

STUDY 2

“...But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah;
your prayer has been heard...’” Luke 1:13

In our previous study, we were introduced to Zechariah and Elizabeth’s story. For all their lives they were both fervent and faithful God-followers, despite living with (what seemed) unanswered prayers, they kept doing what they were called to do, where God had positioned them to be.

In this week’s study, we continue unpacking Zechariah and Elizabeth’s story. As we continue in Luke 1, we read how one day, while Zechariah was on duty serving God, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and spoke God’s promises over his and Elizabeth’s lives. His prayers had been heard, he and Elizabeth would have a son; not just any boy but one who was to be consecrated and dedicated to the Lord, with a specific God-given purpose. His name was to be John. Yet, even though Zechariah had this supernatural encounter with God’s messenger, audibly and visibly, he failed to believe. As a result, he was unable to speak until the promise was fulfilled. – **Read Luke 1:8-25**

It wasn’t until after the child was born, and it was time to name the newborn, 8-day old baby, that Zechariah’s mouth was finally opened again. The child was named John, which means the favour or grace of God. (**v59-63**)

Zechariah failed to believe the good news about the upcoming birth of his son. Even though he was a servant of the Lord, a priest for that matter, descendent of Aaron, chosen and positioned in God’s house, he did not believe. Not even a supernatural being, a powerful angel appearing and speaking to him convinced him. The Bible is filled with stories of people’s unbelief and doubt. Their flaws and their stories exemplify human frailty and mirror our own weaknesses and failings. After all, how many of us can relate to Zechariah’s story, and have failed to believe the promises of God?

Questions

- Are there areas in your life where you have yet to see your prayers answered? Are you still hopeful and believing, or have doubts started creeping in? How can we overcome our unbelief?
- Humanly speaking, Zechariah and Elizabeth’s circumstances were impossible, and yet God answered their prayers. If you feel comfortable, share with your group the impossibilities you find yourself facing today. What areas are you believing for God to show up and turn impossible to possible?

A different response -

“I am the Lord’s servant, ... May your word to me be fulfilled” Luke 1:38

Just a few verses later, we read of an ordinary, young girl Mary and her personal encounter and her response to God’s promise. – **Read Luke 1:34-38 (NIV)**

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As was Zechariah, Mary also was visited by the angel Gabriel and promised a son, but unlike Zechariah, she believed. While Zechariah showed disbelief and wondered if the miracle could happen, Mary wondered how it would happen. “..’how will this be..’ “ **Luke 1:34**.

Both these stories teach us that when God makes a promise, He will do it. If He speaks to us, what He said will come to pass, and it is better for us if we believe it. Are we prepared to learn from Mary’s example and take God at His word?

Questions

- Zechariah and Mary responded in different ways to the angel’s message. Which response is closest to the way you respond to God’s promise?
- What can we learn from their reactions?

Pray

Take some time in prayer and pray for one another for courage and renewed hope. Dedicate some time to pray for those among you who may need to start dreaming again, who need to dust off some of the promises God has spoken over their lives but have not yet come to pass. Pray and have faith to believe again.

Go deeper

What is in a name?

Read in Robert’s book the p.38 – 41

Can our names describe our destiny? Throughout the Bible, names are given or changed. For instance, Abraham (**Genesis 17:5**), or Peter (**John 1:42**). Often names have prophetic significance. Let’s have a look at what the names mean in our story.

Zechariah means “God remembered”, Elizabeth means “the oath of God”, John means “the favour or grace of God”. As so often, this little family unit’s story reflects and points to God’s bigger story for all humankind. God did not only bless this family, but their story foreshadowed the salvation that we can all receive in Jesus Christ.

- God remembers His covenant (**see Hebrews 12:22-24**)
- God swears an oath to bless us (**see Hebrews 6:13-20**)
- God makes grace and favour available for each one of us (**see Hebrews 4:14-16**)