

THE MESSENGER PREPARED

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 1:5-17

CONTEXT

In the four hundred years between the closing of the Old Testament (Malachi) and the opening of the New Testament (the Gospels), many world powers and leaders shaped Jewish culture and religious life. When the book of Luke opens, Herod the Great ruled Judea and the surrounding regions. Though a descendant of Esau, Herod was appointed as king of the Jews by Rome and ruled ruthlessly. The priesthood largely became corrupt during the intertestamental period. But Zechariah was faithful to his role as priest, and along with his wife, Elizabeth, he continued to be faithful to Israel's covenant with God.

KEY CONCEPT

God will send messengers to prepare His way.

As you examine Luke 1:5-17:

- Recognize how God's miracle of giving Zechariah and Elizabeth a son recalls similar miracles in the Old Testament.
- Consider how their son, John, fulfilled God's promise to send someone in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for Jesus.



TIMELINE

Malachi Prophesies the Messenger to Prepare the Way for the Lord (Malachi 3-4)

Nehemiah Returns and Rebuilds the Wall Around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-6)

The Intertestamental Period

Ezra the Priest Returns to Judah and Instructs the People in the Law (Ezra 7-10)

Ezra Reads the Book of the Law and the People Confess Their Sin (Nehemiah 8-12)

SESSION STUDY: An Angel Foretells the Birth of John the Baptist, Who Prepares the Way for the Messiah (Luke 1)

Daily Readings

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 1: Luke 1:1-4 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 4: Luke 1:39-56 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 2: Luke 1:5-25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 5: Luke 1:57-80 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day 3: Luke 1:26-38 | <input type="checkbox"/> Day 6: Psalm 65 |



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

GOD PREPARED THE WAY THROUGH THE PROVISION OF A SON (LUKE 1:5-13).

Highlight the description of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Underline the message the angel gave Zechariah.

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. **7** But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years. **8** When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, **9** it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. **10** At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. **11** An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. **12** When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. **13** But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John."

Luke starts off his Gospel telling Theophilus that he is writing "so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed" (1:4). And with that, he started with the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, a priest and his wife, who also was from a priestly line. Both lived righteously before God, yet they had no children as Elizabeth was barren and they were both older. Luke was setting up the story knowing that this narrative would fulfill prophecy.

In verse 9, Zechariah was chosen by lot for a priestly responsibility. It may seem that this was all happening by luck or chance, but God's providence was truly at work, for in that one moment of Zechariah burning incense in the sanctuary, God sent an angel to him with a message.

LEADER NOTE: During this time, there were so many priests that within the twenty-four divisions that would serve twice a year, the priests who would serve needed to be chosen by lot (Luke 1:9). Zechariah's appointment to bring the incense to the altar was a once-in-a-lifetime moment, and it was not a coincidence that God chose that moment to answer not only Zechariah's prayer for a son (v. 13) but His people's prayer for the Messiah. Zechariah's son would not be the Messiah but the forerunner who would come in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way for Jesus (v. 17; cf. Mal. 4:5-6).

What recent event initially seemed like a matter of luck, but now you can see God's providential hand in it?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

God is not abrupt in His ways but has planned all along to send a Savior for His people. That includes sending messengers to prepare the way to ready hearts to receive Him.

Like anyone would be, Zechariah was “terrified and overcome with fear” (v. 12). God had been silent for over four hundred years, and here an angel of the Lord appeared to him. The angel’s message, however, was one of encouragement, telling Zechariah, “Do not be afraid,” because his prayer had been heard, and his wife would bear them a son (v. 13).

But note that God didn’t give Zechariah and Elizabeth a child to reward their “good behavior”; this wasn’t a reward for their blamelessness. He chose them to participate in His plan of redemption. By withholding a child until His chosen time, God defied society’s belief that to be barren meant there was some underlying sin in a woman’s past. God looks on barrenness throughout Scripture with gentleness and care, especially in the face of societal shame. In cases like Sarah (Gen. 12; 17; 21; Heb. 11:11), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), Rachel (Gen. 29:31; 30:1), Hannah (1 Sam. 1), and Elizabeth, God didn’t give children to elevate these women in society’s eyes but to demonstrate His ability to accomplish His covenant promises.

LEADER NOTE: Many godly couples struggle with infertility. If infertility or recurrent miscarriage never results in children, God will still redeem the years of longing in His perfect way, even if the redemption doesn’t occur this side of heaven. In this fallen world, infertility and miscarriage for many couples may be similar to the thorn in the flesh Paul prayed for God to remove, but God’s grace is sufficient in all of our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Despite the struggles we face, we must reorient our understanding of God’s love and redemptive plan.

How do you view the God-given gifts in your life: as rewards or as God’s faithfulness to His Word? Why does this matter?

**THIS SON WOULD PREPARE THE PEOPLE FOR
THE COMING MESSIAH (LUKE 1:14-17).**

Circle each future-tense verb in the passage.

14 “There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb.

16 He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **17** And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.”

John’s birth, prayed and longed for by Zechariah and Elizabeth, was also joyful for the many who prayed and longed for the deliverance of God’s people. Finally, here was the messenger to the Messenger, foretold four hundred years earlier by the prophet Malachi.

The Greek word for “great” in verse 15 indicates power, authority, or significance. John would be great in the Lord’s sight because of the divine power on his life and the divine purpose for which he was chosen (cf. Jer. 1:5). Abstaining from wine and beer would be an outward sign of this purpose.

LEADER NOTE: It was possible that John would live as a Nazirite (Num. 6:1-3), like Samson (Judg. 13:4-5) and Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11). Nazirites devoted their lives to holiness beyond the general guidelines of the law, typically for a certain service. They took a vow when entering this lifestyle, which was typically marked by certain outward actions, like abstaining from strong drink and unclean foods and not cutting their hair throughout the time of their vow.

Previously, God had ordained other prophets before they were born (Isa. 49:1,5; Jer. 1:5), but Zechariah’s child would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before birth. Pentecost had not happened occurred, so the Holy Spirit didn’t dwell in every person who trusted in the Lord. After hundreds of years without any revelation from the Lord, God would give John His Spirit so that no one could ignore the calling on John the Baptist’s life.

How do you see the Holy Spirit’s working in your life?

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

THE HOLY SPIRIT: The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, possessing the fullness of deity like the Father and Son. His deity can be seen in the fact that He is eternal (Heb. 9:14), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-8), the creator and giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5-7), and directly identified with the triune God (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

Luke 1:16-17 recalls Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6, which speak of the “delight” of the people and the messenger coming like “Elijah” to “turn the hearts of fathers to their children.” The passage also recalls Isaiah 40:3, which foretells a voice of one crying out to prepare the way of the Lord. As a priest, Zechariah would have been familiar with the Old Testament and its prophecies, so the significance of Gabriel’s words here wouldn’t have been lost on him. He would know that the angel was talking about a messenger who was preparing the way for the Messenger, the Messiah.

Even recognizing this prophecy, Zechariah struggled to believe God’s power to give him a son. As a result, the angel made him unable to speak until these things happened (Luke 1:18-20). Later, when Zechariah believed and named his son John, he was able to speak again, and then he prophesied by the Holy Spirit and praised God for His faithfulness (vv. 59-79).

LEADER NOTE: We often forget the people in the Bible were human like we are, so we might have a tendency to look down on them for their doubt. In Zechariah and Elizabeth’s case, we may overlook the significance of their faith. Despite God’s four-hundred-year silence, they remained faithful to His covenant. At the right time, God chose to bless them with a son, and their son would bring joy to many as he heralded the Messiah, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy.

What do you struggle to believe about God, even knowing His Word is true?



Notes

DATE	YEAR	DESCRIPTION
586 BC	586 BC	The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. The Jews were taken into exile in Babylon.
539 BC	539 BC	The Persians conquered the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland.
520 BC	520 BC	The Jews began rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem.
486 BC	486 BC	The Persians conquered the Babylonians and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland.
458 BC	458 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
444 BC	444 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
425 BC	425 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
400 BC	400 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
333 BC	333 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
300 BC	300 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
270 BC	270 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
250 BC	250 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
200 BC	200 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
150 BC	150 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
100 BC	100 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
50 BC	50 BC	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.
0 AD	0 AD	The Jews returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the Temple.

ARRIVAL

INTERACT: As adults arrive, invite them to share how they get ready when a friend or family member is coming to stay in their home. Encourage them to think about shopping, cleaning, and other tasks associated with an upcoming arrival.

TRANSITION: With special events and special people, planning is needed. We want all things to be ready. God too will prepare in advance for events He has in store. He had been preparing His people for a long time for the coming of the Messiah, the Savior. But would they be ready?

CONTEXT

SAY: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 14: Time Between the Testaments** and briefly remind your group of Malachi’s message. Say: “In the past weeks, we followed the Jewish people as they returned from Babylonian exile. With the rebuilding of the temple and the city wall, the people repented of their sin and vowed to worship the Lord. The prophet Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet, foretold a time when God would judge wickedness and bring healing to His righteous ones. He also stated that a future messenger would prepare people’s hearts to turn to the Messiah in repentance and faith. This week we pass over four hundred years of God’s silence in the biblical storyline as we transition to the New Testament, where Luke began his Gospel with a narrative fulfilling Malachi’s prophecy.”

RECAP

ASK: What did you glean from the Bible passage in your personal preparation this week?

SAY: This week in our personal preparation, we learned about a couple whom God blessed with a son, later known as John the Baptist. He would be the forerunner to the coming Messiah, Jesus. John was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb, and we learned about the role he would play in calling people to repentance.

TRANSITION: We talked about the preparations we make when a friend, family member, or loved one comes to visit. Let’s turn our attention to how God makes preparations.



Listen to session-by-session training every week on

Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify

ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training.

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct the group to page 126 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled “Prepare the Way.” Recreate this chart on a board so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Prepare the Way	
Research how the New Testament describes some of God’s preparations.	
VERSES	SUMMARY
Romans 9:22-24	
2 Corinthians 5:5	
Ephesians 2:10	
Hebrews 11:16	
Revelation 21:1-2	

READ: Call on a volunteer to read Luke 1:5-17.

ASK: How did God prepare Zechariah and Elizabeth for their coming son? How did God prepare the Jews for the coming Messiah?

SAY: God had prepared His people throughout the Old Testament by sending messengers—leaders, judges, kings, prophets, and priests—to turn God’s people’s hearts toward Him. He always had a plan to redeem and save His people, even in their sin, and this salvation was all for His glory. He has been preparing a way for us and His preparations are always good.

INSTRUCT: Form five groups (a single person can be a group, if needed) and assign each group one of the passages on the chart. Instruct them to read the verse or verses (and surrounding verses, if needed) and to summarize what God is preparing or has prepared for us. (*Romans 9:22-24: God prepared the wicked for destruction and His people for glory; 2 Corinthians 5:5: God is preparing us for our heavenly bodies; Ephesians 2:10: God has prepared us for good works;*

Hebrews 11:16: God has prepared a city for us in heaven; Revelation 21:1-2: God has prepared a new heaven and earth for us.) Record this on the chart and encourage the group to record the information on the chart in their PSG.

DISCUSS: How do these preparations of God relate to the preparation work the angel foretold about John the Baptist?

DEBRIEF

Which preparation of God are you most thankful for?

How does it make you feel that God thinks you're special enough to prepare these things for you?

SUMMARIZE

Over the past few weeks, we've seen an underlying theme in God's desire to be reconciled to His people. In Ezra and Nehemiah, God called the people back to fidelity to Him. In Malachi, we heard a prophet's plea for people to return to the Lord before the day when He will destroy all evil. And today we learned about the miraculous gift of John, a man whose mission was to prepare the people for the Messiah, the One who would die to reconcile humanity to God.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 127). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: The encounter between Zechariah and the angel Gabriel carries huge theological significance. God didn't give John to Zechariah and Elizabeth to reward their righteousness. Because they were "without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord" (Luke 1:6), God chose to include them in His plan for the world's redemption. Their faithfulness to the Lord bore fruit that would ultimately lead many people in Israel and the world to trust in Jesus.

Which of God's gifts have been the most purposeful in your life?



HEART: Giving thanks to God is a theme woven throughout Scripture, especially in the Psalms and New Testament epistles. In the Old Testament, the Israelites gave a thanksgiving offering to show gratitude and worship to the God who gives us everything we need (Lev. 7:11-15). Unexpressed gratitude can lead to a sense of control and entitlement. When we mindfully thank God for the gifts He has given us, both the good things and the hard things, we acknowledge that He is constant, faithful, and merciful.

How can you practically acknowledge the gifts God has given you and praise Him for them this week?



HANDS: God has been making preparations for His people for our greatest good and His greatest glory. He chose a people in Abraham; He chose David for the line that would lead to our Messiah-King. The Lord disciplined His people through exile and restored them again in His faithful mercy, all so His promises would remain true. He chose prophets to call His people to repentance and prepare them to receive His most precious gift—His Son. Through some of the passages in the epistles, we've seen God making preparations for us in a variety of ways. He has good things in store for His people because He has always been good and faithful. And now He works through us sharing the gospel to prepare and call yet more people into His reconciliation and restoration.

What can you do to help prepare others to accept the message of the good news of Jesus Christ?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

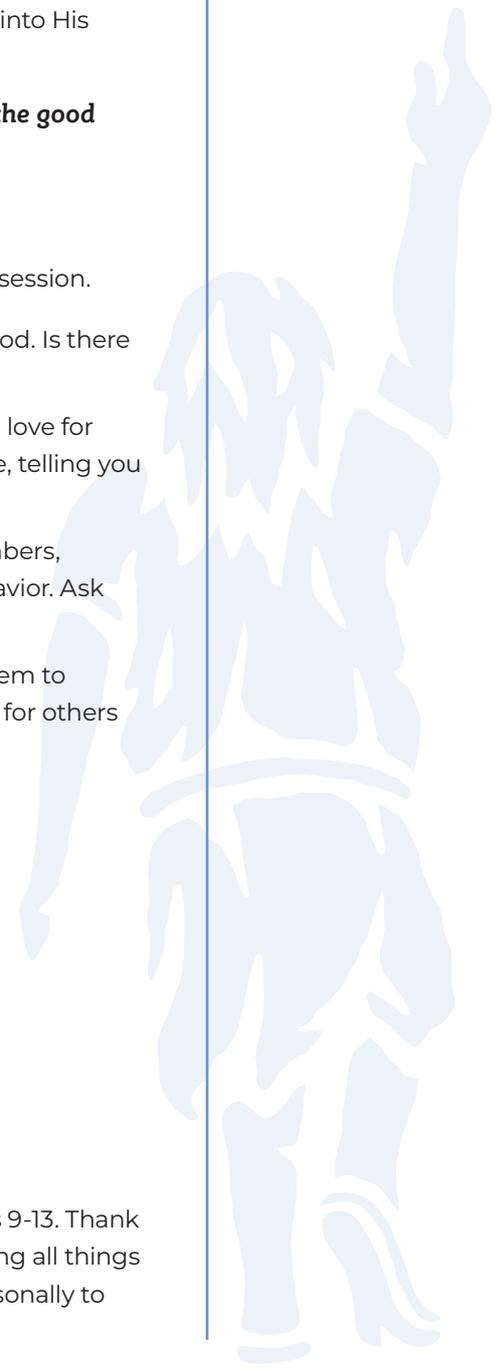
- Reflect on John's mission to call people to repent and turn to God. Is there any area of sin you need to confess to Him?
- Write a letter to God expressing your gratitude for His pursuing love for you. Also thank Him for those who were messengers in your life, telling you about His love and how to know Him personally.
- Pray for those in your sphere of influence—friends, family members, colleagues, teammates—who do not yet know Jesus as their Savior. Ask God for opportunities to demonstrate His love to them.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 127 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 65 with your group, focusing on verses 9-13. Thank God that He always has a plan and knows what He's doing, preparing all things for good. Thank Him that He has prepared a way for each of us personally to come to Jesus and know Him.



THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

By Bob Bunn



On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation supporting what he dubbed “the sanctity of human life.” Pointing to the deaths of millions of unborn children through legalized abortion, Reagan noted that Americans were “poorer not simply for lives not led and for contributions not made, but also for the erosion of our sense of worth and dignity of every individual.”¹ In response, Reagan proclaimed Sunday, January 22 of that year—the 11th anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion—“National Sanctity of Human Life Day.”

Today, many Christians recognize the importance of protecting the sanctity of human life. Not only is it a matter of life and death for unborn children, but it also underscores the larger truth that all human life is sacred—from the womb to the grave. In the article on “The Christian and Social Order,” the SBC also makes a broader appeal for the universal value of each human life, especially those who cannot defend themselves: “We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”²

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

“Sanctity” can be traced to the Latin word *sanctus*, or “sacred.” So by definition, the sanctity of human life considers every life “sacred” or “set apart” by God for His purposes and plans. That’s exactly what we see in the Scriptures.

Starting with Adam and Eve, human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). While theologians have debated the precise meaning

of the *imago dei* (“Image of God”), three things are certain. First, it is unique to humanity. No other aspect of the created order is said to be formed by God’s hand in God’s image. Second, the image of God is a universal trait of each human. All of us—even those who choose to reject God’s mercy and grace—bear His image. Finally, the image of God gives every human value and purpose. Our lives have meaning because we reflect Him.

In the Psalms, we see that the *imago dei* places humans “a little lower than God” and that we are crowned “with glory and honor” (8:5). The Lord has given us authority as His stewards to rule over His creation (vv. 6-8).

Plus, we are “remarkably and wondrously made” by the very hand of God (139:14). He “knit” (a word that implies protection and security in Hebrew³) us in our mother’s womb, and nothing in our lives is hidden from Him (vv. 13,15). This underscores our responsibility to view others through the lens of the sanctity of human life.

The sanctity of human life also emphasizes the purposes God has for each individual. Again, the psalmist noted that God knows the course of our days before they even begin (139:16). In addition, the prophet Jeremiah learned that God had set him apart from ministry before his birth (Jer. 1:5).

God, the Creator of the universe, knows each of us and has a plan for each of us. But the greatest proof that every human life has value can be found in what is arguably the most familiar verse in all of Scripture. John 3:16 states that God’s love for humanity drove Him to make the greatest sacrifice imaginable. He sent His Son to pay the price for our sin. Because Jesus died for humanity, we can affirm the sanctity of all human life.

The image of God is a universal trait of each human.
All of us—even those who choose to reject God’s mercy
and grace—bear His image.

WHAT IT MEANS

As noted, the momentum of Sanctity of Human Life Sunday began with a presidential proclamation regarding the unborn. It served as a clarion call to encourage believers to protect the most vulnerable members of society and to take a bold stand against the evils of abortion.

But if we believe God calls us to value and protect every person He has created, believers must consider expanding their definition of the sanctity of human life beyond the single issue of abortion.

In the Old Testament, God sent His people into exile for two primary reasons: idolatry and injustice. Today, we don’t have to look far to see how oppression of the helpless and hopeless continues to raise its ugly head. Some discount the value of the elderly, especially those who can no longer actively contribute to society. Racial strife, economic injustice, physical disabilities, and mental illness leave many on the fringes of society.

By and large, these are the people Jesus helped. While He kept the hypocritical religious elite at arm’s length, He socialized with the “sinners” as the Great Physician who offered the cure for their deepest needs. He was the rabbi who reached out and touched the lepers and other outcasts with a healing hand. He broke down cultural walls built around ethnic, gender, and social constraints.

Why? All so He could fulfill His messianic call articulated by Isaiah centuries earlier:

To heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of our God’s vengeance; to comfort all who mourn. (Isa. 61:1-2)

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of all human life through His words and actions. He reminds us, as C. S. Lewis stated: “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”⁴ He challenges us to value every human life just as He does.

References

1. Ronald Reagan, “Proclamation 5147, National Sanctity of Human Life Day, 1984,” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/proclamation-5147-national-sanctity-human-life-day-1984>.
2. “XV. The Christian and the Social Order,” *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 2000), <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xv>.
3. Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150 (Revised)*, vol. 21, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 319.
4. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York City: The Macmillan Company, 1949), https://ia902208.us.archive.org/32/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.157427/2015.157427.The-Weight-Of-Glory-And-Other-Addresses_text.pdf.

Bob Bunn serves on Lifeway’s Adult Ongoing Bible Studies team. He and his wife, Mary, live in Nashville and serve at First Baptist Church Nashville.

THE DISCIPLINE OF GIVING

By Rachel Myrick



During the Christmas season, Christians often give gifts generously to the people we love, claiming “it is better to give than to receive” (Acts 20:36). But the discipline of giving is not something we do only at Christmas and Easter. As Christians, we are called to give and live generously and sacrificially, blessing others from the resources that God has given to us.

GIVE WORSHIPFULLY

The first mention of the tithe, or tenth, occurred in Genesis 14. After Abram rescued his nephew, Lot, from Canaanite kings, a mysterious figure known as the king of Salem, Melchizedek, blessed him, and “Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (14:20). According to the book of Hebrews, Melchizedek was “without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever” (Heb. 7:3). Abram responded to Melchizedek’s blessing with worship. Jacob, after his encounter with God at Bethel, made a vow that if God would be with him, “I will give to you a tenth of all that you give me” (Gen. 28:22). At Mount Sinai, the tenth of crops, fruits, and animals were designated as tithes to the Lord (Lev. 27:30-32) for maintaining worship in the tabernacle/temple, celebrating holy feasts (Deut. 14:22-27), and caring for the needy (vv. 28-29).

When the people of Israel returned to Judah at Cyrus’s decree, the people gave freewill offerings for the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 1:6), as they had done when the first temple was built (1 Chron. 29:1-9). God moved the hearts of the people to resume the offerings and freewill offerings as well, giving whatever they felt led to give so that worship could resume (Ezra 3:5-7). After Ezra

read the Law to the people, they also pledged a vow to the Lord that they would resume the tithes of their produce and flocks so that they would “not neglect the house of our God” (Neh. 10:39). The prophet Malachi also encouraged them to remain faithful to regular tithes: “Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me! . . . Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house” (Mal. 3:8-10). Giving back to God some of the resources that He gives to us shows that we desire Him above worldly riches and that we trust Him to provide for our every need.

GIVE CHEERFULLY

Though some modern Christians believe the tithe was only a requirement for Israel, believers in the New Testament gave offerings to further the ministry of the local church and to help those in need. Paul stated that the church should support the pastors and elders who share the gospel (1 Cor. 9:13-14). While many pastors today may be bi-vocational by choice or necessity, in Paul’s day, pastors and elders received offerings from the church (1 Tim. 5:17-18). New Testament believers also collected an offering to care for those in need.

While there is no command in the New Testament for a strict ten percent tithe, Paul said, “Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). We do not give begrudgingly or because our salvation depends on it; rather, we know “God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work” (9:8). Since God supplies everything we need, we can be generous to others (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Your group knows a good lesson when they see it.

It's estimated that 80 percent of the things we learn is through our sense of vision. That's one of the reasons we created *The Gospel Project Leader Pack*. This collection of visual aids helps bring the Bible to life and reinforces learning. Every quarter, a new *Leader Pack* contains tools to help leaders prepare, present, and support the group study for each session.



Each Pack includes:

- Visual aids, such as charts, maps, posters, and handouts
- A special code that enables the following downloads:
 - PDFs of visual aids
 - Customizable *Leader Guide* session plans
 - Memory verse handouts
 - And more



PROPHETS AND PROVISION

Throughout the exile of His people, God remained faithful in providing for those who lived in faith, even under persecution. He provided His presence, protection, and prophets to show the world that He is the almighty God. And when the time was right, He allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, to continue right worship, and to rebuild the city because He is a God of restoration. The Lord desires to restore His people to a right relationship with Him. We see this ultimately through His sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die and rise again. Through His work, people can be restored permanently and adopted into God's family. Despite our sin, which exiles, God provided a way home, and the only way is Jesus.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

WEEKLY HELPS:

gospelproject.com/resources

WEEKLY PODCAST:

*Look for The Gospel Project for Adults
on your favorite podcast app.*

Lifeway adults

gospelproject.com

RELIGION/Biblical Studies/Bible Study Guides



© 2025 Lifeway Christian Resources