



THE LIGHT OF *grace*

BIBLE STUDY



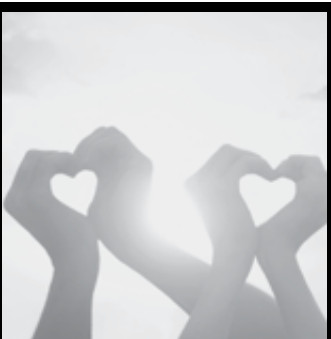
WEEK 1: HOPE
Zechariah



WEEK 2: PEACE
Isaiah



WEEK 3: JOY
Elizabeth



WEEK 4: LOVE
Mary



A 4-SESSION **BIBLE STUDY**
FOR ADVENT

LEADER'S GUIDE

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Introduction

*You then, my child, be strengthened
by the grace that is in Christ Jesus ...*

2 TIMOTHY 2:1

Since its introduction in 1773, the hymn “Amazing Grace” has been sung by millions all over the world. It is a song that has reminded us of the richness of God’s divine favor toward us. Even when we were lost and blind spiritually, God brought us back to him by sending his Son Jesus to be born among us and to save us through his sinless life, suffering, death and resurrection.

Jesus, who is the light of the world, is the light of grace for us this Advent season. His undeserved light upon us reveals the glory of his gracious gifts of hope, peace, joy and love. Those who experienced the light of grace in the time before Jesus’ birth were Zechariah, Isaiah, Elizabeth and Mary. Exploring the biblical accounts of the lives of these faithful people helps us to witness the grace of God at work in them then and prompts us to see the grace of God at work in our lives today.

So much grace is poured out for us through Jesus, that his message of grace flows out from us as we await the celebration of his birth. We are the light of the world, too, as we make his grace known to all around us this Advent season. Let this Bible study enlighten you and give your strength on your journey toward the manger.

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.*

Leader's Guide for Session 1

BEFORE CLASS: Read through this session yourself. Examine the Bible readings listed and become acquainted with them.

READ: Have a member of the group read the Introduction on page 4 aloud.

READ: Read or have someone read the Opening Prayer.

SESSION 1

Hope: Zechariah

And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.

PSALM 39:7



OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, you enlightened the world with amazing grace when you sent Jesus to be born in Bethlehem. Fill our hearts and minds with hope in him for our deliverance from evil and our salvation from sin. Let us not hesitate to be bearers of hope in Jesus to those who have no hope. Amen.

DISCUSSION

What is something (small or large) that you are hopeful for this Advent season?

INTRODUCTION

It might have seemed reasonable for Zechariah the priest to be hopeless. He and his wife did not have any children, and they were now “getting on in years” (Luke 1:17). Yet hope came to Zechariah when the angel Gabriel came to him while he was working in the Temple and told him he and his wife would have a son. Mired in hopelessness at the time, Zechariah did not believe at first, and Gabriel kept him from being able to speak until his child, John, was born. Hope tumbled out of Zechariah’s mouth when he was able to speak again and saw the hope alive in his son who would prepare the way for Jesus. This miraculous story reminds us that through God’s amazing grace, we, too, have hope for the future, no matter how hopeless things may look sometimes.

HOPE FOR ABRAHAM

In order to understand more fully Zechariah’s story in the New Testament book of Luke, we must go back to the Old Testament book of Genesis and look at the story of Abraham. He and his wife, Sarah, too, were childless and quite advanced in age. (Abraham was pushing 100.) Yet three men from God visited Abraham and said he would have a son. By God’s grace, Abraham went from hopeless to hopeful.

1. **Read Genesis 18:1-14.** How does Abraham respond to the arrival of God’s three messengers? How is his response different from Zechariah’s response to God’s messenger? (See Luke 1:12, 18). How do you think you would respond if you were Abraham or Zechariah in these circumstances?

6

DISCUSS: Discuss things you are hopeful for.

READ: Read or have someone read the Introduction.

Hope for Abraham

1. **Read Genesis 18:1-14.** He is happy and excited to greet God’s messengers. He even has their feet washed and starts preparing a meal for them. It is implied that he is accepting of the news they share about the upcoming birth of a son. Zechariah, on the other hand, is afraid of the messenger of God and at first doubts the message that he and his wife will have a son. Answers will vary on how people would respond if they were Abraham or Zechariah.
2. **Read Hebrews 11:8-13.** Abraham had hope because he trusted in God and knew from God that a greater future in heaven awaited him. His hope is remarkable because he was so advanced in years and he was not familiar with where God was leading him on this earth.
3. **Read Genesis 21:1-7.** Isaac represents the fulfillment of God’s promise to them. Isaac represents to the world that God keeps his promises and that he can make seemingly impossible things happen.

4. **Read Genesis 15:5-6.** Many generations of children came to pass through Isaac’s son Jacob, who had 12 sons. The 12 tribes of the Israelite nation came to be through these descendants of Abraham. King David would be born through this line and eventually Christ Jesus.

Hope at the Temple

1. **Read Luke 1:5-7.** It shows that both of them could trace their lineage back to Abraham, so they were members of the nation God had promised to bless. Zechariah is old in age, and he and his wife do not have children. They might assume that God will still bless them with a child, as God blessed Abraham and Sarah with a child. Their lack

of children would be looked down upon in that society, would be seen as a punishment and would fill them with shame. (See Luke 1:25.)

2. **Read Luke 1:8-13.** It was Zechariah's turn to burn incense on the altar just outside the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary where God's presence appeared. The burning of the incense was a high honor and was symbolic of the prayers of the people rising up to God. Gabriel appeared at the right side of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled and fearful at the sight of Gabriel rather than hopeful about what Gabriel's arrival could mean.
3. **Read Luke 1:14-17.** John would bring joy and gladness to Zechariah and Elizabeth and rejoicing to the people. John will be great and filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn people to trust in God, and parents to love their children. Answers will vary.
4. **Read Luke 1:18.** The news seems physically and biologically impossible because he and his wife are beyond traditional child-bearing years. Answers will vary, but might include that it is hard for us to accept news sometimes that our brains cannot logically understand.

5. **Read Luke 1:19-20.** Answers will vary, but may include that his time of silence may have allowed him to pray more and reflect on the miracle that was about to happen, which led to more trust in God, as revealed in the first words he spoke once his son was born.

2. **Read Hebrews 11:8-13.** Why did Abraham have hope in the future? Why is his hope so remarkable?

3. **Read Genesis 21:1-7.** What does Isaac represent to Abraham and Sarah? What does Isaac represent to the world?

4. **Read Genesis 15:5-6.** After Isaac was born, the promise of God recording in these verses came true. What came to pass through Abraham's offspring? What mighty nation came to be? What important individuals would eventually be born into the line of Abraham? (See Matthew 1:1-6, 17.)

HOPE AT THE TEMPLE

1. **Read Luke 1:5-7.** Why is it significant that the ancestry of both Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth is mentioned here? What does Zechariah have in common with Abraham? What might Zechariah and Elizabeth assume about their lives because of this? What made their current circumstances especially difficult?

2. **Read Luke 1:8-13.** What was Zechariah doing in the temple? Where does the angel Gabriel meet him? What emotions reveal Zechariah's hopelessness?

3. **Read Luke 1:14-17.** What wonderful things will come to pass through the life of John? What makes this description of John so hopeful? Do you know people with similar characteristics in your life today?

4. **Read Luke 1:18.** Why is this seemingly good news still hard for Zechariah to accept? Why is it hard for us to accept good news from God sometimes?

5. **Read Luke 1:19-20.** Gabriel's action to strike Zechariah speechless seems like a punishment for his unbelief, but how might it also have been a blessing in disguise?

6. **Read Luke 1:21-25.** What does Zechariah's rather calm return home while speechless reveal to us? What does Elizabeth's reaction to her pregnancy reveal to us about her and about the relationship between Zechariah and Elizabeth?

HOPE AT THE BIRTH OF JOHN

1. **Read Luke 1:57-58.** What does the presence of neighbors and relatives after the birth of John say to you?
2. **Read Luke 1:59-66.** The naming of John causes quite a stir. Why? Why are Zechariah and Elizabeth so confident in his name? Why is it meaningful that Zechariah can speak again after he writes down his son's name? Why does this incident frighten the people who were there?

A SONG OF HOPE

1. **Read Luke 1:67-79.** All the hope that Zechariah had stored up inside during his days of no voice came pouring out in a song the Church now calls the Benedictus (Latin for blessed, the first word sung). What specific acts of God does Zechariah praise? What hopes for the future does Zechariah speak over his son?
2. **Read Luke 1:46-55.** How is this song of Mary the same as or different from Zechariah's song?
3. **Read Matthew 3:1-12.** How does John the Baptist live out the words of his father's song of hope?

6. **Read Luke 1:21-25.** It seems to indicate that Zechariah was coming to terms with the good news and that Elizabeth is accepting of it as well. Elizabeth's reaction tells us that she is strong in her faith and obedient to God's will, and it seems to indicate that she is happy to stay at home with her husband.

Hope at the Birth of John

1. **Read Luke 1:57-58.** It seems to say that Zechariah and Elizabeth have a strong support system around them to love and care for them. It also indicates that this was a big event in the community.
2. **Read Luke 1:59-66.** It is unusual because traditionally children were named after their fathers, so the people expected the baby to be named Zechariah. Zechariah was told by Gabriel that he would not speak again "until the day these things take place" (Luke 1:20), by which Gabriel meant "your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and *you shall call his name John*" (Luke 1:13). So as soon as Zechariah wrote down the name "John," his speech returned. The people were fearful most likely because they witnessed the supernatural occurrence of the return of Zechariah's speech and they could not understand it.

A Song of Hope

1. **Read Luke 1:67-79.** Zechariah praises the salvation, mercy, remembrance and deliverance shown by God toward his people. Zechariah speaks over John the sure hope that John will prepare people for the arrival of the Lord Jesus who brings forgiveness and mercy, and will guide people to the Lord's peace.
2. **Read Luke 1:46-55.** Answers may vary, but both the Benedictus and the Magnificat are songs of praise to God for his blessings. Zechariah's song specifically references his son John and the coming of the Lord, while Mary's song dwells more on the power of God to help the poor, weak and humble in general.
3. **Read Matthew 3:1-12.** John the Baptist lives out his father's hopeful words by calling people to repent and prepare for the Lord. John baptizes people, warns people of their evil ways and humbly points people to Jesus.

A Vision of Hope

1. **Read Isaiah 51:1-5.** Isaiah says that justice and salvation are present in the light of grace dawning upon us in Jesus.
2. The references to desert and wilderness as places where comforting words are shared and the announcement that a better place is near all hint at the words and actions of John the Baptist that would come.
3. Answers may vary, but this prophecy is full of hope because it reminds us of God's promise of blessing to Abraham and Sarah and their descendants (of which we are a part by faith), the joy and gladness we have to look forward to because of Jesus and the salvation we all have in him.

A Hope for Us

1. **Read Romans 5:1-5.** Grace and faith are the undeserved blessings we have been given by God to sustain us and make us hopeful for future blessings from God, no matter what we may be experiencing currently.
2. The benefits of suffering are endurance, character and hope.
3. Zechariah endured a length of time when he could not speak, He was strong in his character as the proud father of baby John. He professed hope in who his son would become.
4. Answers will vary.
5. Answers will vary, but suffering reminds us that Jesus suffered and died once and for all on the cross for the full salvation of our souls.

Amazing Grace

2. Answers may vary, but this verse and Zechariah's song both recount God's goodness and the hope we have in him.

A VISION OF HOPE

1. **Read Isaiah 51:1-5.** The prophet Isaiah connects the dots for us from Abraham to the light that will shine, the light we now know is Jesus. What does Isaiah say is present in this light of grace?
2. What elements in this prophecy hint at the presence and role of John the Baptist in bringing this light to the people?
3. What makes this prophecy so hopeful?

A HOPE FOR US

1. **Read Romans 5:1-5.** What is the role of grace and faith in the building up of the hope we have?
2. What benefits ultimately come through suffering?
3. How are these benefits revealed in the life of Zechariah after the hardship he had in waiting for a child?
4. How have the benefits of suffering revealed themselves to you in your life?
5. How does suffering make our hope in Jesus stronger?

AMAZING GRACE

1. Sing or speak together this verse from "Amazing Grace":

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

2. How is this verse similar to Zechariah's song of hope?

RESPONSIVE READING..... PSALM 33:18-22

L *Truly the eye of the lord is on those who fear him,*

C **on those who hope in his steadfast love,**

L *to deliver their soul from death*

C **and to keep them alive in famine.**

L *Our soul waits for the lord;*

C **he is our help and shield.**

L *Our heart is glad in him*

C **because we trust in his holy name.**

L *let your steadfast love, o lord, be upon us,*

C **even as we hope in you.**

READ: Read responsively the verses of the psalm.

SING: Sing (or speak) this hymn.

HYMN.....MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

His oath, his covenant and blood
Support me in the raging flood;
When ev'ry earthly prop gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

When he shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in him be found,
Clothed in his righteousness alone,
Redeemed to stand before his throne!
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for the light of grace that shines with the gift of hope. Help us to look toward the future with great confidence and trust in you and your plan for us. Open our eyes this Advent to the hope we find in Scripture, prayer and worship that you are always with us, you prepare a place for us in heaven and you saved the world forever by being born in a manger Christmas Day. Amen.

SHINE THE LIGHT OF HOPE

Bring hope to those in need around you by delivering food and clothing to homeless shelters or other organizations that care for the needy.

READ: Have someone read the Closing Prayer, or read the prayer in unison.

SHARE: Suggest that participants collect items to give to the needy.