

The Scrolls



Studies for families in Belonging, Becoming, and going Beyond

Volume 13 Number 24

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FATHER'S DAY "180 DEGREE DIFFERENCE" LUKE 1:5-17

This Week's Core Competency

Hope – I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 6:19-20 *19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

Biblically speaking, what can we hope for? I mean truly, 'take-it-to-the-bank' hope for. Oftentimes, we 'hope' a job interview goes well; or we 'hope' to have a fun, safe trip to the coast. Perhaps some once 'hoped' their first marriage would be saved. And how many of us have 'hoped' that a loved-one would be cured of a terminal illness? While it is perfectly natural to long for and even pray for these things (as the Spirit leads - Eph 6:18), hope is far more than the sum total of one's personal desire. "In casual conversation the word hope conveys a desire...that is uncertain of fulfillment. Doubt is attached as if the hope or wish will probably not come to pass. [But] the word hope is only rarely used in this way in Scripture; most often it conveys the meaning of a confident or certain expectation" (Don Campbell, *The Theological Wordbook*, 169).

But that begs the question, "Of what can we be absolutely certain of and therefore hopeful for? The answer is surprisingly simple. Biblical 'hope' is a proper response to the declarative promises of God as revealed in his word; promises that can be applied to, yet transcend, our present circumstances. Space will only permit a few examples, but they are undoubtedly worth affirming!

As believers in Jesus Christ, God has promised us eternal life (John 1:12, 3:16, 5:24, etc). So, if a fellow believer is dealing with a serious illness, our hope in the promise of permanent healing *in the life to come* remains unshakable. Or, we can know for certain of God's promise to faithfully complete a good work in us (Phil 1:6, 2:13, etc). So, in the midst of great personal disappointment, or even through our on-going struggle with sin, we can maintain a steadfast hope that God not only can but *will* work together all things for good (Rom 8:28).

Additionally, it is easy to develop a sense of hopelessness with all the evil and suffering we see in the world. Yet, God has promised us he is going to do something about it (Nahum 1:2; Romans 12:19 - cf. Deut 32:35). So while our hearts may ache over a natural disaster, injustice, human cruelty, etc. (*hopefully* to the point it moves us to action or advocacy!), we can sleep soundly at night knowing that: all evil will be avenged by our holy and just God, that he has promised to remove any/all suffering - physical, mental, etc. - from our presence in eternity (Rev 21:3-5) and that we will spend forever in unbroken fellowship with Jesus Christ (Phil 1:23). We have these and many more wonderful promises from God that we can hang our "hat of hope" upon. And when our faith is grounded on biblical promises, our hope will never return void.

A Situation for Discussion

David and Rebecca have been married for 6 years. They've been trying to conceive for the last four.

con't pg. 2

Rebecca says all the right things in front of others; you know the sort: "God is in control", "We're just waitin' upon the Lord", etc. But in her heart of hearts, Rebecca's faith is getting pummeled by discouragement. She recently sensed a seed of bitterness take root in her heart towards God. It began to develop last week when she saw a "Hollywood" report story about the twin boys the girlfriend and millionaire porn magazine mogul are going to have come November. As hard as she tries, she just can't get past the question, "Lord, why would you allow her to carry twins and yet keep me from having even one?"

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Luke 1:5-17

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. 16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle all the proper names in this passage.
- * Highlight "In the...Judea" for historic context v. 5.
- * Place brackets around vv. 6 and 7.
- * Box the word "upright" and "blamelessly" in v. 6.
- * Underline "he was chosen by lot" in v. 9.
- * Highlight the angel's words from "Do not" to "has been heard" in v. 13.
- * Place a number (first to last) by each descriptor the angel gives of John.
- * Double underline the first and last phrase in v. 17.

day 2 **EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

- 1) Differentiate between the major and minor characters of this passage.

- 2) List all you know, or can uncover (Concordance, Bible Dictionary, etc), regarding Herod the Great. Note anything *ironic* relative to the remnants of Israel at the time of this story?

- 3) Identify how Zechariah and Elizabeth are described in this passage. Restate these in your own words.

- 4) Solve this mathematical word problem. A priest had only 14 opportunities a year to be chosen to burn incense in the temple. There were approximately 750 men in his division. How long *might* he have to wait for this opportunity to "fall" to him? (Note: A priest could only offer burning incense once in a lifetime)

- 5) Read v. 9 followed by Ps 16:5-6 and Pr 16:33. Explain your understanding of the relationship between the human activity of "casting lots" and the providence of God?

- 6) Identify everything from the passage the angel has to say about the son that Elizabeth would bear to Zechariah. Write a summary statement in your own words.

- 7) In what sense do you think John would serve "in the spirit and power" of the OT prophet Elijah?

- 8) What is the ultimate purpose given for John the Baptist's ministry (See also Lk 3:3-6)?

- 9) How might this passage cultivate the Core Competency of Hope in us today?

- 10) **Discussion:** Do you think it is okay to "cast lots", regarding amoral (i.e. - not immoral) issues today?.

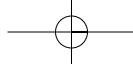
day **3** **EXAMINE** – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Often our familiarity with a passage can cloud our understanding or appreciation of its significance. The angel's annunciation(s) in Luke 1 broke over 400 years of silence by God to the Jewish people; and what a tumultuous 400 years it was! The book of Malachi was given to the Jews around 430 B.C. It concluded with the promised appearing of a prophet who would make way for their coming Messiah. However, weeks turned into years and years turned into centuries. Despite numerous tectonic shifts in world domination, the Jews lived in relative religious freedom and peace; first under the Persians (450-330) followed by the Grecians (330-166). However in 175, Antiochus IV places a prohibition of Judaism in favor of advancing *Hellenism* (i.e. - the Greek way of life). There were a few heroic efforts, but victories were short-lived. Oppression remained and Hellenism became ever-more pervasive in Jewish life. In 63 B.C. Roman general Pompey invades the Holy Land and seizes control of the city. The Roman emperor appointed rulers over the newly-acquired territories. In 40 B.C. Herod (the Great) was appointed ruler over Judea; including: Samaria, Galilee, Perea and Tracontis. By 37 B.C. he successfully gained control of the region and ruled until his death in 4 B.C.

Just 2 years prior to Herod's death, the angel appeared to Zachariah in 6 B.C. And at this time, the Jews were desperately longing for their promised Messiah to come defeat Rome, establish national solidarity (having been compromised by historic exiles (see v. 16), Hellenism, oppression, etc), restore religious freedom and reestablish Israel as the favored nation of God. And as if these 400+ years of silence were not enough, it did not go unnoticed that long ago God foretold "the older [Esau] would serve the younger [Jacob]" (Gen 25:23). Yet here sat Herod, an Idumite and descendant of Esau - ruling over them - descendants of Jacob. For many, hope was all but lost. But such could not be said of Zechariah and Elizabeth as "both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly" (1:7).

When the lot fell to Zechariah, he knew this moment was by divine appointment (v. 9); that he had been chosen for the sacred task of burning incense - reflective of the prayers of Israel's surviving remnant - in the temple. Picture the following: "He is accompanied by two assistants. One of these men is carrying in a golden bowl burning coals from the altar of burnt offering, and is spreading them out on the altar of incense. He then withdraws. The other assistant is carrying a golden censer filled with incense. He arranges the incense upon the altar. And now, profound silence ensues, for the most solemn action of the ritual is about to occur. A signal is given. The sacred moment has arrived for Zechariah to place the incense upon the coals, causing a cloud to arise, its fragrance rising and spreading. Together with the ascending aroma a fervent prayer consisting of thanksgiving for blessings received and of supplication for peace upon Israel, now issues from the heart and lips of the priest. The people gather "outside"...in a prostrate position and with outstretched hands [praying and waiting for Zechariah to return] to pronounce the Aaronic blessing on the people" (William Hendrickson, *Luke*, NTC, 68-69).

All is going according to plan until suddenly the angel Gabriel (v. 19) appears. Quickly calming his fears Gabriel assures him that his "prayer has been heard" (v. 13). While Gabriel next prophetically speaks of Elizabeth conceiving a son, the immediate context strongly suggests that the prayer that had just been "heard" was the one Zechariah had just offered on Israel's behalf (remember, Zechariah and Elizabeth are "well along in years" (v. 7) indicating conception by natural means was impossible). By way of a double-blessing, the prophet hoped for in Malachi (4:5-6) over 400 years ago was not only coming to Israel...but his arrival would be through Zechariah and Elizabeth! In one fell swoop, the waning hope of the Israelites was being restored and Zechariah and Elizabeth's long, lost hope of having a child became a bona-fide promise. And all according to God's perfect timing (cf. Gal 4:4-5).



The Message of the Passage
Given the certain hope we have in God's faithfulness,
continue to walk upright and blamelessly before him -
regardless of the perplexities of life.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

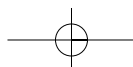
• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“180 Degree Difference”
(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)



notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 5 **Zechariah** (Lit. "the Lord has remembered").
- v. 5 **division of Abijah** Abijah was one of the heads (8th in a line of 24) of the priestly families of Israel (cf. Nu 12:12-17; 1 Chr 24:10) and a descendent of Aaron (Moses' brother). At the time of Zechariah was serving, it is estimated that 18,000 priests served within these 24 divisions. Thus there were roughly 750 priests per division. Each division served in the temple twice a year (and collectively during special celebrations such as Passover) in one week increments. Thus, the opportunity to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense was quite literally a once-in-a-lifetime experience.
- v. 5 **Elizabeth** (Lit. "God is my oath [or "promise"]") "The story of Elizabeth/John echoes that of Hannah (1 Samuel 1, 2) the mother of Samuel. As Samuel was the prophet who anointed David as King of Israel, John was the prophet sent to prepare the way for their last king, Jesus.
- v. 5 **upright/blameless** These descriptors are not intended to communicate that Zachariah and Elizabeth were without sin, rather of their genuine faithfulness regarding their devotion to God. The same term is used of Simeon (2:25) and Joseph (Mt 1:19).
- v. 7 **barren** "With upright/blameless], reminiscent of various passages in the OT, Luke is probably drawing implicit comparisons to the age and barrenness of such famous OT personalities as Abraham and Sarah (see, e.g., Gen 18:9-15), the mother of Samson (Judg 13:2-5), and Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Sam 1:1-20). And as it was in the case of these OT saints, so it is with Elizabeth: after much anguish and seeking the Lord, she too is going to have a son in her barrenness" (sn 25, NET Bible, 1831-32). "Their childlessness was not due to any personal sin on their part but on God's sovereign and wise plan" (note 1:5-7, ESV Study Bible, 1942).
- v. 9 **chosen by lot** Due to the large number of priests, this required method (*m. Tamid* 5:2-6:3) was exercised each day to determine God's providential choice (See Pr 16:33) of which priest was to burn incense 'that' day. Prior to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon God's people (Acts 2), this was a common and acceptable way to settle a dispute and/or determine God's will (See Lev 16:8-10; Nu 26:55, 33:54; 1 Chr 24:5, 31; 25:8-9; 26:13-14; Ne 11:1; Jon 1:7, John 19:23-24 (cf. Ps 22:18); Acts 1:26, etc. "For Luke, this was not the result of "chance" or "fate." God was clearly in control of this event" (Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC, 74).
- v. 10 **burning of incense** "A sweet-smelling substance that was burned as an offering to God on the altar [placed in front of the curtain - behind which was the Holy of Holies] in the tabernacle and the temple. The purpose of this incense offering was to honor God. Incense symbolized and expressed the prayers of the Hebrew people, which were considered a pleasant aroma offered to God" (*Nelson New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 597). The same priest would perform this duty twice daily at 9 A.M. and 3 P.M.
- v. 15 **fermented drink** This command relates to John's special role (and associative ascetic life) as the forerunner of the coming Messiah. This is more stringent than that of a Nazarite vow or for a priest during periodic service; abstinence for the former was only for the number of days covered by the vow (Nu 6:4-5) while for the latter only for/during their week(s) of service (Lev. 10:9).
- v. 17 **of Elijah** The Jews knew that Elijah had not died (2 Ki 2:11) and, despite the nearly 400 years of silence on the part of God, they were anxiously anticipating Elijah's return (Mal 4:5). When word got out about John's preaching in the desert, it didn't take long for many to inquire if he was Elijah. John rightly asserts that he is not Elijah (John 1:21) and Jesus rightly asserts that John is the "Elijah" (Mt 11:14). The confusion is resolved when we see John serving in the same office of Elijah (that of prophet) and communicating much the same message (that of repentance; v. 17; cf Mal 4:6).
- v. 17 **to turn** "The prophet John promised reconciliation to God for those who responded to his call to repent (3:1-14). 'Turn' is a biblical term for conversion, indicating a change of orientation, a turning away from sin and towards God" (v. 16 note, NKJV Study Bible, 1685). The two lines that follow "cover all relationships: turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children points to horizontal relationships, while (turn) the disobedient to the wisdom of the just shows what God gives from above in a vertical manner" (sn 30, NET Bible, 1832).



Connect the **FAMILY.**

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

If your friend told you Jesus lives in his heart, but he was always getting in trouble at school and being mean to his family, what would you think? Why would his actions affect what you think about his faith in Jesus? Read 2 Kings 22:1-15. If people really had faith in God, King Josiah knew they should also do whatever is necessary to obey him. Does real faith equal obedience in your life.

Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, help me to not merely listen to your Word, and deceive myself. Help me do what it says. James 1:22

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Hope – Coping with the problems of life and death with the help of Jesus.

Memory verse – "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." James 1:22

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *What was found as the temple was being rebuilt?
- *Why did King Josiah tear his robe when he heard the words read from the Book of the Law?
- *Why were the chariots, horses, altars and the Asherah pole wrong to have?
- *What caused King Josiah to realize they were disobeying God?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

Write down the names of three people you know who have some sort of need. Next to each name, write what their need is. Place the list on the refrigerator to remind you to pray for them. Decide as a family of something you can do for each of them this week to help meet their needs.

Kids K through fourth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.



Family completes **Experience It** _____
Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____
Family participates in **Live It** _____ and **Pray It** _____
Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Child's name _____

Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians 6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.