



Greatly Troubled & Highly Favored | Shawn Johnson | 12.08.2024

Weekly Study

SHARE

As group members get settled, take a few minutes to check in with everyone and see how life is going. Share an exciting story from this week, your highs and lows, an answered prayer, or something you're struggling with. If someone is really struggling, rally the group around them and take a few moments to pray over them.

- **Share a high and a low from last week.**
- **What is your favorite part of Christmas? Share your favorite traditions, memories, or holiday foods.**
- **What is the best Christmas gift you've ever received, and why is it so meaningful to you?**

BEFORE WE BEGIN

When we enter seasons and discuss topics that stir up a wide range of emotions, two common patterns often emerge:

1. **Reluctance to Share:** When someone shares something joyful or miraculous, those who are struggling often refrain from sharing their struggles, worried about "bringing the mood down" or "making it about them." On the other hand, when someone shares

something heavy, those with good news often stay silent, fearing they'll seem like they're bragging or being insensitive.

2. Comparison of Struggles: Many feel guilty about sharing their struggles after hearing about someone else's greater pain. For example, you might have been planning to share that your car broke down but decided not to say anything after hearing a group member had just lost a loved one.

While these feelings are understandable and sincere, it's important to remember three truths:

- God is limitless: He holds space for both joy, sorrow, and everything in between. He is present in every emotion, whether you're celebrating or mourning.
- Love in action: Paul reminds us in Romans 12:15 to "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." God is worthy of all of the praise at all times, and He is present in all of our struggles, both big and small.
- Together is better: We will never experience the fullness of what community has to offer until we learn to trust that our group has the capacity to hold space for the feelings, emotions, and burdens of each and every member of the group. What others share is part of their testimony—a reminder of God's faithfulness meant to encourage us and bring us hope; don't let the enemy use it to silence your story and diminish the value of what's on your heart.

This week, let's trust that God cares about every struggle, big and small, and embrace the fullness of community by sharing our hearts with one another. Don't let comparison or fear rob you of the healing, connection, and joy that comes from allowing God and our group to love all of us, regardless of what we have to offer at any given moment.

Sincerely,

- Red Rocks Groups Team

G R O W

As we enter the Christmas season and the final weeks of 2024, we recognize that this time of year can stir up a wide range of emotions. For some, it's a season of joy, family, blessings, and love as we gather to celebrate the birth of our Savior. For others, it can be a time filled with great anxiety, deep sorrow, profound emptiness, and hopeless despair. Wherever you find yourself this season, Shawn reminds us of this powerful truth: God meets us in every moment, offering His love as He draws us closer to Him.

In his message, *Greatly Troubled and Highly Favored*, Shawn pointed out that being 'highly favored' by God doesn't mean we won't face troubles. The story of Mary, the mother of Jesus, serves as a profound example. Despite being told she was favored by God, Mary was 'greatly troubled' by the news of her miraculous pregnancy. Her story illustrates a powerful reality: we can be blessed and favored by God while still facing significant struggles. We often recognize God's presence and favor when life is going well but question His love during times of difficulty. However, Shawn reminds us that God's favor and life's challenges often coexist.

We are encouraged to hold onto faith even when our circumstances feel overwhelming. Our struggles do not define who we are in Christ. Instead, our identity is rooted in God's unchanging love and presence, which remain constant through both joy and hardship.

Read Luke 1:26-35, John 16:33

- If you were to summarize your year in two words, would you choose “highly favored” or “greatly troubled?” Explain.
- In what ways does the story of Mary challenge your understanding of God's favor and what it means to be blessed, even in the midst of challenging times? Explain.
- If you had to identify one thing that sustained you throughout this year, through all of the highs and lows, what would it be? What does that reveal about God's favor for you?

M O V E

When the walls are caving in and our world is falling apart, we often find ourselves crying out things like, “Why is this happening? God, where are You? How will I get through this?”

When we reach the end of our rope and see no way out, we can, like Mary, cling to God’s unchanging character. By remembering that His Spirit is with us, His power protects us, and His promises are for us, we can stand back to our feet under His strength, move forward as we’re guided by His Spirit, and respond to any situation with faithfulness, confident that His promises never fail.

Read Luke 1:37-38, Psalm 27:13-14

- Which of the angel’s responses (Holy Spirit, Power of the Most High, No word from God will ever fail) do you find most comforting in difficult times? Which one is the most difficult for you to believe? Why?
- The angel's response to Mary reveals God’s profound desire to be present and involved in the most challenging seasons of our lives. The question is, have you invited God into your situation, or have you been trying to muscle through it on your own? Explain.

Read Luke 1:45-49 NLT

- What is God revealing to you through this final verse?
- Final thoughts?

P R A Y

Take a few minutes at the end of group to spend time alone with the Lord. Ask Him to remind you of His love for you and the promises He has set in motion for your life. Write down what He speaks over you as you read this proclamation:

*I may be greatly troubled for a moment,
but I'm highly favored always and forever,*

both in this life and the next.

I am not blessed because of a lack of trouble in my life;

*I am blessed because I believe you will do what you said you will do,
even in the midst of life's greatest sorrows.*

*I am confident I will see your goodness while I'm here in the land of the living because your
word never fails.*

As I wait patiently for

- *Promise one*
- *Promise two*
- *Promise three*
- *Etc.*

I will stand in Your strength,

abide in Your love,

*and endure whatever comes my way with boldness, courage, and faithfulness as your Spirit
guides me every step of the way."*

When everyone is finished, gather back together as a group. Invite anyone who feels comfortable to recite this proclamation aloud and share the promises they heard God speak over their life.