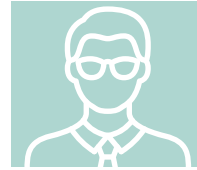




# MESSAGE GUIDE

DECEMBER 1, 2024

## FEAR NOT-1: ZECHARIAH



LUKE 1:5-25

**RICK GROVER,  
LEAD PASTOR**

This week we are jumping into our Christmas series that we are calling, “Fear Not.” It is interesting that the Christmas story recorded in the Gospels is filled with fear:

- And “Fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, `Do not be afraid” **(Luke 1:12-13, ESV).**
- Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father, was told, “Do not fear to take Mary as your wife” **(Matthew 2:20, ESV).**
- Mary was told, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” **(Lue 1:30, ESV).**
- The shepherds watching their flock by night, “The shepherds ... were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, `Fear not...” **(Luke 2:9b-10, ESV).**

When you think of the Christmas story, do you think about the fear that these people—real people—faced? The Christmas story is a story of hope and joy and peace, but we can easily overlook the reality of what these faithful servants of God faced...including their own fear.

This Christmas series is not the Hallmark Christmas card fantasy where everything in life is “peace on earth, good will to men.” We’re going to go behind the scenes of the Christmas story and look at how those people chosen by God to usher in and welcome the Prince of Peace had to face and overcome their own fear. And here’s what we’ll discover and unpack over the next four weeks: God doesn’t eliminate our fear; He empowers us to face it and overcome it.

### 1. WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN FILLED WITH GREAT FEAR IN YOUR LIFE?

That which is the greatest story ever told of offering peace, hope, and joy to the world crossed into the orbit of everyday people, just like you and me, who are filled with fear. Zechariah is told that he will become the father (in his old age) of John, the prophet who prepared the way for the coming Messiah.

**Zechariah:** His son was John the Baptist. If it were not for Zechariah’s son, Zechariah would not be known by us today. He would have gone down in some first-century record of Jewish priesthood that would have been lost over time. But the biblical record of John the Baptist assures that Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, would be remembered for all time.



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Here's where the story begins. Roughly 430 years before the time of Zechariah and Elizabeth, there were two Jewish prophecies of what would proceed the coming Messiah, both written by Malachi: *"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me"* (**Malachi 3:1, ESV**).

Later in chapter four, we read, *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction"* (**Malachi 4:5-6, ESV**).

And thus ends the written record of the Old Testament. Now, let's jump 400+ years ahead to Israel, and the people have been waiting a long, long time. When will God's deliverance come? When will the great and awesome day of the Lord arrive? When will God bring about this spiritual awakening in Israel? When will the messenger arrive telling us the Messiah is on His way?

And here's where Luke begins his Gospel. After his introduction to Theophilus where he writes that his purpose is to give him (and all of us) "an orderly account" to verify the life and teachings of Jesus, he writes about a priest named Zachariah. **Read Luke 1:5-25.**

So, the parents are remembered throughout history because of the identity of their son, but it was because of their faithfulness that God gave chose them to be the parents of John.

This is key for us in our understanding of how God deals with us in our fears. Remember, again, He doesn't eliminate or eradicate but He empowers us to face and overcome. Zechariah and Elizabeth were known for their faithfulness: *"And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord"* (**Luke 1:6, ESV**).

Luke records that Zechariah was faithfully conducting his normal service as a priest, vv. 8-10, that's when in an instant everything in his life, and Elizabeth's life changed. Notice that Zechariah wasn't looking for something. He didn't wake up that morning and say, "Wow. Maybe today is going to be the day that God is going to do something miraculous in my life!" No, it's in the faithful, steady plodding of obedience when the Lord often shows up.



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## 2. ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH WERE GOING ABOUT THEIR NORMAL LIFE OF FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE WHEN GOD SHOWED UP IN A BIG WAY. WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN GOD SUDDENLY SHOW UP IN THE STEADY PLODDING OF OBEDIENCE (IN YOUR LIFE OR IN SOMEONE ELSE'S LIFE)?

This leads us right into the heart of this ongoing, nagging part of the stories we'll see over the next four weeks: Faithful service does not eliminate fearful feelings. In fact, sometimes faithful service can lead to fearful feelings! At least it did for Zechariah: *"And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him"* **(Luke 1:11-12, ESV)**.

Sometimes we get the false impression that if we just serve God, He's going to make sure we never face anything that ever troubles us, and we're always going to be on this spiritual high on the mountain top of faith. But Scripture indicates that following God isn't like that. In fact, sometimes in our following of God, we experience even more trouble and greater fear. Again, Faithful service does not eliminate fearful feelings.

If you notice, Zechariah experienced two types of fear. He had the fear that we would all experience in the presence of this mighty, angelic being, in vv. 11-12. This is why Gabriel, the angelic warrior of God assured Zechariah in v. 13, *"Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard"* **(Luke 1:13, ESV)**. There is a good fear, though still uncomfortable, where we are called upon to *"fear the Lord our God"* **(Dt. 10:20)**.

But over in verse 18 there is another kind of fear Zechariah experiences, and that's the fear of uncertainty. It's the fear of doubt. It's the fear of, "What if I heard wrong? What if this doesn't happen like the angel said? What if God's way really isn't true?" This is where Zechariah put more stock in his circumstances than in God's plan. Look at verse 18 again: *"And Zechariah said to the angel, 'How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years'"* **(Luke 1:18, ESV)**.

Zechariah's doubts led to God's discipline: Zechariah would be silent until John's birth. Sometimes our fears can get the best of us. When we doubt, it doesn't mean God removes Himself from us. But He does at times invoke discipline to spur us on to greater growth and trust in the future. And then, in the end, God's plan unfolds, John is born, and indeed, he does become the messenger of the Messiah who declares, *"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* **(John 1:29)**.



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## 3. DO YOU SOMETIMES HAVE THE FEAR OF UNCERTAINTY THAT GOD ISN'T REAL OR DOUBT HE ISN'T WORKING IN YOUR LIFE? HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD'S DISCIPLINE IN THOSE MOMENTS?

Takeaways:

# 1- Faithful service doesn't eliminate fearful feelings. In fact, sometimes God allows us to experience fear in spite of our faithful service. It doesn't mean God has abandoned us or doesn't love us. It's just the opposite: when we acknowledge our weakness, then we are far more open to receiving His power, for when we are weak, He is strong.

*"Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10, ESV).

# 2- There are two types of fear: a healthy fear of the Lord and an unhealthy fear from the lack of faith. Let's make sure that our fear of the Lord guides us, so that we will not fall to fear from lack of faith.

# 3- God doesn't eliminate our fear; He empowers us to face it and overcome it. Even with Zechariah, God didn't just wave a magic wand and make his fear go away. It was still a choice God gave him to trust Him in spite of his circumstances. So, God gave him the power to face his fear and overcome it. And so, He will with us today.

## 4. HOW ARE YOU CHOOSING TO TRUST GOD TO EMPOWER YOU TO FACE AND OVERCOME A FEAR?

### NEXT STEPS:

- If you would like to talk with someone about how to face your fears and overcome them, text **"FEAR"** to 317-707-6462, and we'll reach out to you.
- If you would like to talk with someone about what it means to pursue a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, text **"FOLLOW"** to the same number, and we'll reach out to you. Or, if you're ready to talk with someone right now or have someone to pray with, we encourage you to stop by the Next Steps Room, where people will gladly talk and pray with you.

