



INTRO:

The Gospel of Luke, along with the book of Acts, was attributed in early church history to Luke the physician, who traveled with Paul the apostle (Col 4:14; compare note on Acts 16:10; 21:1, 17). Luke's Gospel was likely composed between ad 60 and 85, shortly before he finished Acts. In a manner similar to Hellenistic Greek histories and Graeco-Roman literature, Luke begins his Gospel with a prologue that identifies his audience and explains his reason for writing.¹ Unlike Matthew, Mark and John, Luke began his gospel with a brief preface written in this excellent style of Hellenistic Greek. He was addressing the world at large and setting Christianity on the stage of world history, and so he adopted the contemporary literary style.² The gospel opens with the words;

Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. ³So it also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable

¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:1–4). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

² Marshall, I. H. (1994). [Luke](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 981). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed. (Luke 1:1-4)

“Many had undertaken to compile a narrative” about Jesus. Luke was familiar with other sources that discussed Jesus. He was familiar with Mark’s Gospel and probably Matthew’s as well. The unique content in Luke—material not found in the other Synoptic Gospels (Mark and Matthew)—was the result of his research (see Luke 1:3) and access to sources not available to Mark or Matthew.³

The eyewitnesses that Luke referenced were those who heard Jesus’ preaching and saw His attesting signs firsthand.⁴ Some have suggested that Luke may have been among the 72 Jesus sent out on the missionary journey (10:1–24) because of his notation that the things were fulfilled among us. However, the next statement that these “things” (i.e., accounts and teachings) were handed down orally by the eyewitnesses of Jesus would negate that possibility.⁵

Theophilus carried a Greek name that meant “friend of God.” It might refer to a specific individual, or Luke could have been writing to the church at large—to all who consider themselves friends of God. Theophilus might have been Luke’s patron, a wealthy person responsible for funding the writing, copying, and distribution of Luke’s Gospel and the book of Acts (see Acts 1:1).⁶

And guess what y’all- **in Christ you’re a friend of God!** You’re a “theophilus”! Isn’t that beautiful?

The things about which Theophilus was taught were likely referring to teaching about Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection.⁷

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After the intro in vv. 1-4, we move right into the narrative of Luke’s account. The next section marks the beginning of the birth narratives in Luke’s Gospel (continuing through

³ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Lk 1:1). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Lk 1:2). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁵ Martin, J. A. (1985). [Luke](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 202). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Lk 1:3). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁷ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Lk 1:4). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Luke 2). Unlike Matthew, who records only Jesus' birth, Luke includes the announcement and birth of John the Baptist, which is a super dope and rich addition!⁸

It starts as follows;

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years. (Luke 1:5-7)

To give a little context, King Herod the Great of Judea ruled from 37–4 BC.⁹ There was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah, whose name means “Yahweh has remembered,” which is fitting for the circumstances of the narrative.¹⁰ “Zech” belonged to the eighth priestly division, according to King David's arrangement (1 Chr 24:1–10).¹¹ Elizabeth was descended “from the daughters of Aaron”, which shows that she (as well as Zechariah) came from the priestly class.¹²

Zechariah and Elizabeth “lived without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord”. This doesn't mean that they lived a perfect, sinless life. Only Jesus Christ accomplished that. It meant that they lived “without blame”. In other words, they were above reproach in their lifestyle, and when they made a mistake and committed a wrong action or sin, they likely admitted it and apologized. They also, instead of living a duplicitous life, simply lived up to all the convictions that the Lord had laid on them. That's what it means to “live without blame”, because when you have a life that's above board, and admit when you've fallen short, no one can “blame” you. No one can accuse you of anything that you don't already know and that God ain't already working on!

And when Christ Jesus dwells in the life of a follower of Him, He leads that person to be “without blame”. It's His work in our life that does it! Someone can go from being a wild, flagrant, greedy, selfish, hateful, violent, addicted, lustful fool, and fall into the arms of

⁸ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:5–25). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:5). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁰ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:5). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:5). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹² Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:5). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Jesus, and Jesus will send the Holy Spirit to live in that person, and guide them towards being “without blame”. He will guide them away from sinfulness, and even gradually more so throughout time as the process of revelation and repentance continues to do its work in the life of that person!

Elizabeth and Zech had some barriers. For one, Elizabeth was barren. Barrenness was common among the prominent women of the OT (see 1 Sam 1:2). Luke was identifying Elizabeth with these women, hinting that God would provide her with a son.¹³ Secondly, both Zech and Elizabeth were advanced in years, much like Abraham and Sarah (Gen 17:17).¹⁴

I want to speak for a moment to those of you precious daughters of God who have been through infertility or through miscarriages. I want to speak to you precious daughters of God who wish you could have children but for whatever reason, you can't. I want you to know that God sees you. He loves you. He's not forsaking you in your sadness. Even when we read of the miraculous events of God's people seeing miracles in the realm of fertility and baby delivery we can't cast this on all situations. Even in the worst and most difficult scenarios the Lord is dwelling with you. Sometimes in painful moments.

⁸ When his division was on duty and (Zech) was serving as priest before God, ⁹ it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. (Luke 1:8-10)

Each division of priests served in the temple twice annually, with each session lasting one week.¹⁵ Zech was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense, which was a rare honor normally received once during a priest's lifetime.¹⁶ While Zechariah was inside at the altar of incense, a crowd gathered to pray. The incense for which Zechariah was responsible symbolized the prayers of the entire nation. At that particular moment Zechariah was thus the focal point of the entire Jewish nation.¹⁷

¹³ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:7). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:7). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁵ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:8). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁶ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:9). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁷ Martin, J. A. (1985). [Luke](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 203). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

My family needs predictable patterns. We have a pretty unpredictable life when it comes to ministry and the jobs my wife has, so our schedule can ebb and flow often. However, we make sure to have regular things that are a part of our life to keep us tethered to God and each other. I listed them all out recently as part of an exercise with a discipleship training group I'm part of.

I personally have a weekly discipleship group on Wednesday mornings at 6:30am where we seek God together, get to know one another on a deep level, pray, grow and hold one another to actionable change. I'm in another leadership discipling group on Zoom weekly at 12:30 pm on Wednesdays as well, so Wednesdays refuel me. I regularly go to therapy- Christ-centered trauma therapy in particular because of my context, ministry in tough situations and minor aspects of my past. I seek to have time in scripture every morning that I'm able to while I'm on a recumbent bike. I do regular exercise- more stretching now in my 40's than lifting weights like I did in my 20's and 30's. When the weather's good, I hike and jog on trails in the woods with as much terrain as I can find in the valleys of Northeast Ohio as much as I'm able to, and always do so without earbuds in so that it's a time of solitude and prayer.

My family always attempts to have spiritual conversations whenever we're able to have a meal together. Sometimes we talk about broader spiritual topics or just check in with one another. Sometimes we dig into scriptures or video devotionals. We worship God as a family together every Sunday morning in the Church that my wife and I get to help lead. Every night I play guitar for my youngest one and a half year old daughter Madi and pray for her to help her sleep. I make sure to regularly have one on one times with my wife Sarah, usually little snippets daily and regular dates where we can really unplug from everything, connect, and enjoy one another. I make sure to have regular one-on-ones with my seven year old daughter Brooke, and my ten year old daughter Charlotte, where they get to do things they enjoy (*usually* that we both enjoy! 😊) and we can really talk and connect. Every Thursday night I initiate my time of Sabbath with a good drink I really like, some of my favorite food, and Law and Order Thursdays with my wife (when they're not airing repeats on Spectrum Live TV!). Every Friday I'm mindful to genuinely slow down my pace, really enjoy the presence of God, and really enjoy my family. I don't check my phone or computer unless I absolutely, without a choice, have to do so.

Rhythms of life, predictable patterns, and traditions are vital to a thriving existence! Individuals need rhythms, patterns and traditions. Families need them. Communities need them.

This pattern that Zechariah was part of, or "division", was one of twenty-four groups of priests divided by families and structured after the pattern of 1Ch 23 and 24 (cf. 1Ch 24:10 and Lk 1:5). The Exile of Israel had interrupted the original lines of descent; so the divisions were regrouped, most of them corresponding to the original in name only.

This burning of incense was also the climactic moment of Zechariah's priestly career, perhaps the most dramatic moment possible for the event described to have occurred. God was breaking into the ancient routine of Jewish ritual with the word of his decisive saving act.¹⁸

What a time for God to break through with such power at this climactic moment of Zechariah's life! May God break through in your life in both routine and surprising and special ways as you seek Him! As you engage in "predictable patterns" of seeking God regularly, may He show up in both powerful and beautiful ways! May He show up in ordinary, practical ways and supernatural ways!

ENGAGE FOR A MOMENT... WHAT PATTERNS ARE YOU ENGAGING IN AS AN INDIVIDUAL, AS A FAMILY, AND ALONG WITH YOUR COMMUNITY? PAUSE AND LIST THEM OUT NOW... WRITE THEM DOWN.

Luke writes on;

¹¹ An angel of the Lord appeared to (Zech), standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. (Luke 1:11-12)

Zechariah was gripped with fear (lit., "fear fell on him"). In Luke, many people responded with fear or awe (*phobos*) when confronted with mighty acts of God (See Luke 1:30, 65; 2:9–10; 5:10, 26; 7:16; 8:25, 37, 50; 9:34, 45; 12:4–5, 32; 21:26; & 23:40)¹⁹

So Zechariah is at a very climactic moment in his life and career, and an angel appears to him and scares the daylights out of him.

It's right to have a holy and powerful fear of God. It's not wrong to tremble in conviction in His presence. He's not just some goofball gummy bear man in the sky. Just look at Isaiah 6:1-5 where Isaiah has a power encounter with the God of Heaven;

¹⁸ Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament Copyright 2004.

¹⁹ Martin, J. A. (1985). [Luke](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 203). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphim were standing above him; they each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies; his glory fills the whole earth." 4 The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 Then I said: "Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies."

But quickly after Isaiah's terror and conviction, look what profound forgiveness grace, and response happens next in Isaiah 6:6-8;

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. 7 He touched my mouth with it and said: Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity is removed and your sin is atoned for. 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking: Who will I send? Who will go for us? I said: Here I am. Send me.

Every healthy, robust encounter we genuinely have with God usually has a combination of conviction, radical loving grace, and response- much like what is depicted in Isaiah's account here.

ENGAGE FOR A MOMENT... WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU HAD AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CONVICTION YOU SENSED? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE GRACE, LOVE AND FORGIVENESS YOU EXPERIENCED IN HIS PRESENCE? HOW DID YOU RESPOND? WHAT DID YOU DO AS A RESULT?

Zechariah too experienced conviction, then radical love and grace, where the angel came to tell him that his prayers had been answered. And akin to the prayers of Abraham and Sarai who were too old to bear children, he and Elizabeth would bear a child.

¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people." (Luke 1:13-17)

This miracle child would be named “John”, which means “Yahweh has shown favor,” and totally aligns with John’s vocation.²⁰ Many would rejoice at his birth, and he would never drink wine or beer. Like Samson and Samuel, John the Baptist was to be a Nazirite from birth (see Num 6:1–4; Judg 13:2–5; 1 Sam 1:11). According to Num 6, Nazirites were Israelites who were separated or consecrated for God’s service. They were to abstain from wine and strong drink, vinegar products, and anything produced from grapes. They also had to take care not to come into contact with dead bodies. They were not permitted to cut their hair until their vow was complete, at which time they were to offer sacrifices to Yahweh.²¹

Later John did, in fact, voluntarily take on a Nazirite vow, refusing to drink anything fermented (Num. 6:1–21). Luke did not specifically state that John would fulfill all aspects of the Nazirite vow. Instead, John would avoid taking any wine perhaps to support his contention that his message was urgent.²²

God does call some followers of His to entirely abstain from the liberty of alcohol in any way. There’s nothing wrong with someone having an occasional drink or two while avoiding excessive, repeated drinking and drunkenness. But those who have a tendency towards alcohol and those whom the Lord has called to fully abstain oughta join John’s predetermined vow of the Nazirite. And hey- go ahead and grow some dreadlocks while you’re at it! 😊

John would be “filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb”. Man, I love it! Guess what? It doesn’t matter what age you are! You can be filled with the Spirit and live for the Lord at any time! John was going to experience that while in a genuine fetal position!

Gabriel²³ proclaimed that John would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. This stupendous angel was alluding to Mal 4:5–6 to compare John the Baptist with

²⁰ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:13). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

²¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:15). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

²² Martin, J. A. (1985). [Luke](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 204). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²³ **Gabriel** was one of only two named angels in the Bible (the other is Michael, mentioned in Dan 12:1; Rev 12:7). Gabriel also appeared to Daniel and explained his vision (Dan 8:15–26). (Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:19). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.)

the OT prophet Elijah. Jesus also referred to John as a type of Elijah in Matt 11:14²⁴ Crowds of Israelites did, in fact, turn to the Lord through John's ministry.²⁵

John was to "make ready for the Lord a prepared people", which was possibly an allusion to Mal 3:1. Jesus quoted this explicitly to refer to John the Baptist (Luke 7:27).²⁶

Zechariah, like any normal person and like most of us, responded to this prophetic pointing to a miraculous gift with doubt and uncertainty.

¹⁸ "How can I know this?" Zechariah asked the angel. "For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years." (Luke 1:18)

I love and respect the artist and singer Mary J. Blige. She came up hard in Yonkers, NYC. She went through abuse, poverty, difficulty, and divorced parents. She struggled with drug addiction and deep depression from the time of being a teenager. She was prone to fall into abusive relationships in her early years.

But from the time of being a five year old kid and seeing her mother mimic the R&B singers on "Soul Train" as it played on the TV, she began to sing as well. She described singing as an escape from all the pain she struggled with and felt which constantly surrounded her and enveloped her.

But when Andre Harrell, who worked for Uptown Records, heard a little cassette tape of her singing that she had made at a late 80's low grade mall studio, he paid her a visit at her housing project apartment in Yonkers. He asked her to sing and she zoned out in artistic focus... singing some beautiful acapella vocals. She blew him away. She got signed to uptown records in 1988 by Harrell. But the whole time, she never really believed that she was anything to marvel at. She simply just loved singing and did it all the time. She pressed in deep with what she loved, and people took notice!

And Zechariah didn't believe that he was anything special to be chosen for anything extraordinary. He was simply serving, loving, and living for the Lord, caring for his wife and caring for God's people. He was lovingly and devotedly living in obscurity when this angel rocked his world. So of course, he couldn't help but say, "how could it be possible that you would appoint me for something like this?" And plus, he was an old fogey at the time.

²⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:17). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

²⁵ Martin, J. A. (1985). [Luke](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 204). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁶ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:17). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

But nonetheless, God broke through. However, there were still more trials to go through!

¹⁹ The angel answered (Zechariah), "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. ²⁰ Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. ²² When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and remained speechless. ²³ When the days of his ministry were completed, he went back home. (Luke 1:19-23)

The angel Gabriel had to seal the miraculous and prophetic news being given with a sign on Zechariah. Zechariah disbelieved because what was being told to him was pretty dang hard to believe! To make sure that the promise landed deep in Zechariah's heart, mind, soul and spirit, he was struck with a muted tongue. His proverbial mic got turned off!

My wife Sarah has always been saying that we would have three daughters. She literally told me on numerous occasions that she had visualized it in her head.

We had Charlotte in 2012. Sarah tragically miscarried in 2014. We had Brooklyn in 2015...

2016 rolled through, 2017, 2018, and 2019 also. I continued to get wrinkles on my face as Sarah got more beautiful. Sarah kept saying that she still saw three daughters in our family. We would often reason, with sadness, that maybe the third daughter was with Jesus and was the one Sarah miscarried in 2014. But Sarah would keep saying that she saw us with three actual daughters.

Then COVID happened in 2020, and we had some time to be cooped up in the house... Sarah, with much persuasion and begging (😓) convinced me to start trying to get pregnant again. I resisted and fought it and then unwillingly gave in (😬). Hallelujah to the Lord almighty.

We tried to get pregnant for the next six months. Nothing happened. We began to think it wasn't going to happen. I figured that maybe, like Zechariah, my 39 year old body might not be as much of a baby making machine as my 30 year and 33 year old body was!

Then, right when we were about to give up, Sarah all of a sudden broke the news to me. "I'm pregnant" ...

I immediately felt like I was going to faint, mostly because I realized that I was all of a sudden going to be a 40 year old man with a little infant and the responsibilities that came along with him or her!

And lo and behold, we had a third baby girl and named her "Madison Vienna", which means "God's gift of music".

Beyond potentially fainting like I was when I got some intense news, Zechariah got his tongue muted and couldn't speak. The people outside were waiting for Zechariah and he could not speak to them. It would've been customary for a priest to pronounce a blessing after coming out of the temple.²⁷ But Zech was dumbfounded and quiet, and pretty likely freaking out in a way that made it clear that something profound had gone down!

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, 25 "The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people." (Lk 1:24-25)

The miracle spoken by the angel began to unfold... Elizabeth, like Sarah with Isaac, was now pregnant with her soon to be son John!

Yet leading up to this moment, Elizabeth felt marginalized and disgraced, like any barren woman in Israelite culture. She felt that the Lord didn't favor her. Maybe she felt lesser than others and outside of God's blessing.

ENGAGE FOR A MOMENT... DO YOU CURRENTLY, OR HAVE YOU EVER, FELT "DISGRACED" OR "OUTSIDE OF GOD'S FAVOR"? DID THE LORD SHOW HIMSELF SOMEHOW TO YOU IN THE MIDST OF THAT? WHAT DID HE SAY TO YOU? ARE YOU STILL WAITING FOR THE LORD TO SHOW HIMSELF TO YOU? TAKE A MOMENT TO PRAY AND ASK HIM TO SHOW HIMSELF IN THE MIDST OF YOUR STRUGGLE...

I was in a worship session yesterday with a group of Church leaders from around the region. When I came into the gathering I stood near the back in an obscure part of the gathering. As our worship time went on I realized that I had been standing by a trash

²⁷ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Lk 1:22). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

can filled with trash while passionately worshiping Jesus the whole time. I didn't even notice that the trash can was right next to me.

I realized that the Lord has called me to be near to those who feel like the refuse of the world- those who have been discarded. The poor, the minority, the outcast, those who've been hurt by the Church, and the marginalized. As I looked out over the other Church leaders worshiping I realized that this is right where I belong- near the can of refuse. I felt so much joy in my calling to have this honor in that moment! To be called to those who need the Lord's care significantly!

God's word to those of us that feel marginalized, disgraced and barren is this- WE ARE LOVED, AND WE ARE VALUED.

And guess what? Jesus Christ is a **dumpster diver!** The world and hypocritical religious people may have thrown you away and labeled you useless! But Jesus dove into the dumpster and found a precious diamond! That diamond is you! The world and the religiously hurtful made a grave mistake when they tossed you out because they didn't realize that you were God's precious gem! His word to you today is that in your confusion and pain He loves you and is going to come through! That's why Jesus Christ died for you! That's why He rose from the grave! He is seated at the right hand of God and invites you into complete, total, full surrender to Him! He states that you are loved! He states that you are forgiven! He states that you belong! He states that you matter to Him in heaven, and you matter to His people! Step into His love and truth now!