

## **Dec 3 Small Group Leaders' Guide - Luke 1:1-25**

In the Greco Roman world heralds took news of objective history changing events from town to town. It may have been news of victory in battle, the ascension of a new king, or the ratification of a peace treaty. In Greek this news was called euangelion or gospel. The herald was called an evangelist. The early Jesus followers adopted this language to say that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was an objective history changing event that impacted everything. This language was subversive in a world saturated with the gospel of Caesar. This was the news of a counter king, a counter kingdom, and a counter kingdom lifestyle.

1. How does this context shape our understanding of Luke as gospel?

*The gospel of Jesus is rooted in history. It isn't a philosophy, a religion, an ideology. It is something that happened in history and thus it shapes every aspect of our lives, our world.*

*This event in history means it must be come to terms with. Who is this Jesus? What did he do? What impact does it have on me?*

*As it pertains to the final question it is important to note that gospel was something that was accomplished. It had been done. You didn't need to perform all that was needed was acceptance and then living in light of what had been accomplished.*

### **Read Luke 1:1-25**

2. There had been no prophet of God in Israel for over 400 years. God had been silent for 400 years. Have you ever encountered the silence of God? How did you respond? How did it make you feel? How did it impact your view of God? Your view of your value in His eyes?

*This is simply a personal reflection question.*

*We don't often talk about this experience in the life of faith, though it is a common experience (see Psalm 13).*

*I would encourage you as a leader to first reference it as a common experience, perhaps even read Psalm 13. I think that may for many reasons help to encourage people to speak as I would suspect this is something we have all experienced to some extent.*

*As a leader if you have an experience to share the more honest you are the more others will feel comfortable sharing.*

*The silence of God often leads us to pray less rather than railing against the silence.*

*We feel either abandoned by God, or wonder if there may not be a God, or if there is a God that God is not good.*

3. As Luke tells us about the personal tragedy of Zachariah and Elizabeth he goes to great length to undermine a linkage between their goodness or lack of goodness and their circumstances. Why does such a linkage need to be broken?

*Luke by his details tells us that they are from the richest of religious pedigrees. A priest married to a direct descendent of the first high priest.*

*Luke tells us by his details that they are righteous, blameless. This does not mean that they were sinless only that they were wholly committed to the ways of God.*

*Luke by these details will not let us make a connection between their infertility and the judgement of God (which was a common belief).*

*This is a belief that is as prevalent now as it was then, just around different things. We believe that if life doesn't turn out as we would have wanted it must mean that I am being punished for doing something wrong. If I have been good I deserve a good life and so if I do not have a good life then either I sinned and am being punished for it or God is to blame. Such a thread has likely weaved its way through everyone of our hearts at some point.*

*This belief should be undone because it is just untrue. Good people do not get good things, bad people do not get bad things. That is not gospel that is Karma. This is also not true to our experience. It is often the wicked who succeed, the good who suffer. The life of Jesus himself should undercut any such linkage. The only perfect man who suffered grievously.*

*Do we suffer for our sin? Of course we do. If we lie and are found out it will corrode the relationship and leave us in a place where others don't trust us. That would be suffering the natural consequence of our sin, but God does not add on top of that punishment.*

*Why? Because that would be unjust. Jesus took all of our sin to the cross and paid the full penalty for it. If God judged sin in himself on the cross then to also judge us for it again would be unjust.*

4. Silence does not mean that God has not heard our prayer. When the angel comes he says your prayers "have been heard" (past tense). Zachariah would not have been praying his own personal desires as he stood before the altar of incense. How can the truth that silence does not mean that God has not heard our prayers impact how we deal with the silence of God?

*How many times might we interpret God not answering our prayer as we would have wanted as silence? We are never promised however that God will answer our prayers the way that we would have wanted. We are only promised that he hears our prayers...*

*This question all revolves around how we view God. If we view God as a loving and wise father who always answers our prayers in ways that if we had the wisdom we would have asked for then we will experience the silence differently than someone who sees God as a boss who gives good things to those who perform.*

*There is also the conviction here that we don't have because we don't ask. There are many things God promises to give us. Let us trust Him to ask. He is a loving father who longs to lavish good things upon his kids.*

5. Holding the story of Zechariah alongside the story of Mary reveals that both of them respond initially with doubt. In response the angel brings Zechariah to silence and sends Mary to Elizabeth. It is often seen that God is punishing Zechariah for unbelief and affirming Mary's belief. But what if each response is a gift – that conversation is exactly what Mary needs – and silence exactly what Zachariah means for the good news to take hold in each of their hearts?

*It would tell us that rather than punishing doubt God desires to enter into it to bring us to deeper trust.*

*It would tell us that God deals with each of us as individuals. Meeting us exactly where we are to form and shape us in ways that are needed.*

6. The gospel is the objective history changing event of Jesus' life death and resurrection. It is, what Luke says, what has been accomplished among us. As such the gospel doesn't invite us to do, it tells us it has been done. How does silence and conversation help us build our foundation on the gospel, the finished work of Jesus?

*Silence gives us the ability to deepen in our understanding of who God is and what he has done. It gives us the opportunity to stop listening to ourselves and to start talking to ourselves. To stop allowing our thoughts to just follow their natural course but to take a hold of our selves and preach the good news to our hearts and lives.*

*Conversation enables us to sit down with someone who knows and loves us and allow the good news to be spoken into our hearts and lives by another who knows the places we need to receive the good news.*

*If this is true – how does it impact how you see yourself?*

*If this is true – how does it speak to your unforgiveness, your fear, your anger?*

*If this is true – how does it impact how you work, spend your time, your money?*

7. What are some of the ways you have become rooted in the good news of Jesus?

*This is a personal reflection question.*

*I would encourage you as a leader to have an example or two ready to go that will help stir others up to share.*