflection****1. Gathering in His Name:**

- What does Matthew 18:19-20 mean to you personally? How have you experienced God's presence when believers gather together?
- Why is it important for Christians to come together in prayer and fellowship?

2. God Among Us:

- Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:10-14) speaks of Immanuel, "God with us." How does this promise shape your understanding of God's closeness today?
- How does this prophecy relate to what Jesus told His disciples?
- What do you notice about King Ahaz's response to God's offer of a sign?
- Why might someone reject God's invitation?

Signs and Discernment**3. Looking for Signs:**

- Pastor Mark said, "We look for the signs in the weather more often than we look for the signs in scripture." What does this mean to you? Is it true in your life?
- How does God communicate to us today through signs? Can you share examples from your own experience?

4. Scriptural Signs:

- In Matthew 16:1-4, why did the Pharisees miss the signs Jesus was showing them? What can blind us to God's activity in our own lives?
- What were the Magi seeking, and how did their approach differ from the religious leaders?

5. Distraction vs. Discernment:

- Pastor Mark said, "The signs are invitations...not explanations. The sign is not the thing itself. The sign is only to point us to Jesus." How can we avoid being distracted by signs and instead let them draw us closer to Christ?
- What does true discernment look like in your life?

Application to Today**6. Signs of the Times:**

- What global or celestial events have stirred spiritual conversations for you recently?
- How do you interpret current events in light of biblical prophecy?

7. Hope and Readiness:

- Pastor Mark teaches that the signs of Jesus' return are meant to produce hope, not fear. How does this perspective affect your outlook on the future?
- What steps can you take to stay spiritually awake and ready, as described in Matthew 24:42-44?

8. Mission and Transformation:

- How does staying rooted in scripture transform your life and your group's discussions?
- Pastor Mark said, "If Jesus is coming back then loving people and sharing hope matters more than ever." What practical ways can you live this out?

Personal Reflection and Prayer**9. Responding to the Signs:**

- What is one thing you feel God is saying to you through this study? How will you respond?
- Take time to pray together, asking for discernment and readiness to respond to God's signs in your lives.

Section III: Complete study notes

Pastor Mark began again reminding us that we are here because the Holy Spirit brought us together. Look up Matthew 18: ¹⁹Again, I tell you truly that if two of you on the earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three gather together in My name, there am I among them. _

1. What do you see?
2. Why is it important for Christians to come together?
3. Why is He Whom God raised from the dead residing with us?
4. Look at Isaiah's prophecy in chapter seven: ¹⁰*Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹"Ask for a sign from the LORD your God, whether from the depths of Sheol or the heights of heaven." ¹²But Ahaz replied, "I will not ask; I will not test the LORD." ¹³Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God as well? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will be with child and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel."* (Note: *Immanuel* means "God among us/in our midst.") What do you notice about wicked King Ahaz's "religious" response to Isaiah in verse 12?
5. What is God offering Ahaz? Why would Ahaz reject it?
6. Is the sign given, notwithstanding? Who is the sign for, then?
7. What do you notice about Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus' promise above?
8. Mark went on to prophesy that you would receive answers because you came and made yourself available. Explain.
9. Do you have a testimony?
10. What does that imply about the time you take with these notes?
11. Record and share new insights and ideas that you receive from this effort.

Pastor began the message saying, "We look for the signs in the weather more often than we look for the signs in scripture."

1. What did he mean?
2. Is this true about you? How often do you look at the weather app?
3. From what app do you get the signs of the times? Explain.
4. How does God communicate to us through signs today?
5. What signs do you see in particular? Make a list.

✠ Does God still speak to us through signs?

Look up Matthew 16: ¹*Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came and tested Jesus by asking Him to show them a sign from heaven. ²But He*

replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'The weather will be fair, for the sky is red,' ³and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but not the signs of the times. ⁴A wicked and adulterous generation demands a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Then He left them and went away.

1. What do you see? What was the sign of Jonah?
2. Can you list signs in Matthew preceding this chapter that the Pharisees had missed?
3. Can you explain the difficulty that the Pharisees had in seeing the signs? What was blinding their eyes?
4. What were they expecting? What were they not expecting?
5. Pastor referred to the Magi in the Christmas story. Why?

Look at Matthew 2: ¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ²asking, "Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." ³When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴And when he had assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel.'"

1. What had the Magi seen and recognized?
2. Contrast the Magi to the priests/advisors in Herod's court, who knew the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, but did not know the times or the seasons.
3. Did any of these priests change at all in the next thirty plus years from when they advised Herod? Explain.
4. Apply this to the signs that will Jesus' return. Will they be easy or difficult to miss?
5. Explain again how King Ahaz missed the signs? (See Isaiah's prophecy above, [verse 12](#).)
6. What did the Magi from the East know of signs? ([See footnote below](#).)

Pastor says, "The wise men weren't seeking a sermon outline...or a scroll outline. They weren't looking just for a devotional. God uses physical things in the environment to guide people..." He says, "Scripture speaks to us about God's intention. If we do not know scripture we can miss what God is doing. Throughout scripture God uses stars, dreams, prophets, signs and wonders

not to entertain, but to confirm and to guide people. It was to guide hearts toward Jesus. God's Word speaks to us about what God is doing, and through events, He gives us confirmation."

1. What do you see?
2. What celestial events have stirred discussions lately?
3. What global events?

Pastor says, "The signs are invitations...not explanations. The sign is not the thing itself. The sign is only to point us to Jesus. If your attention is drawn with fascination towards an event, and is not more attracted to Jesus, it's a distraction."

1. Explain.
2. What did the Wise Men do when they saw the sign? Describe their efforts.
3. Do you have an observation concerning today's fixations with signs?
4. Do you have a testimony?

✠ **Jesus expects us to discern the signs of the times.** Pastor says, "There is an expectation that we be prepared."

1. How do we know this?
2. Review the parable of the ten virgins. What were the expectations?
3. Who met those expectations? Who failed? Why?
4. Pastor says, "Discernment is not about getting more information. It's about paying attention." Explain.

"Discernment sees something, and finds meaning in those events around us in the context of scripture, and in the context of God's intention."

1. Can you clarify this concept in your own words?
2. Is God still giving us signs today? Name one.
3. How does God speak to us today?
4. How do we know the world is not on "auto-pilot"?

Pastor laid out a list that things are occurring in the world to which we need to pay attention and of which we should be aware and wary:

1. Pastor said, the Bible speaks of a rise in spiritual hunger, an awakening. (Isaiah 60: ¹*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.* ²*For behold, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you, and His glory will appear over you.* ³*Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.* ⁴*Lift up your eyes and look around: They all gather and come to you; your sons will come from afar, and your daughters will be carried on the arm.*.) What evidence do you have of this?

2. The Bible speaks of wars and rumors of wars. Matthew 24:⁶*You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. These things must happen, but the end is still to come.* ⁷*Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.* What have you seen? Where is there unrest and rising global tensions?
3. The Bible speaks of hunger and global disasters: Matthew 24:^{7b}*There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.* ⁸*All these are the beginning of birth pains.* How many can you list?
 - a. What causes massive migrations?
 - b. Explain verse 8.
4. The Bible speaks of celestial events: Matthew 24:²⁶*So if they tell you, 'There He is, in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Here He is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.* ²⁷*For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* ²⁸*Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.* ²⁹*Immediately after the tribulation of those days: 'The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.'* ³⁰*At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*
 - a. Describe the warning. What have we already seen?
 - b. Describe the reliability. What is absolutely necessary?
5. The Bible speaks of moral shifts. Examine Matthew 24:¹⁰*At that time many will fall away and will betray and hate one another,* ¹¹*and many false prophets will arise and deceive many.* ¹²*Because of the multiplication of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.* ¹³*But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.* See also 2 Timothy 3:¹*But understand this: In the last days terrible times will come.* ²*For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,* ³*unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, without love of good,* ⁴*traitorous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,* ⁵*having a form of godliness but denying its power. Turn away from such as these!*
 - a. What have you seen?
 - b. Do you know of other biblical warnings like this?
 - c. What does Paul's warning to Timothy tell us about the times we live in?

6. The Bible speaks of increased polarization: Matthew 10: ²¹*Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rise against their parents and have them put to death.* ²²*You will be hated by everyone because of My name, but the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.*

- a. What do you see? What have you already seen?
- b. Why is it important to be aware?
- c. What are the steps required to persevere to the end?
- d. Are there families to pray for?

† **“The signs of Jesus’ return are designed to produce hope not fear.”**

1. Explain.
2. What does recognition of the signs bring?
3. What do the wise do in the face of a hurricane or a tornado warning?
4. How does one prepare, when one knows for a certainty what is ahead?
5. Remember above, Jesus said in Mt 24:6 that this must take place. Why did He tell us this?
6. Think of Pompeii. Explain how ignorance is deadly.

† **The goal here is faithfulness, readiness and being on mission.**

1. Explain.
2. How does readiness breed urgency?
3. Pastor laid out intentionality as a goal for 2026. What does that mean?
4. Look at Titus 2: ¹¹*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to everyone.* ¹²*It instructs us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live sensible, upright, and godly lives in the present age,* ¹³*as we await the blessed hope and glorious appearance of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* ¹⁴*He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.* What does this say about faithfulness, readiness and being on mission?
5. What does it say about hope in the last days? What tools have been made available to us?
6. In context, what is the blessed hope Paul speaks of? Is it different from the glorious appearance?
7. Pastor says, “For believers, the return of Jesus is not a threat, it’s a promise?” What is included in that promise?
8. What’s in it for us?

† **How do we respond?**

The wise men gave us an example:

1. They knew the ancient writings.

2. They watched.
3. They saw the sign, the star that rose.
4. They moved according to the sign.
5. This moved them closer to Jesus.
6. They worshiped.

Pastor suggests this means that we:

1. Stay awake spiritually. Matthew 24: ⁴²*Therefore stay awake, because you do not know the day on which your Lord will come.* ⁴³*But understand this: If the homeowner had known in which watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.* ⁴⁴*For this reason, you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect.* (Compare this to what Paul told Titus above.) “It’s not about knowing the day and the hour when it will happen. It’s about being ready. Not anxious. Not obsessed. Just alert.” Explain.
2. Stay rooted in scripture. This is part of what our upcoming 21 days of prayer and fasting is about. God speaks most loudly through scripture. It’s not about information. It is about transformation.
 - a. Pastor said, “The Bible reads us as we read it.” What did he mean?
 - b. He continued, “It has the ability to transform our lives.” Explain.
 - c. Know that signs never contradict the Word of God.
3. Stay active in the mission. “If Jesus is coming back then loving people and sharing hope matters more than ever.”
 - a. Explain.
 - b. Is it safe to think, “I have time. I’ll wait until...” something happens? Why not?

✠ Pastor’s wrap up:

1. The stars are still shining.
2. God is still using signs to instruct us as to times and seasons.
3. Events are still taking place in the world today, to ask us if we are discerning. Only the wise discerned the signs at His first coming.
4. God is still speaking. Jesus is still building His church. The Holy Spirit is still moving.
5. As the wise men did, we get to decide: Will we scroll past the signs, being preoccupied...busy...caught up with social media that we throw our lives away? Or will we follow the signs toward Jesus, to worship Him and present our gifts at His feet?

6. Pastor said, "If we are distracted by signs that do not lead us closer to Jesus, then it's just entertainment." Explain.
7. Signs must lead to Jesus.
8. Signs are meant to lead hearts to Jesus and to prepare the world for His return. We must be those who watch, discern and respond.

Take the time to pray.

Follow up application:

1. Use the **Soap study below** to pursue your own understanding.
 2. Pray with somebody about something this week. Record the results.
 3. Make a list of events you suspect are "signs of the times." Write down a prediction of coming events, and keep the paper handy.
 4. Write down one thing this message brought you. Write what you will do with this. List steps for perseverance.
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Footnotes:

1. **On Jesus in our midst**—In Matthew 18, Jesus told us He would be with/among two or three people who prayed together, guaranteeing the results of that prayer. The actual language of the promise is worth examining. What did He mean when he said He would be "with us/among us/in our midst?" The original Greek says that whenever two or three... συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἕμὸν ὄνομα (*synegmenoi eis to emon onoma*, "in synagogue/gathered together) He would actually be ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν (*en meso auton*, "right in the midst/middle of them". *Meso*, according to the lexicon, means "midst," "among," or "in the middle" and it frequently marks a literal center point). When we are three, we're actually four, and He's not standing on the outside. What is essential here is how this fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 His name, *Immanuel*, means "God right in the middle of us/in our midst."
 2. **On the identity of the Magi**—The church entertains many traditions concerning the wise men who came to Jesus. This Wikipedia article below is rife with the legends, stories and myths that have surrounded these men. Were they Kings? Were they three in number? How do we know. Matthew alone contains their story, and the rest is conjecture? Interesting points can be raised: the story does coincide with a comet that appeared in mornings for seventy days around 3 BC. The gifts would fund a family, belying the claim that Jesus was born into poverty. He was born into provision, as are we all. And the "east" is where Daniel's prophecy still lingered, foretelling a mighty stone that would come and take down kingdoms. Jesus' coming was foretold and anticipated by wise men around the world. Here's the Wikipedia article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_Magi
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For further study:

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP method** (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—Write what God is saying. / **P**ray—Write what your response is.) to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: Isaiah 7:10-14 Tuesday: Matthew 18:19-20 Wednesday: Titus 2:11-14 Thursday: Isaiah 60:1-4 Friday: Matthew 24:6-8 Saturday: Matthew 24:26-29 Sunday: Matthew 24:9-13

Once again, some passages suggested here have more than the usual number of verses. This is not to increase the burden but to provide clarity of context. Pick the verses that speak to you most clearly, and run these through the SOAP steps.