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Submission to God in Place of Fear



QUESTION 1:

When has a pleasant change caught you by surprise?

THE POINT

God's desire to work through us is no cause for fear.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Let's get rid of one mistaken idea about older adults: They don't like change. The rationale has been that they don't like change because they're older and, therefore, set in their ways. But the truth is: None of us like change—and we all get set in our ways! We get used to a routine or doing things a certain way, and we see no reason to change.

Of course, we willingly make some changes on our own such as purchasing a different car or changing to a new job. We embrace the changes that come with becoming a parent

or grandparent. But when change is thrust upon us by others, we can resist. What if things aren't better? What if this is harder? What if . . . ? We can quickly raise a lot of concerns and potential fears.

Even when we know God is behind the change, fear can still be present. In Luke 1, we see a young woman who was about to experience an incredible change in her life and circumstances. We can be encouraged by her example to trust God no matter what.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

LUKE 1:26-29

²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be.

The angel Gabriel played a prominent role in the events recorded in Luke 1. He had already appeared to Zechariah to inform him that his prayers had been heard. Although they were "well along in years," Zechariah and his wife were told they would have a son who would prepare the way for the Messiah. Now in verse 26, Gabriel announced that Messiah's birth.

Mary was a young woman; scholars believe she was probably a teenager. She was "engaged to a man named Joseph," and Luke pointed out twice that she was a virgin. The Greek word for *virgin* means exactly what it means in English. She had not had sexual relations with a man.

Typically, when an angel appeared in Scripture, the response was fear. That seems understandable; I'm sure the appearance of an angel—a holy messenger and heavenly warrior from God—would be intimidating. Mary would have been familiar with the

history recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, those times when God's messengers delivered one of two types of messages. First, some messages were warnings or announcements of impending judgment. Second, some messages were invitations or announcements that the person would play a part in God's work. This work might be difficult, but it would yield something extraordinary.

QUESTION 2:

When have you felt troubled by the unknown?

Mary was troubled, but not because an angel had appeared to her. She was troubled by the meaning of his words. Gabriel's announcement to Mary was no word of

judgment; instead, it was quite the opposite. It was a greeting that spoke of God's grace and favor: "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you" (v. 28). What did this message mean to her, a typical young Jewish woman?

God had bestowed a special honor on Mary. Why else would He send an angel to tell her

God was with her? For many of us, knowing God is present can be a comfort; while for others, the presence of God might justifiably cause them to tremble with fright. Mary, though, was troubled because she didn't know why she was favored or blessed with the presence of God.

LUKE 1:30-33

³⁰ Then the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."

When Gabriel, a messenger from God, says, "Do not be afraid," it's best to remember who is saying it and whom he represents. Within the Christmas narrative, the call to not be afraid was heard several times. Zechariah heard it (Luke 1:13); Joseph heard it (Matt. 1:20); and the shepherds heard it (Luke 2:10). Mary need not be afraid because she had "found favor with God" (v. 30). As much as those involved in the Christmas narrative needed to hear it, we all need to hear it. In all of life's different circumstances, we don't have to fear because of who goes with us.

The reason Mary didn't need to be afraid was because she had "found favor with God." To find favor with God means to be "full of grace." This phrase clearly portrays Mary as a recipient of God's grace. Some have



erroneously made Mary to be a dispenser of grace, though she needed it herself. And thankfully, it can now be said of all who have accepted God by faith and have become His children that we also are full of grace.

It's worth stressing again that we may not understand everything God has planned for our lives, but we can trust Him because of His presence and grace. His gracious presence should dispel any fear. As David declared, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you" (Ps. 56:3). Fear wants to cripple us and have the last word in our lives, but God's presence wins over fear every time.

Gabriel's next words made it clear how Mary was favored by God. She would give birth to "the Son of the Most High." Mary could not have missed the powerful significance of hearing those words. This term conveys the power, strength, and authority of God. It means the Father is superior to everyone and everything in every way. This term also shows us that Jesus's divine sonship is linked to His messiahship; therefore, He is equal with God (Phil. 2:6). This phrase also reminds us that Jesus has the same nature as God the Father.

Mary's child would be royalty. "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end" (v. 32b-33). Jesus's kingdom is divine and will last for all eternity. The promises may have reminded Mary of God's promise to David: "Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16).

Throughout Scripture we encounter individuals who were given opportunities to step into the unknown and trust God on the journey. Mary was now going to step into a situation no woman before or since had experienced and she would need to trust God. There was no need to fear because God would use her obedience to do something that had never been done and would bring grace and salvation to all.

QUESTION 3:

Why do we sometimes fear God's plans?



LUKE 1:34-38

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?” ³⁵ The angel replied to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” ³⁶ And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ “See, I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary. “May it happen to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

It’s not that Mary doubted Gabriel’s announcement, but she did have questions. Mary’s confusion came because she thought the angel was describing a normal conception from an act she and Joseph had engaged in. Since she knew she and Joseph had not consummated their marriage, she asked for clarification: “How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man” (v. 34).

QUESTION 4:

When is it OK to question God?

The angel’s answer to Mary’s question described the creative work of the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (v. 35). Overshadow carries the sense of the holy, powerful presence of God. God’s mighty presence was sufficient to sustain Mary and bring about the virgin birth. Creatively, the Holy Spirit brought the physical conception of Jesus. As Gabriel testified: “For nothing will be impossible with God” (v. 37).

Mary’s response to Gabriel is one of my favorite responses in all the biblical narrative: “See, I am the Lord’s servant. . . . May it happen to me as you have said” (v. 38). I love her response because I yearn to trust the Lord like this. The statement convicts me because it reminds me of those times I am not the Lord’s servant. It reveals to me that I often let self or fear sit on the throne of my life, but not Jesus.

With confidence, Mary took a step of faith and didn’t allow fear to sit on the throne of her life. What would our lives look like if we did likewise? How would we navigate this world differently? May we live in such a way that whatever comes our way and whatever invitation the Lord gives us, we respond as Mary did: “I am the Lord’s servant.”

QUESTION 5:

When have you been reminded that God is the God of the impossible?

OUR CALLING

Use the acrostic below to write feelings you experience when considering God's calling on your life. Then write a prayer asking for God's help in meeting Him where He is at work.

C –

A –

L – lost at times

L –

I –

N –

G –

My Prayer:

*“God does not choose people because of their ability,
but because of their availability.”*

BROTHER ANDREW

LIVE IT OUT

God's desire to work through us is no cause for fear. How will you express your trust and submission to Him? Choose one of the following applications:

▶ **Read.** Read through an Old Testament book like Exodus. Note the times when God came through despite the impossible situation those in the biblical narrative were facing. Let this serve as a reminder of why you can trust God in any situation.

▶ **Obey.** If you feel you're facing an impossible situation, maybe there's a step of obedience that needs to be your first step. Meditate on the verse: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Step out in trust as God empowers you to obey Him, regardless of your circumstances.

▶ **Serve.** There are areas within your church that are seeking others to get involved. Maybe you feel ill-prepared or that your past has disqualified you. Contact whomever you need to and let him or her know that your "yes" is on the table.

All of us have a certain amount of trepidation when it comes to change. But when God is the One leading us into that change, we can rest assured there is nothing to fear.