

Expecting God to Work Even Though It Seems Impossible

Message 1 of 4 in the series: "Eagerly Expecting"

Expectation = a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future

A. One day an angel told an old priest to expect an answer to prayer that he'd probably given up on many years earlier.

"When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old. **One day** Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense... While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, 'Don't be afraid, Zechariah! **God has heard your prayer.** Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.'" Luke 1:5-17 (NLT)

1. Zechariah no longer had any expectation that God would answer his prayer, so he didn't believe God's promise to do so even when he heard the news out loud from an angel.

"Zechariah said to the angel, 'How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.' Then the angel said, 'I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, **since you didn't believe what I said**, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.'" Luke 1:18-20 (NLT)

2. Unbelief = Low expectations or no expectations that God will answer our prayers

"He (Jesus) returned to Nazareth, his hometown. When he taught there in the synagogue, everyone was amazed and said, 'Where does he get this wisdom and the power to do miracles?' Then they scoffed, 'He's just the carpenter's son, and we know Mary, his mother, and his brothers—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. All his sisters live right here among us. Where did he learn all these things?' And they were deeply offended and refused to believe in him. Then Jesus told them, 'A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his own family.' And so **he did only a few miracles there because of their unbelief.**" Matthew 13:54-58 (NLT)

Life Application: Expecting God to answer prayers requires faith in God's kindness and goodness.

"When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. **'How kind the Lord is!'** she exclaimed. 'He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.'" Luke 1:23-25 (NLT)

"Now **faith is confidence** in what we hope for and **assurance** about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for... without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Hebrews 11:1-2, & 6 (NIV)

Life Application: Expecting God to answer prayers requires faith in God's timing.

"...if we look forward to something we don't yet have, **we must wait patiently and confidently.**"

Romans 8:25 (NLT)

"For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, **who works for those who wait for him!**" Isaiah 64:4 (NLT)

Life Application: Expecting God to answer prayers requires faith in God's unlimited creativity and power.

"Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish **infinitely more** than we might ask or think." Ephesians 3:20 (NLT)

B. God worked in the lives of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John (the Baptist) to raise the spiritual expectation level of people all over the world.

“When it was time for Elizabeth’s baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, ‘No! His name is John!’ ‘What?’ they exclaimed. ‘There is no one in all your family by that name.’ So they used gestures to ask the baby’s father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s surprise he wrote, ‘His name is John.’ Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God. Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. **Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, ‘What will this child turn out to be?’** For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way. Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: ‘Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago... And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because **you will prepare the way for the Lord.** You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.” Luke 1:57-70, & 76-77 (NLT)

Note: John = “The Lord is gracious.”

Note: People who are expecting act/talk/plan/pray differently.

Life Application: God wants us to live expecting Jesus to forgive, transform, and work through us and others.

“...Christ’s love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them. So **we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view...** **This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!** And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’” 2 Corinthians 5:14-20 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions

Read Luke 1:1-25, & 57-80 and then discuss the following questions:

1. How do you plan to keep Christ at the center of your Christmas celebrations this year?
2. Why was it so hard for Zechariah to trust Gabriel? Now read Matthew 13:54-58. Why was it so hard for the people of Nazareth to trust Jesus?
3. Share a time when you struggled to obey something you knew God wanted you to do. What made it so difficult to trust the Lord?
4. React to the following statement: “People who are expecting act/talk/plan/pray differently.” What are you expecting God to do in 2022?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. Do you see yourself as an ambassador for Christ? Do you expect Him to forgive, transform, and work through you and the others in your Connect Group? ...in your family? ...in the lives of your neighbors/coworkers/classmates?
6. Discuss the following quotations:

“Even though God delays, He delivers.” Susie Larson

“The message of Christmas, then, is not about manufacturing sentimental feelings in vain hopes of a miracle. It’s about believing the reality that God has birthed something new in Jesus and because of this, God will birth something new in you and in me.” Daniel Darling

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” The Lord speaking to Abraham (Genesis 18:14)