
TALK IT OVER

A Season of Preparation

Pastor Andy Wood

February 21-22, 2026

If you would like to watch the weekend message, visit www.saddleback.com/watch.

Open your group in prayer and remember that this is only a guide. Feel free to discuss each of the questions provided or simply dive deeper into just one. Before you close with prayer, take a few minutes to look over the Three Essential Questions at the end of the document.

Scriptures

Mark 1:1-8 (NIV84), John 3:29-30 (NIV84), Acts 2:36-41 (NIV), 2 Timothy 2:20-22 (NIV), Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV), Psalm 145:8 (NIV), Romans 10:9 (NIV), Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

Questions

1. We are all in “A Season of Preparation”—school, career, marriage, children, grandchildren, empty nest, retirement, and death. God prepares us for what's ahead. We can: ignore it, reject it, or embrace it! Read Mark 1:1-8 (NIV84): *“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way—a voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: ‘After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* What did Isaiah prophesy with regard to the messenger who would “prepare the way for the Lord”? During John the Baptist's preparation for the Lord’s coming, how did he describe the coming “Son of God”? How did John compare his baptism with Christ’s baptism?
2. The word “gospel” in Mark 1:1 means “Good News”! All of the Old Testament prophecies, all of the moments of the Israelites being brought out of Egypt—in fact, all of the Bible—has been used by God to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah! John the Baptist’s role was to prepare the way for the Good News of Jesus’ First Coming into this world; now, we are in another “Season of Anticipation” for the Second Coming of Christ! Any preparation for a move of God requires: (1) Anticipation—what's ahead? (2) Prioritization—what deserves more focus now? and (3) Refinement—what is God wanting me to turn from and to turn to? Refinement and repentance calls for a radical change of mind, heart, and direction—turning away from sin and toward God. Discuss the season you are currently in—and the season God is preparing you for. How can you prepare for the movement of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit toward holiness and service with anticipation, prioritization, and refinement?

3. Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV) says, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* What does the passage say Jesus did for us? Pray to Jesus for a breakthrough: *“What’s in me, Lord, that’s in your way?”* Remember: Jesus already paid the price on the cross to free us from the sin that’s entangling us! How does the author's athletic imagery encourage our refinement—our turning away from what God wants us to turn away from, and our turning to what God wants us to turn to?

4. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:20-22 (NIV), *“In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”* How does the passage reveal God’s concern for our purity and usefulness? What are the key distinctions Paul makes between a “vessel for honor” and one for “dishonor”? Discuss what we can do to cleanse ourselves and be a vessel prepared for honorable use.

5. Paul said in Romans 10:9 (NIV), *“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* When the people asked Peter in Acts 2:38-39 (NIV), *“What shall we do?”* Peter replied, *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”* How does fixing our eyes on Jesus help us? Our focus as a church this season is on praying to Jesus for breakthrough, reaching the people Jesus loves, and giving Jesus our whole heart! Discuss specific steps you can take to align your heart with the movement of God in you, and pray for breakthrough to reach the people he loves.

6. Speaking of Jesus in John 3:29-30 (NIV 84), John the Baptist said, *“The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.”* John the Baptist gave priority to Jesus—naming Him the Bridegroom who must become greater, while he must become less. Similarly, we’re also called to give priority to Jesus. What are some areas in which you struggle with being humble? Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) says, *“He rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* What steps can you take to seek God with your whole heart and give Jesus the place of prominence He deserves? What does God promise in Acts 2:38 (in Question 5 above) and Hebrews 11:6 when you do?

Are you interested in the Bible and in helping small groups benefit from the weekend message? Well, you are in luck! Saddleback members like you create these discussion guides each week. If you are interested in joining the team, please email JasonW@saddleback.com.

Three Essential Questions

The following questions are intended to be open-ended and encourage members to consider how they and what they, or the group, can do as a result of hearing the message.

1. **What did you hear?** *What point in this message was most impactful for you?*
2. **What do you think?** *How did this message challenge, change, or affirm your thinking?*
3. **What will you do?** *How will you or your group put into practice what you've learned today?*

Are you interested in the Bible and in helping small groups benefit from the weekend message? Well, you are in luck! Saddleback members like you create these discussion guides each week. If you are interested in joining the team, please email JasonW@saddleback.com.