



A Story of Hope



STUDY 1

This month's Connect group study is taken from Robert Fergusson's new book "Jesus and...". We have taken chapter 1 of Robert's book "Jesus and Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John – Finding hope for your family", and made it into a 3-part study. As the title suggests, this first chapter recounts the faith journey of an ordinary Jewish couple remaining faithful throughout their lives, overcoming doubts, and eventually seeing God's promise come to pass.

Luke 1:5-23

Luke begins his gospel with a story of two everyday people in their old age, both descendants of Aaron, who were servants of God. Luke records that 'both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly' (v6, NIV). Yet, they were not able to conceive, and remained childless for most of their lives. It may seem odd for Luke to begin the story of Jesus this way. But this is our God; He writes the most beautiful and most powerful stories. Where people are faced with impossibilities and fruitfulness, where the natural says too late, too difficult, too impossible, God steps in and does what only He can do. Only He has the power to change the course of our lives. Our God is a God of hope. Our God is the God of the impossible. Our prayer for these three weeks is for you to encounter, discover and come closer to our God of hope, for yourself, for your family and for your community. Jesus and you is all you need.

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Let's dive right in and read about the encounter that changed the course of Zechariah's and Elizabeth's lives.

Read Luke 1:5-7

In these verses we are introduced to a little family unit; two ordinary people, loving and serving the Lord for all their lives. They are described as righteous and blameless. It is no small thing to be called as such in the Bible. Yet, despite their life-long commitment of faithfully serving His house, and their dedication to a life of obedience, their prayers remained unanswered, and for a very long time, Elizabeth was not able to conceive. By the time we read their story it is said 'they were both very old' (v7, NIV).

- How would you describe your family unit?
- Is it large or little like Zechariah's and Elizabeth's; is it broken or blended?
- Whatever your family may look like, each one of us is part of some sort of family. And every one of us has some kind of aspiration and hopes for it.
- If you feel comfortable, share your dreams and hopes for your family. Maybe you want it healed, restored, saved, for your family to prosper and grow?
- The church is described as God's family (**Hebrews 2:11**) (**Galatians 6:10**). In what ways can the church/your Connect group model a healthy family/community to the world?

Zechariah and Elizabeth's family unit, despite facing the reality of the natural, remained faithful and consistent throughout their lives. Until one day, this little, yet favoured family got God's attention. All along, God had a purpose and a future in mind for their family and beyond. And if you let Him, He can do the same for you. God sees you; He sees your family. He has a plan and a future for your family too. – Let Him write your own story of hope.



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Pray

Pray together for each other's families, whether you have a natural family or a spiritual family, or friends you consider family. And if, for whatever reasons, in this season you find yourself feeling rather lonely and not belonging to any family, be encouraged that you belong to God's family. If you feel comfortable, ask your Connect group to pray for God to come through on your behalf.

Go deeper

The Bible is filled with stories of hope and unexpected acts of grace. All of them point straight back to Jesus and His salvation for humanity. The book of Acts alone has plenty of records of entire families saved, restored, and having their course of life completely changed forever. (**Acts 16:13-15, 16:25-34, 18:8**). And God can do the same for yours.