

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to help you talk about God's word and Pastor Brian's message with friends and family. You of course can use your own questions, but we'd like to give you this tool to encourage Biblical fellowship and discipleship in your circle of relationships. ***Enjoy discovering more about Him!***

"THE ROAD OF PREPARATION" | LUKE 1: 5-25 | PASTOR BRIAN BELL

WARM-UP QUESTION:

When was a time that waiting for Christmas seemed difficult or long?

"When God Seems Silent" Luke 1: 5-7

The nation of Israel hadn't heard from God and Zechariah and Elizabeth were still waiting for a child. **What is difficult about waiting for God? How did Zechariah and Elizabeth spend their time while waiting?**

"When God Finally Speaks" Luke 1:8-17

Zechariah gets the honor of burning incense and is met by an angel, telling him he will finally have a son. **What does this show about God's timing of His actions? How should that impact the faith of His followers today?**

"When God's Answers Feels Impossible" Luke 1: 18-25, 59-64

Zechariah doubts the angel's message and goes mute as a result as a sign to all. Elizabeth does get pregnant and rejoices. **How did God's discipline lead to praise? How has God used discipline to align your heart to His?**

"What God Prepares in the Waiting" Luke 1: 65-66

The people were in awe of what happened with Zechariah, Elizabeth and the birth of John after Zechariah was able to speak again and praise God. **How did this impact faith of all involved?**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Jesus' birth highlights God's preparation of people's hearts and minds, powerfully shown in the birth story of John the Baptist. God prepares people through waiting, discipline and surprising answers to prayer. **What are you currently waiting for from God? Are there ways God is disciplining you lately? What are ways you can serve Him while you wait? Make time to be silent before God this week and ask for patience.**

The Road to Bethlehem

11-23-25

2 The Road of Preparation

I. Announce:

- A. Welcome to those watching online (2nd).
- B. Slide1-3 Lar: TGE Service. Church Campout. CK Play.
- C. Slide4 Office/Appointments Closed **Tues** closed due to water fix. **Thursday** for Holiday.
- D. Prayer: may time be *pleasing* to **You**, and *profitable* to us.

II. Slide5 Intro: The Road to Bethlehem

- A. There's a **unique ache** that comes with *waiting for a child*. Month after month, hope rises and falls like a tide that never quite reaches the shore. **You pray**, you **plan**, you **calculate days**, and **try every method** known to man (diets, doctors, procedures, *and* promises). Friends announce pregnancies with ease - while you quietly slip away to *fight back tears*. Each negative test feels like another unanswered prayer. The waiting turns into wondering: *Does God see us? Has He forgotten? And yet*, even in the silence, **faith** clings to *the faint but stubborn belief that God is still writing the story - even when His pen seems paused*.
- B. Last week: *The Road of Promise*. Gen.3:15 *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he (Jesus) shall bruise your head (satan), and you (satan) shall bruise his heel (Jesus).*
 - 1. We learned, the story of Christmas didn't start in a **stable** - it started in a **garden**. The very first *promise* of Christmas was *whispered to a fallen couple*, by a gracious God, in the midst of their failure.
 - a) **The 1st announcement of the gospel in the Bible**. (that God was going to fix their **fall**)
- C. Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great **fall**, All the kings horses, and All the kings men, *couldn't* put Humpty together again.
 - 1. This nursery rhyme began as **a riddle**, asking the question, *What, once broken can never be repaired not even by strong or wise persons?*
 - a) See Humpty (and humans) *didn't* have a **wall problem**, but a **Fall problem**.

b) Regardless of how hard we try, *a broken egg* can never be put back together again. *A scrambled egg* can never be unscrambled.

2. The **Fall of humanity** into **sin** in **Gen.3** is bad news - **very bad news**.

a) **God formed** all things by creation, **but humanity deformed** all things by **sin**.

No animal (all kinds of horses) nor human (all kinds of men) could ever fix this problem.

But God had a **plan** and a **promise**!

D. Slide 6 This week: *The Road of Preparation*. God Works in the Waiting!

God not only had a **plan**, & made a **promise**, but now we journey toward it's **Preparation**. Not starting with **Jesus birth**, but His important cousin's birth - **JB**.

1. We will be looking at **Luke 1:5-25** (Zechariah and Elizabeth).

2. Before the Savior came, God prepared hearts - *Sometimes through waiting, silence, and unexpected answers*.

3. *God's preparation often feels like *delay* but His silence is never *absence*.

III. Slide 7 **1 WHEN GOD SEEMS SILENT** (Luke 1:5-7) Read

A. **400 Years of Silence**

B. *In the days of Herod, king of Judea ...* (v.5) [Herod was to the Jews, what Nero was to the Romans. These were dark days!]

1. **Illustration**: Hold up a Bible and hold the page between Malachi and Matthew. This blank page represents 400 years of silence. - *Just because you can't hear Him, doesn't mean He's not preparing something!*

C. The last they heard was Malachi promising that **Elijah** would come (Mal.4:5-6).

1. **Then nothing!** No prophets. No new word from God. **4 centuries of waiting**. 4 centuries of **Prophetic Laryngitis**.

2. **But** silence doesn't mean *inactivity* - it means **preparation**. *While they were waiting, God was working*.

D. **Zechariah and Elizabeth's Private Silence**

- E. Not only had **the nation of Israel** heard nothing - *this couple* had heard nothing from God personally about their prayers for a child. (50 yrs?)
- Yet they were *righteous before God* (6). Still *faithful*, still walking *uprightly*.
 - Barren* stamped on her life *like others ... Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel*.
 - Barren* but blameless, *Barren* but not broken. They didn't sin, they didn't get bitter at God, they're *still in ministry*, still *worshipping*, still *praying*, still *serving ... and still asking God for a baby*.
 - Their long waiting* mirrored *Israel's* (*both were waiting* for a birth *only God could bring*).

IV. Slide8a **2 WHEN GOD FINALLY SPEAKS (8-17)**

- A. *Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.* (13)
- B. **Familiar Routine / Unexpected Encounter**
- C. Zechariah was serving in the temple - **18,000** priests. Only **14** to be chosen for this incense duty. Only once. Most never in their lifetime have this privilege. If they were chosen, it was *the greatest day* of his life, the day he dreamed of.
- I can relate :) I remember in 8th grade I was asked to *be in charge of all the altar boys* in my Catholic church. I was honored, *and* Bobbie was proud! [fav part ringing the bells, *and* holding the incense for the priest]
 - But* that was the day *God broke the silence*. All alone, in a dimly lit room he had never been in, then *AHH! Don't be afraid, your prayers have been heard*
 - When we stay faithful in the small, we often find God faithful in the surprise.*
- D. They weren't going to *just have a baby*, *but the greatest boy* to have ever lived, says Jesus! *I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.* Lk.7:28
- Slide8b *Zachariah* = God Remembers. *Elizabeth* = Oath of God. *John* = God is gracious. (last OT prophet).

a) (13) *Liz will bear you a son* - talk about the ultimate *Gender-Reveal*, the angel Gabriel telling them? - **Slide8c** I picture Gabriel with *blue grenades of confetti*.

2. **Don't miss** (15) *he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mothers womb*. A great Pro-Life verse (this is not political but *biblical*).

a) **Note:** the **child** in the womb here is named John. *Filled with Holy Spirit. Set apart as a Nazirite*. A little bit later in the chapter, *leaped for joy in her womb when Mary walked in the room. A pretty good case for personhood*. [a whole, separate, unique, living human being]. Filled with Holy Spirit in vitro!

E. God's Preparation Behind the Scenes

F. God was *preparing* not just a **miracle** - **but a messenger** (John the Baptist).

1. John's birth would *prepare the way* for **Jesus'** ministry. *Before the Light of the world came, God lit one small lamp*.

2. **Slide9** (17) *and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared*.

G. **Illustration:** A gardener doesn't *shout at seeds to grow* (he tills, plants, and waits). **God** was cultivating the soil *of Israel's heart*.

V. **Slide10 3 WHEN GOD'S ANSWERS FEELS IMPOSSIBLE (18-25)**

A. *How shall I know this? For I am an old man...* (18)

B. Faith Tested by Delay

C. Zechariah had **prayed** for years. *When the answer finally came, he doubted*.

1. God's delay often **exposes** what we really believe about **His** goodness.

2. Zec moved *from faithful, to faithless, to speechless* (for 9 months) in 1 question *"How shall I know this? For I'm an old man, and my wife is advanced in years. [looking at his own limitations, not God's unlimited power]*

- a) **How shall I know this? - Really?** Let's review: You've been asking for a baby for decades. You just won the dice rolling game-Super Lotto Plus. The presence of God is lit right in front of you (curtain). I am Gabriel (notice the wings). You were doing the incense/praying, you've been asking for a baby, I show up and say yes (pause) *Zec, What am I missing?*
- b) Sometimes we as Gods children *talk too much* and *wait too little*.

D. God's Discipline as Preparation

E. Zechariah's *temporary silence* wasn't *punishment* - it was **preparation**.

1. When he finally speaks again in vs.64, it's **in praise**.
2. **Slide 11** When it comes to naming their baby it says, (59b-64) *And they would have called him **Zechariah** after his father; 60 but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called **John**." 61 And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "**His name is John**." And they all wondered. 64 And **immediately** his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, **blessing/praising** God.*

a) **Remember what Zechariah's name means?** *God has remembered.*

F. Sometimes God quiets us so we'll listen better. Like **muting** an **instrument** to **tune it**. God silenced Zechariah so that when he spoke again, the sound would be *pure worship*.

1. Before a musician tunes an instrument, they often quiet the sound (they stop playing, dampen the strings, **or** silence the instrument momentarily) **so** they can *listen carefully* and *make small, precise adjustments*.
2. Sometimes God **mutes us** - pauses our **voice**, our **platform**, or our **plans** - **not** to punish, **but** to tune our hearts ... **to His!**
3. Zechariah's silence was that kind of **divine tuning**. God quieted him, not to humiliate him, **but** to **refine** him - **So that** when his voice returned, it wasn't filled with doubt, **but worship**.

- a) How about you? Has God pressed “mute” so He can make sure your next sound harmonizes with His heart?

VI. Slide 12a 4 WHAT GOD PREPARES IN THE WAITING

- A. **He Prepares Hearts**: Zechariah and Elizabeth remained **righteous** *through long disappointment*.
- B. **He Prepares Faith**: Silence stripped away **self-confidence** & **deepened dependence**.
- C. **He Prepares Testimony**: When the silence lifted, the whole community was filled with awe. *65 And **fear** came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.*
1. Slide 12b Like **a seed under soil**, God’s **promises** often **grow in silence**.
You **can’t see** what He’s doing, **but He’s working** under the surface.
- D. **During this Holy Hush, for 400 years** - God was patiently waiting for the **right time**, waiting for the **right people**, waiting for the **right reasons**, **and** for the **right purpose**.
- **What is God doing in the silence of your life?** He hasn’t checked out!

VII. Closing Reflection / Transition

- A. **The road to Bethlehem** runs through **the waiting room** of God.
1. **Before** angels sang in the night sky, one old man stood speechless in the temple. **Before** a baby cried in Bethlehem, another baby cried in his mother’s arms in Judea. **God was preparing everything - perfectly timed, perfectly planned.**
- B. **Transition to Week 3**: When God’s **Preparation** was complete, He looked for someone willing to say ‘**Yes!**’ Next week, we’ll meet her. **Mary**, whose **Surrender** changed history. [The Road of Surrender]
- C. ***TGE Service - 6:30pm.**

D.Keywords: preparation, Zechariah, Elizabeth, John.