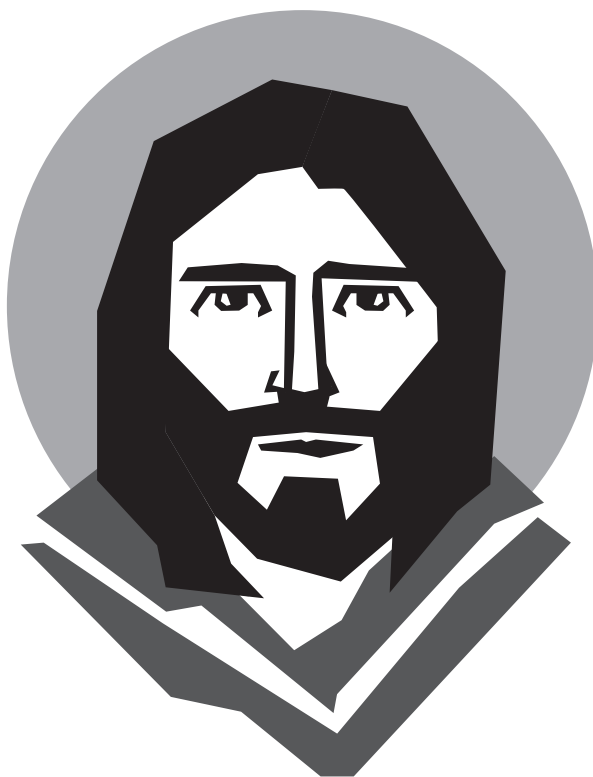
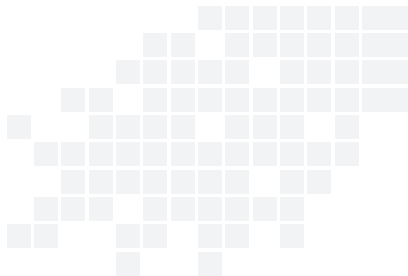


THE REAL JESUS



A study through the Gospel of Luke

BOOK 6: HIS PREPARATION





BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

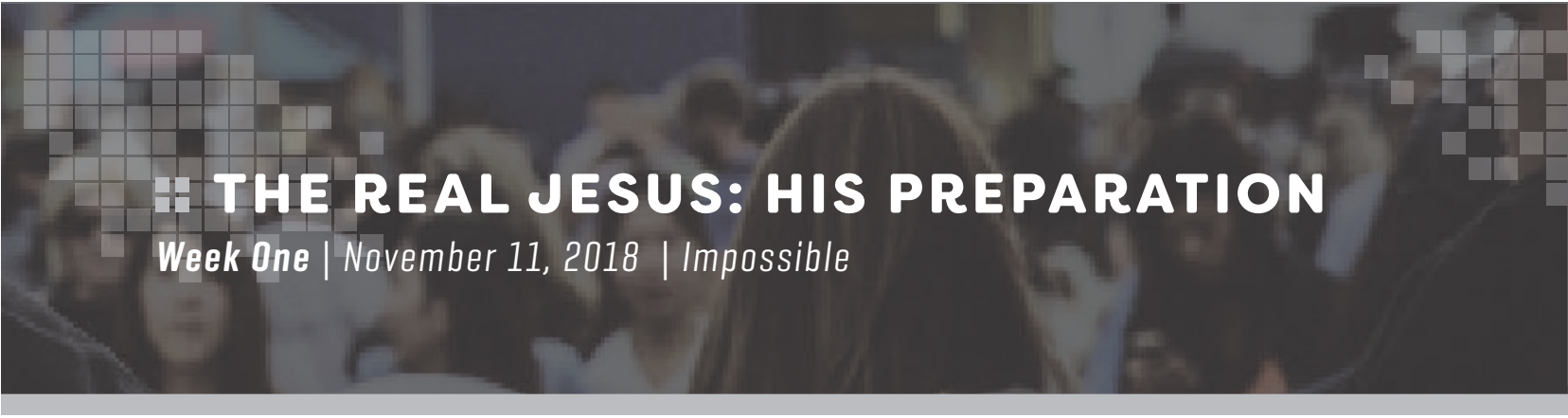
In the Bible, God reveals His truth about how to have eternal life by becoming a believer in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The believer is a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a true child of God, and one who has been saved by God according to God's grace (undeserved favor). *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How does one become a Christian?

- The Bible, God's word, says that eternal life (salvation) is a free gift of God which cannot be earned or deserved (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- However, we also find in God's word that all people are born sinners and cannot save themselves from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death and separation from God. God's requirement is perfection and no one is perfect (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:3-23; Ephesians 2:1-3).
- God tells us in His word that He is holy, meaning that He is perfect and that He is also just, meaning that He gives to sinners what is deserved, and because of His holiness and justice He must punish sinners. But thankfully, the Bible also says that God is loving and merciful and does not take pleasure in punishing sinners (Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 2:4-5).
- God has mercy on sinners by not giving them what they deserve. This is only possible because He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the God-man, to be the substitute for sinners bearing the penalty for their sin and satisfying God's justice (John 1:1,14; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 5:8).
- Jesus said that in order for anyone to have eternal life there must be repentance of sins and faith placed in His substitutionary death on the cross to pay for the penalty of one's sins. This faith must be in Jesus Christ alone not depending on anything else including "good works" (Mark 1:15b; Acts 20:21; Ephesians 2:8-9).

What then is the response to these things if one desires to have eternal life and become a Christian?

1. Pray and ask God to forgive you. The Bible says that you must repent of your sins, being ashamed of them, genuinely regretting and grieving over them, and firmly deciding to make an about-face and turn away from sin and your old lifestyle (Acts 3:19-20).
2. Pray and tell God that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you. The Bible says that for you to become a Christian, you must place your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to become your substitute and who took the penalty for your sin upon Himself once and for all (John 3:36).



THE REAL JESUS: HIS PREPARATION

Week One | November 11, 2018 | Impossible

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's texts, Luke 1:5–38. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

❏ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God shatters our understanding of what's possible.

❏ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Knowing the Real Jesus means rejecting what we believe is true and trusting what He says is true.

❏ MEDITATE

"For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

It's been four hundred years of silence for God's people. Surely by now they were wondering if God had abandoned them. Entire generations of Israelites lived and died having only heard about the God of their ancestors, never hearing from Him. These people hadn't received the privilege of God's voice. But as we will study today, God breaks centuries of silence to bring impossible news to an old priest and a young fiancée.

God was preparing to set in motion His plan to rescue His people from the dominion of sin. He was preparing the world for the arrival of His Son by sending a forerunner. He would send John the Baptist to "make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:17) before He sent Jesus. He was preparing to fulfill in the New Testament the promises He made to His people in the Old Testament. He spoke to Zechariah and Mary and invited them into His plan, starting with the impossible. Today, we'll study their responses and determine what we can learn from them.

It's not a question of if we will be asked to believe the impossible about Jesus, it's a question of how we will respond when we are. We can be guilty of creating an idea of who Jesus is so that we can make sense of Him. But Jesus does not exist to be made sense of. He is bigger than we imagine Him to be. In the absence of our safe, comfortable logic, we are left with awe and wonder. Children are known for their capacity for wonder. They easily embrace what adults struggle to believe. Our struggle as adults is because of our more fully developed logic. The phrase, "child-like faith," is used to describe someone's ability to accept as truth what seems impossible. Perhaps it's fitting that Luke's gospel begins with children. Maybe we need a reminder to embrace the impossible, to embrace the Real Jesus, whose ways are unfathomable (Romans 11:33). When He calls us to the impossible, we can follow Him without any doubts. When He delivers impossible news, we can respond in faith.

Q: *When a gap exists between what we think is true and what God says is true, how should we respond?*

Q: *How has God shattered your understanding of what's possible?*

■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In today's lesson we will study God's delivery of impossible news and how He expects His people to respond.

1. SURRENDER DOUBT

2. RESPOND IN FAITH



3. PRAY FOR GRACE

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

SURRENDER DOUBT


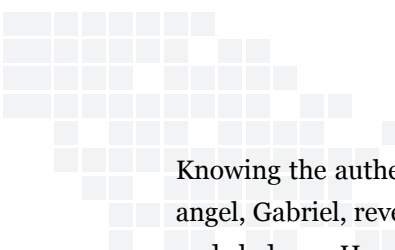
LUKE 1:5–25

Q: *What is Zechariah's response to Gabriel?*

Q: *What are the consequences of Zechariah's unbelief?*

God's chosen people had not heard from Him in centuries. Its logical to think His first speaking engagement of the New Testament would involve some fanfare. We can imagine a crowd gathered to hear the long-anticipated voice of the Lord. But when God chose to speak after generations of silence, He spoke to an old priest in the privacy of the temple. This quiet encounter likely conflicted with their expectations of how the Messiah would come to them. Likewise, we have our own expectations for how Jesus will come to us. But the Real Jesus shatters our expectations. Indeed, He exceeds them all. He comes on His terms and calls us to trust that His ways are better than ours.

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were elderly “and they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord” (Luke 1:6). They were faithful servants of God. In their culture, children were viewed as God's reward for faithful service. But Elizabeth was barren, so they had no socially recognized reward for their faithfulness. What they had was decades of unfulfilled longing. To be childless was to be disgraced. And yet, they were faithful. Zechariah and Elizabeth didn't have an if/then faith. They obeyed God for who He was, not for what He could give them. Their faith was real.



Knowing the authenticity of Zechariah's faith makes it difficult to understand his unbelieving response when the angel, Gabriel, revealed God's plan to bless them with a son. And not just any son. John's birth would usher in joy and gladness. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit from before his birth. He would turn the hearts of the people to the Lord. John the Baptist would prepare God's people for Christ's coming. Shouldn't this veteran saint be thanking God and buying "It's a Boy" cigars? Instead, he basically says, "How can I believe you? Don't you know who I am, that my wife and I are old?" Gabriel's response is to remind Zechariah that he, Gabriel, is an angel of the highest order who stands in the presence of God and was sent to deliver this good news to him (v. 19).

Zechariah responded to God's impossible, yet wonderful news with doubt. He believed the obstacles to God's plan were too great. He and Elizabeth were too old to have a child, and besides that, Elizabeth was barren. He believed only what he could understand. God sent Gabriel to shatter Zechariah's belief in what was easily understood, in what he thought he knew. God asked Zechariah to trust Him and His impossible ways. Zechariah chose not to, and he suffered for it. There were consequences for his unbelief as there are for us all. His unbelief resulted in his being made silent until God would fulfill His promise and give him a son.

God always accomplishes His plans for His people. His Word is full of promises and He will see to them all coming true. But He fulfills His Word on His terms. The Real Jesus' thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9). For those who respond to Him in doubt and unbelief, there will be eternal consequences. Trusting the Real Jesus requires us to reject whatever we believe that contradicts what He says.

☐: *Are you surprised that a righteous priest would doubt God? In what ways do you relate to Zechariah?*

☐: *How do you think nine months of silence changed Zechariah? Has God ever placed you in a season where you were forced to wait and listen rather than do and speak? If so, how did God use it to change you?*

☐: *How does Zechariah and Elizabeth's response of genuine faith to the cultural shame in barrenness encourage you? How can you live out this same faith in the midst of perplexities in your own life?*



RESPOND IN FAITH

■ ■ LUKE 1:26–38

Q: *How did the angel greet Mary?*

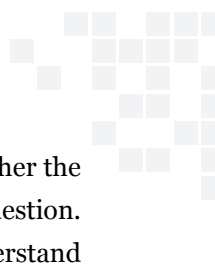
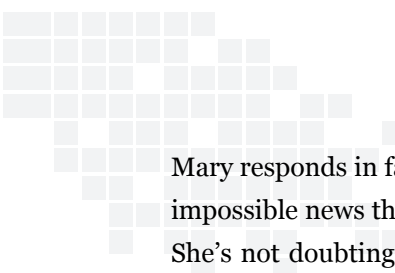
Q: *How does Mary respond to Gabriel?*

Gabriel now delivers more impossible news. The recipient of this divine message is a young, virgin girl living in a backwater town called Nazareth. Gabriel greets Mary with the words, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you” (v. 28).

Mary is favored by God. God breaks centuries of silence to bless Zechariah. We learn from these two encounters that God’s favor is a result of His mercy. Mary “found favor” with God. She found what she wasn’t seeking. God’s grace is freely given. We can’t earn it. He doesn’t distribute His grace based on gender, age, geography, vocation, education, economics, or any other classification. God told Moses, “I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exodus 33:19). Knowing this should free us from our misguided attempts to earn God’s favor. We can be guilty of thinking if we just do “this,” or if we just say “that,” we will secure God’s favor. We’re wrong. It’s because of His mercy.

God’s grace shown to Zechariah and Mary also assures us of His great love for His people. We see His tender, personal affection for them. He never forgot an old priest’s decades of prayers. He never overlooked a young fiancée with no cultural influence. The Real Jesus remembers what the world forgets. The Real Jesus sees value where the world sees insignificance. Our Father is El Roi (Genesis 16:13), the God who sees us. We don’t escape His notice and we can’t earn His favor. Both are the result of His mercy.

Knowing the Real Jesus, realizing His love and mercy towards us, empowers us to trust Him even when we don’t understand Him. God’s ways often don’t follow the logic of this world. The Christian life is a countercultural one. In God’s paradoxical economy, the way to go up is to go down. The humble are exalted (Matthew 23:12). We are weak when we are strong (2 Corinthians 12:10). If you want to save your life, you must lose it (Matthew 16:25). Following Christ often doesn’t make sense. For example, when we obey Jesus’ command to establish our treasures in heaven and not on earth (Matthew 6:19–20), our faith combats the world’s priorities. It’s in these moments that we must wholeheartedly trust in the Lord and not lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).



Mary responds in faith even though it's clear she doesn't understand all the particulars. When Gabriel tells her the impossible news that she will bear a son, she asks, "How will this be, since I am a virgin" (v. 34)? A valid question. She's not doubting the reality of her upcoming motherhood, she's simply admitting that she doesn't understand how it will happen. But when God shatters her understanding of what's possible, Mary chooses to respond in faith. "For nothing will be impossible with God" (v. 37). We walk in our understanding of what's possible, but God invites us to dwell with Him in the impossible.

There is great tension between what we understand and what God opens our eyes to see. When the Real Jesus' impossible ways confront our limited understanding, we can trust Him. David says in Psalm 131:1–2, "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me." David didn't invest his energy in trying to figure out what was too great for him to understand. In the light of what he couldn't know, he was comforted by who he knew. We can respond in faith, not because of what we know, but because of who we know.

Q: *Has there been a time in your life when, like Zechariah, you've suffered the consequences of responding poorly to what God was calling you to do?*

Q: *In this text, Mary basically says two things, "How can this be?" and then, "Let it be." Is God calling you to release something as you trust His plans that, like Mary, you don't understand?*

PRAY FOR GRACE

📖 LUKE 1:38 AND MARK 9:14–25

Q: *How does Mary respond to Gabriel?*

Q: *How does Jesus challenge the boy's father?*

When God challenges our understanding or calls us to do something that seems impossible, we don't always respond well in the moment. We aren't willing to reject our beliefs. We aren't willing to trust the Real Jesus. Our flesh clings to itself, trusting in what's familiar and understandable. We deceive ourselves into believing we know best. This is pride. James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." The humble seek and receive grace. We must seek God's grace to respond to Him rightly.



What is our right response to God? Consider Mary's words to Gabriel. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word" (Luke 1:38). Essentially, Mary says, "I belong to God. Whatever He says goes." Is this how you respond when God calls you to do something? Mary had a plan for her life. She intended to marry Joseph and build a family with him in the ordinary way. But God invited her into His extraordinary plan. She could have pointed out the impossible logic of this plan. She could have responded in fear of the unknown. She could have responded defiantly, upset over the humiliation and scandal headed her way as a result of the favor she found with God. But Mary responded well. "Let it be so." Her response mirrors that of Christ's in the garden of Gethsemane. "Not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Mark 9 tells the remarkable story of Jesus freeing a boy from an unclean spirit determined to destroy him. The boy's father asked Jesus to help them if He could. Jesus reminds him that all things are possible for one who believes (v. 23). The father responded well. "I believe; help my unbelief" (v. 24). Humbly, he prayed for the grace to believe the impossible. Our Father welcomes our dependency. He meets our need with His provision. Our insufficiency displays His sufficient grace (2 Corinthians 12:9). Our weakness draws us to deeper dependence on God. We are needy for His grace in order to respond well, and He gives grace to the humble. Ask Him for it.

- ❖ *Does the father's response sound like a contradiction to you? How is it really not a contradiction but a realistic description of what it's like to walk by faith?*
- ❖ *How can your prayers be influenced by this father's humility?*
- ❖ *Can you think of passages in the Bible that define humility? Do you see those characteristics in Mary's response?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- 
- 
- Q: *Has the Spirit brought to mind a specific area in your life where you are responding to the Lord in doubt rather than in faith?*
- Q: *You may theoretically believe that nothing is impossible for the Lord, but do your prayers, thoughts, words, and actions prove that you live your life in light of that reality?*
- Q: *When you feel the tension between wanting to doubt God and wanting to trust Him, how can your faith community help you?*

PRAY

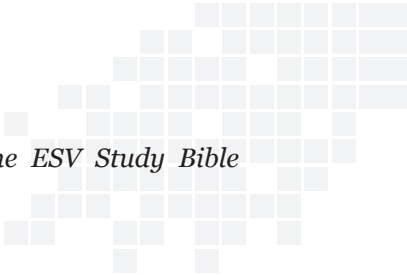
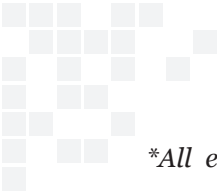
+ *Use this prayer point to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Father, nothing is impossible with You. I can't understand all Your ways with my finite mind, but I pray for the grace to trust You. When You call me to do something, help me respond in faith, trusting that Your ways are better than my own. You are trustworthy. Give Your servant the strength to reject any belief that contradicts Your Word. Give me faith to follow You into the impossible.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 1:24–25 Why Elizabeth remained in seclusion five months is unclear, but it kept her pregnancy secret for a while and allowed her time to worship God (v. 25) and prepare for this special child. To take away my reproach—Childlessness was considered a disgrace (cf. Genesis 30:23; Isaiah 4:1).

LUKE 1:35 The Holy Spirit will perform this great miracle so that Mary will become pregnant without having sexual relations with a man, indicating that Jesus' holiness derives from His being conceived by the Holy Spirit. Though Jesus was a genuine human being, He did not inherit a sinful nature and disposition from Adam as all other human beings do (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; by contrast, Psalm 143:2; Ephesians 2:3).



**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and Christ-Centered Exposition (Luke).*

