

Revive Our Hearts™

ELIZABETH

DEALING WITH
DISAPPOINTMENT

A Bible study based
on the teaching of

NANCY DEMOSS
WOLGEMUTH

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Elizabeth's story

AS FOUND IN LUKE 1

DEDICATION TO THEOPHILUS

¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST FORETOLD

⁵In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

¹¹And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's

womb. ¹⁶ And 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 the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call

his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

MARY’S SONG OF PRAISE: THE MAGNIFICAT

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me
blessed;
⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”
⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and
returned to her home.

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she
bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the
Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with
her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the
child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his
father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called
John.” ⁶¹ And they said to her, “None of your relatives is
called by this name.” ⁶² And they made signs to his father,
inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he
asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.”
And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth
was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing
God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all
these things were talked about through all the hill country

of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their
hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the
hand of the Lord was with him.

ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy
Spirit and prophesied, saying,
⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of
old,
⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most
High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the
shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he
was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance
to Israel.

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Many of the letters and emails we receive at *Revive Our Hearts* are from women facing disappointment. Women dealing with the disappointment of:

- Being single much longer than they hoped.
- Being in a marriage with a man who isn't following the Lord.
- Waiting to have children.
- Parenting a young child who is difficult.
- Having an adult child who is not walking with the Lord.
- Waiting for a fulfilling career.
- Facing a discouraging medical diagnosis.

The list of potential disappointments is long. You likely have disappointments of your own. The question is, how do you deal with disappointment with grace? How do you continue to trust the Lord when your longings remain unfulfilled?

Luke 1 delivers the profile of a woman who knew what it was like to face disappointment. Elizabeth went on to become the mother of John the Baptist, but not until she'd already endured decades of infertility. Her story has much to teach us about God's grace in the face of our own disappointments.

As we look at Elizabeth's story, we'll also examine the lives of her husband, Zechariah, and her relative, Mary, as well as some others found in Scripture who faced disappointment. You may relate to any or all of them. We look to their examples, asking the Lord to teach us truth that applies to our own individual lives.

TIPS FOR USING THIS STUDY

Throughout this study, ask yourself these questions:

- What does this passage teach me about the heart, ways, and character of God?
- How does this passage point to Jesus and the gospel?

- Is there an example for me to either follow or avoid? If so, how should I seek to change in response?

Each week of study is divided into four suggested daily lessons. You are free to work at your own pace, finishing a day of study at a time or completing the entire week in one sitting.

As you go through the study, you may find it beneficial to listen to the audio series “A Portrait of Elizabeth”.

Remember, the Holy Spirit is our primary teacher as we seek to understand God’s Word. Jesus Himself told us that the Holy Spirit is a gift, and a “Helper” able to “teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). Secondary tools that can help you better understand the Word of God (but aren’t necessary to complete this study) include:

- An English dictionary to look up the basic meaning of words
- Various translations and paraphrases of the Bible
- A concordance
- A Bible dictionary
- Commentaries
- A study Bible
- Colored pens or pencils to write in your Bible

To help you get more from this study, we’ve also included group discussion questions at the end of this booklet. You can join the discussion with our group of friends through the Elizabeth podcast created to accompany this study.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

Elizabeth’s story, though short, provides great insight into how to cope with disappointment in a way that honors the Lord. Through years of infertility, Elizabeth handles her unmet longing for a child with continued trust and obedience to the Lord. Her life may not have turned out the way she planned, but God allowed her to play a critical part in the unfolding of His redemptive story.

Through the next six weeks, may you find practical ways to put God’s Word into action. And may you surrender your own disappointments as an act of praise to Christ—who is worthy.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Spend time meditating on and memorizing the following verse this week:

the Lord is
good
to those who
WAIT for
Him,

TO THE SOUL WHO SEEKS HIM

LAMENTATIONS 3:25

Week 1

RIGHTEOUS BUT WAITING

Introduction

Somewhere in the world sits a very disappointed scientist. Imagine scrolling through miles of data, enduring day after day of the same old, same old, hearing the same facts taught for decades and then . . . Eureka! You discover something new!

So it was with the scientists who identified Xena, a tenth planet located 10 billion miles from earth, with a diameter comparable to half the width of the United States. Discovery of a new planet? That's big news! Except . . . it hasn't been. Few of us have heard of Xena (and even fewer know the planet's official name, 2003 UB313), despite the fact that the discovery was made and announced more than a decade ago.¹

Perhaps we earthlings are too busy with our own orbits to pay much attention to a planet so small and so far away. Xena entered our collective consciousnesses to lackluster excitement and fanfare.

Maybe you've never had a cosmic discovery ignored but you know what it's like to face disappointment. We all do. How should we respond when those disappointments come?

In the book of Luke, we are introduced to Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah, mother of John the Baptist, and cousin to Jesus' mother Mary. Elizabeth's story is most frequently told as background noise to the nativity, an afterthought to the wonder of Christ's coming birth. Or perhaps we look at Elizabeth in the rearview mirror as we consider her bug-eating son, John the Baptist, and wonder, *What did that boy's momma think of his strange ways?*

But Elizabeth's story wasn't always filled with such excitement. Her faith was forged in the fire of disappointment, and she has much to teach us about facing our own setbacks with hope and grace.

Read Luke 1.

THE BOOK OF *LUKE* AN OVERVIEW

AUTHOR

Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry (Luke 1:2), but a member of the second generation of the early Church. Church history records that Luke was a Gentile, and Scripture tells us that he was a "beloved physician" (Col. 4:14). Luke traveled with Paul, followed the accounts of Jesus' life "closely" and set out to write "an orderly account" of "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

Both the Gospel of Luke and Luke's second book, Acts, were written for Theophilus. Scripture doesn't tell us who Theophilus was except for Luke's description of him as "most excellent." Though the letter was likely written to this specific individual, it has important applications for all believers (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Day 1: SERVING AND SUFFERING

Though every word about Elizabeth in Scripture is contained in a single chapter, her story reveals many rich insights that can help us in our own walk with God.

Verses 5 gives us the setting for her life: “In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.”

Let’s stop and dig here for a moment. There’s gold to be mined from these two sentences.

What was Elizabeth’s husband’s name? _____

What was his vocation? _____

The passage tells us that Zechariah was “of the division of Abijah.” In 1 Chronicles 24:7–19, we learn that the Levites (priests) were organized into twenty-four divisions. Generally speaking, this rotation resulted in priests being summoned twice a year to serve in the temple in Jerusalem.

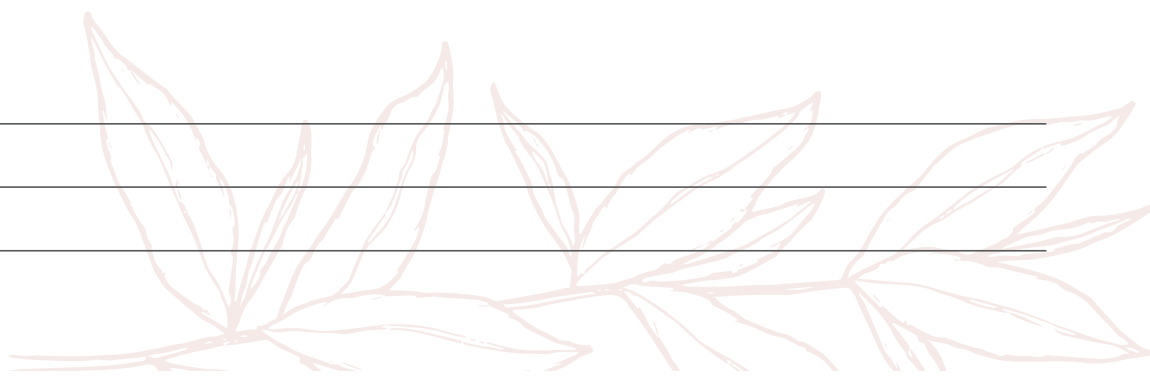
What does the passage reveal about Zechariah’s heritage?

Look again. Whose family tree does this verse say Elizabeth came from?

According to Exodus 28:1, what was the role of Aaron and his family members?

Elizabeth was the daughter of a minister. She was married to a minister, and as her story unfolds, we’ll see she became the mother of a minister.

Write out Luke 1:6 below.



How does this verse describe Elizabeth and her husband?

What high praise! If the characteristics of your own family could be recorded in Scripture, what words do you hope would be used?

Record a few below.

Elizabeth comes from a family of faith. As long as there had been a temple, her grandparents had been serving the Lord in it. She married a man of faith, and together, they served the Lord and His people. They were a godly couple, in righteous standing before the Lord. They had a lifestyle of obedience.

And yet . . .

A faith-filled heritage, a godly marriage, and a righteous life did not insulate Elizabeth from disappointment. Verse 7 tells us, "But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years."

Look up Matthew 5:45. According to this passage, the sun rises on the _____ and the _____ and God sends rain on the _____ and the _____.

In other words, we all receive blessings and disappointments. Elizabeth reminds us we can be righteous but waiting, serving the Lord and yet still suffering.

Look up each of the following passages. Draw a line to what each one teaches about waiting.

L A M E N T A T I O N S 3 : 2 5 It is good to wait quietly for the Lord.

I S A I A H 4 0 : 3 1 We can have hope while we wait.

P S A L M 3 7 : 7 Those who wait for the Lord will see their strength renewed.

P S A L M 6 2 : 5 The Lord asks me to wait patiently for Him.

L A M E N T A T I O N S 3 : 2 6 The Lord is good to those who wait.

Elizabeth waited for years and years and years to have a child of her own. We don't know her exact age, but we do know "both were advanced in years." On the surface, it must have seemed that empty arms were the only reward for Elizabeth's waiting.

Perhaps you know the exact brand of heartache Elizabeth did. You've longed for a child of your own for years, and your heart aches when you read of Zechariah and Elizabeth's unfulfilled longings. Or maybe you know a different kind of disappointment.

Replace the details of Elizabeth's disappointment with your own by filling in the blanks of the verse with details from your own life.

But _____ (your name) had no _____ (area of unfulfilled longing), because
_____ and _____.

The Best Is Yet To Come

Are you ever tempted to believe that living a righteous life should exempt you from hurt or disappointment?

What promises do we have as followers of Christ who seek to live righteously? Look up the following passages and write the promise beside each one.

J O B 17:9 _____

P S A L M 5:12 _____

P R O V E R B S 21:21 _____

Day 2: FAILING TO FRUIT

In Elizabeth's case, her womb was barren, but barrenness can take many forms. In agriculture, barrenness means "habitually failing to fruit."² It's an image of an apple tree with only leaves or seeds that refuse to send up sprouts. This is a picture of our own disappointments.

- Perhaps you've invested much in a relationship only to see it wither and die.
- Maybe you've poured countless hours into an idea or dream, but no growth ever comes.
- It may be that you've become disappointed in the ways your children have turned out. They used to be your little seedlings, but now their lives seem full of weeds.
- Maybe you've tried every treatment and remedy to cure an ailment, but they all habitually fail to produce lasting fruit.

List a few areas of your life where you feel discouraged while waiting to see the "fruit" of your investment.

While it's true there is much we don't know about Elizabeth, we don't see her giving up on obedience to God. We see a woman who is not serving God for His gifts but serving God just because He is good. She was committed to obey God, even when her longings were not fulfilled.

She was righteous but waiting *well*. Can the same be said of us?

Let's pause here for a moment. The disappointments you face today may feel major or minor. You may have wrestled with an unfulfilled longing for decades or just since you woke up this morning. In any case, know that God is paying attention. He listens to your longings. Take hope in this: Elizabeth's longings were not insignificant. They were the canvas God used to paint a magnificent masterpiece.

What truth does Psalm 56:8 reveal about God's response to our angst? _____

What does God ask us to do in 1 Peter 5:7? _____

Our worries, fears, longings, and deep sighs . . . God invites us to give them to Him. Why? Because He cares for us deeply.

In what area of life is obedience wearing you out? _____

What reward is promised to us in Galatians 6:9? _____

Consider how you can intentionally remind yourself of this Truth this week. Write your ideas below.

Day 3: THE LAND OF LONGING

The roots of our disappointments dig much deeper than our current situation or set back. To better understand Elizabeth's heartache and our own, let's pause and remember the first woman to ever experience disappointment.

Read Genesis 3. What disappointments did Eve face as a result of the Fall?

The seeds of many of our deepest longings were planted at the Fall. Sin forever fractured our relationships, warped our hearts, and strained our intimacy with the Father. The very soil beneath our feet is depleted by sin (Gen. 3:17).

You and I will always have unfulfilled longings this side of heaven. Living righteously doesn't mean we won't face disappointments. If we had all our longings fulfilled down here on earth, we wouldn't continue to long for a better place, our heart's ultimate home.

Theologian and preacher Charles Spurgeon is recorded as saying, "Anything is a blessing which makes us pray."

Is it your disappointments that remind you of your need for Jesus most often? Do your setbacks work like alarm clocks, reminding you to pray? If so, consider them a blessing.

During her years of infertility, how many hours must Elizabeth have spent in prayer? How often did this struggle drive her to her knees in desperation to see the Lord move? As we will soon see, none of it was wasted. The Lord was listening to Elizabeth. And He's listening to you, too.

Longings are not in and of themselves sinful. What is sinful is demanding that they be fulfilled now, or insisting on meeting those legitimate longings in illegitimate ways.

Reflecting on your own disappointments, how could Elizabeth have responded sinfully to her longing for a child?

How instead would you describe her response?

Who do you know that has faced disappointment with extraordinary grace? What can you learn from their example?

Say Psalm 27:14 out loud as a prayer, asking the Lord to help you wait on Him.

Day 4: HE IS WORTHY

Obedience to God is not a means of getting Him to do our will. We don't obey God so that He will make life easier for us. We obey God because He's God, He's sovereign, and He is worthy of our obedience.

Take some time today to reflect on who God is, using the passages below as your guide.

God, Colossians 1:17 tells me You are _____

God, Malachi 3:6 tells me You are _____

God, Psalm 33:6 tells me You are _____

God, Psalm 139:7–10 tells me You are _____

With these Scriptures in mind, write out a prayer to Him, telling Him you want to obey, even when you face disappointment.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Spend time meditating on and memorizing the following verse this week:

BUT I WILL

HOPE

continually &
WILL PRAISE you
yet
more &
more

PSALM 71:14