

## SESSION 4

# Submission to God in Place of Fear

### THE POINT

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

### THE PASSAGE

Luke 1:26-38

### 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.

### THE SETTING

At Christmas Christians naturally focus on the events at the birth of Jesus. However, sometimes they neglect the important incidents that preceded His nativity. Luke recorded in his Gospel the amazing occurrences prior to Jesus's birth that took place in the lives of several key individuals, most significantly Mary. At the right time, Mary was confronted in Nazareth with some astounding news from a heavenly visitor. She would be the mother of the Messiah.

## GET INTO THE STUDY



**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 1**, the “Putting Fear in Its Place” poster, to review the major theme of this study, along with the focus of each session.

**DISCUSS:** **Question #1** on page 37 of the PSG: “**When has a pleasant change caught you by surprise?**”

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 38 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of submitting to God by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**RECAP:** 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.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 38 of the PSG: “**God’s desire to work through us is no cause for fear.**”

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking God to help us understand the need to submit to Him. Thank Him for taking away our fears as we do.



5 MINUTES

### Putting Fear in Its Place

- ▶ **THE FEAR OF GOD**  
*Psalms 33:6-15, 18-22*
- ▶ **SECURITY IN PLACE OF FEAR**  
*Romans 8:28-39*
- ▶ **LOVE IN PLACE OF FEAR**  
*1 John 3:13-18; 4:14-18*
- ▶ **SUBMISSION TO GOD IN PLACE OF FEAR**  
*Luke 1:26-38*
- ▶ **COURAGE IN PLACE OF FEAR**  
*Matthew 14:22-33*
- ▶ **JOY IN PLACE OF FEAR**  
*Zephaniah 3:9-20*

# STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

## LUKE 1:26-29

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

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 1:26-29 on page 39 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to give further background on the angel Gabriel.

**RECAP:** 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.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*When have you been caught off-guard by a message from God?*

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 39 of the PSG: "When have you felt troubled by the unknown?"

**RECAP:** 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.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use the Skit option on page 55 of this Leader Guide to help group members relate to Mary's story.

**TRANSITION:** We don't have to fear the unknown. In the next verses, we see that we also don't have to fear God's plan for us.

## LUKE 1:26-29 COMMENTARY

**[VERSE 26]** The first chapter of Luke's Gospel tells the intriguing story of an Aaronic priest named Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. They were a righteous but aged couple who were without children. One day, while Zechariah did his duty in the Jerusalem temple, the angel Gabriel appeared and informed him that his wife would give birth to a son who would grow to be a prophet (Luke 1:8-20).

In the **sixth month** of Elizabeth's pregnancy, **Gabriel** was again dispatched, this time to Nazareth. Angels are supernatural messengers of God. Gabriel ("Strongman of God"), who stands "in the presence of God" (v. 19), twice appeared to Daniel (Dan. 8:15-17; 9:20-27). He was a primary emissary for delivering important divine communications. Nevertheless, Gabriel is never called an "archangel" like Michael (Jude 9). Nazareth was a remote village, so Luke added that it was **a town in Galilee**.

**[VERSE 27]** The object of Gabriel's visit to Nazareth was to see a specific teenaged girl only yet identified as **a virgin**. A *virgin* (*parthenos*) was a young girl who had never had sexual relations with a man. Her youth contrasted to Elizabeth and Zechariah who were thought to be past the childbearing age. God did a marvelous miracle allowing Elizabeth to be with child, but in this young maiden He was going to take the miraculous much, much further.

The virgin was **engaged to a man named Joseph**. Joseph was a carpenter from Nazareth who was **of the house of David**. Being a descendant of David was a key qualification for the Messiah. Thus, Jesus was a legitimate inheritor of the royal lineage (Luke 1:32; see also Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8). When a census was taken Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem. "Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David" (Luke 2:4). This fulfilled a Messianic prophecy: "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to

be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times" (Mic. 5:2).

Luke finally identified the young woman: **The virgin's name was Mary**. *Mary* (*Maria*) is a Greek variation on the Hebrew name *Miriam* and means, oddly enough (especially in this instance), "obstinacy" or "rebelliousness." It was actually a common moniker among Jewish women. Moses's sister bore that name (Ex. 15:20). So did several prominent women mentioned in the New Testament, including Mary Magdalene (Matt. 27:56) and Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1).

**[VERSE 28]** So, the angel Gabriel, just as he did with Zechariah, **came to her**. Luke did not indicate Mary's immediate reaction, but she was probably startled and frightened (Luke 1:30). Whatever her emotions, the angel gave her a comforting salutation, **"Greetings, favored woman!"** Some people think that Mary herself is a bearer of divine grace necessary for salvation. But saying she is *favored woman* only means that God Himself had chosen her to be the earthly mother of His Son. Mary did not possess some special intrinsic holiness. She was only a godly woman whom the Lord knew would be a good mother for the Messiah. Indeed, Gabriel, assured her, **"The Lord is with you."**

**[VERSE 29]** Despite Gabriel's assurances, Luke described Mary as **deeply troubled by this statement**. This probably means she, like Zechariah (v. 12), was frightened by the appearance of the angel and by his perplexing words. It's not every day that someone comes face to face with a supernatural being. Luke described her thoughts as **wondering what kind of greeting this could be**. She was taken off guard by the angel's grandiose introduction.

Mary is like us all. We tend to fear the unknown or what we do not understand. However, we need not fear when God is with us, as Mary would soon learn. What the angel said to her next had incredible consequences for her life and for the world.

# STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

## LUKE 1:30-33

<sup>30</sup> Then the angel told her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end.”

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 1:30-33 on page 40 of the PSG.

**RECAP:** 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.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to give further background on Mary having found favor with God.

**RECAP:** 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.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 41 of the PSG: “Why do we sometimes fear God’s plans?”

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that we don’t have to fear the seemingly impossible.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*What are some things that have helped you submit to God’s plan for your life?*

## LUKE 1:30-33 COMMENTARY

**[VERSE 30]** Once more Gabriel comforted the confused and scared Mary. He commanded her by name, **“Do not be afraid, Mary.”** The phrase *“Do not be afraid”* appears several times in Matthew’s and Luke’s records of events surrounding Jesus’s birth. Gabriel said it to Zechariah (Luke 1:13) and now to Mary. The “angel of the Lord” assured Joseph in a dream not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife (Matt. 1:20). An angel also said it to the frightened shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem (Luke 2:10).

Gabriel again told Mary, though she was in a unique situation, that she could rest assured that **“you have found favor with God.”** Again, Gabriel was not implying that Mary had done something extraordinary to merit the Lord’s grace or that she was in any way a conveyor of grace. He only reiterated that she was the sovereign choice of God, by His graciousness, to be the human mother of Jesus. Certainly God knew Mary was a young woman who loved and honored Him. But He had chosen her from eternity past to take this enormous challenge, knowing she would willingly agree.

**[VERSE 31]** Gabriel then delivered the most momentous news imaginable. Up to this point he had not indicated exactly what her divine mission entailed. To emphasize the importance of what he would say, Gabriel ordered her to **“Now listen.”** Whenever that term appears in Scripture it indicates that what is about to be said should be absorbed carefully. He then told her something that would stun a woman in Mary’s stage of life (a virgin), **“You will conceive and give birth to a son.”**

Can you imagine the feelings Mary must have experienced and the questions that must have run through her mind when the angel gave her that news? *Conceive in my womb? Give birth to a son?* But, before she could even utter a word, Gabriel continued, **“you will name him Jesus.”** Just as the angel had told Zechariah to name his son John (1:13), he now instructed Mary to name her child

Jesus. The English name *Jesus* derives from *Iésous*, the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name *Yehoshua* or, contracted in English, *Joshua*. It means, appropriately, “The Lord [Yahweh] saves” or “The Lord is salvation.”

**[VERSE 32]** Gabriel continued to unfurl his divine message to Mary. He declared that Jesus would have three distinguishing characteristics. First, **“He will be great.”** Interestingly, he had said the same thing to Zechariah about his son, John (Luke 1:15).

But then Gabriel magnified the scope of the greatness of Jesus. Note, Luke, at this point in his writing, wanted to make Gabriel’s divinely revealed principles clear, not just for Mary, but also for his readers, present and future. So the mighty angel said, second, the child **“will be called the Son of the Most High.”** As great as John, or any other prophet could be, Jesus was and is unique and superior to them all. He is the One and Only Son of God (John 3:16). He is the Second Person of the eternal Holy Trinity, who would be born on earth as a man. Jesus would not be regarded as the Son of God because He is the Messiah, but He would be the Messiah because He is the Son of God.

Furthermore, third, he said **“the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.”** Luke already established Jesus’s descent from David for his readers (Luke 1:27). Now Gabriel confirmed that, given His lineage, Jesus would eventually inherit the kingship of David as the royal Messiah.

**[VERSE 33]** As the rightful heir to David’s throne, Gabriel confidently foretold, **“He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end.”** The kingdom of God has come with great power in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But its final consummation is still to come. In that day Jesus will indeed rule not only over the house of Jacob (Israel), but over the whole world. And His reign will be never-ending.

# STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

## LUKE 1:34-38

<sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?” <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.” <sup>38</sup> “See, I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary. “May it happen to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 1:34-38 on page 42 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to give further background on the significance of Mary being a virgin.

**RECAP:** 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).

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 42 of the PSG: “When is it OK to question God?”

**RECAP:** 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.”

**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 42 of the PSG: “When have you been reminded that God is the God of the impossible?”

**DO:** Direct group members to **Engage** with “Our Calling” on page 43 of the PSG (page 55 of this Leader Guide) to help group members consider God’s plans.

**GUIDE:** Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “God’s desire to work through us is no cause for fear.”

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*How does Mary’s example inspire you to submit to God’s plan for your life?*



## LUKE 1:34-38 COMMENTARY

**[VERSE 34]** Mary was young, but she was not ignorant. After Gabriel had laid out God's plan for her, and she had a few moments to think it over, Mary asked the angelic visitor, **"How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?"** Mary understood exactly what Gabriel was proposing in his explanations. She was somehow going to get pregnant while remaining a virgin. She just could not figure out how such a thing could happen. She got her answer.

**[VERSE 35]** The heavenly visitor presented an amazing and miraculous scenario in responding to Mary's doubts. In this one verse he explained how all three Persons of the Trinity are involved in this divine occurrence. First, he said, **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you."** The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, has an active and prominent place in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel (1:15,35,41,67,80; 2:25,26,27), just as He does in Luke's other book (Acts). The Holy Spirit is the divine agent who indwells and empowers God's people for special service. Luke had described John as being filled with the Spirit while still in Elizabeth's womb (1:15).

Next, Gabriel asserted that the **"power of the Most High will overshadow you."** *The Most High*, as has been stated, is God the Father Himself, the First Person of the Trinity. *Overshadow you* is similar to the cloud that overshadowed Jesus, Elijah, and Moses at the transfiguration (Luke 9:34-35). It symbolizes God's holy presence in especially important events. The infinite creative power of God in the Holy Spirit and the Father will cause Mary to become miraculously pregnant.

So, **"therefore,"** said the angel, **"the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."** The Holy One refers obviously to Jesus, who will be conceived in Mary's womb without a human father. Thus, He will not carry the stain of original sin. *Son of God* refers to His divine status on earth as Messiah and His status in heaven. He is God the Son, the eternally preexistent Second Person of the Trinity, who left

His exalted place in heaven to be born as man in the material world.

**[VERSE 36]** Gabriel provided a clear explanation to assuage Mary's qualms. But, so far, all of it has been future oriented. So, he invoked a recent past event to provide further evidence that what he said is not beyond the realm of possibility. He informed Mary that her relative, Elizabeth, just six months earlier, had incredibly conceived a son, though she was well beyond the childbearing age (Luke 1:24-25). Of course, Elizabeth's miracle was not on the same supernatural level as what Gabriel was proposing to Mary, but it was a powerful confirmation of his claims.

**[VERSE 37]** Finally, Gabriel sealed the deal with the ultimate declaration: **"For nothing will be impossible with God."** Since God exists, and since He made the universe out of nothing, and since He created biological life (and modern *scientific* evidence suggests He did both), then miraculously conceiving Jesus in Mary's womb would pose no problem for Him. Jesus Himself avowed the same truth when talking about salvation: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

**[VERSE 38]** Gabriel had completed his mission to inform Mary of her calling. She realized what the stakes were and what the consequences would be. So, having carefully weighed the options, and being a godly woman, she responded as if to say, "Take this message back to God." She declared, probably as much to herself as to Gabriel, **"See, I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it happen to me as you have said."** She had passed the test, submitting to the Lord's will by faith. **Then the angel left her.**

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ. The place of Mary in that story cannot be understated. Of course, we must not elevate her status beyond what the Scriptures attest to. Nonetheless, her courage and willingness to do God's will has been a model of faithfulness for all men and women throughout the centuries.



# LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to page 44 of the PSG. Encourage them to 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.

## Wrap It Up

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 44 of the PSG.

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.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use the Song option on page 55 of this Leader Guide to help group members reflect on Mary's calling. Then relate it to their own.

**PRAY:** Thank God for helping us find the courage to submit to Him and His plans for our lives. Ask Him to use us to bring good to others and glory to Him.



## EXTRA!

Free additional ideas for your group are available at  
[BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](https://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)

**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.

**G –**

**NOTE:** The script can be found at [BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra).

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