**Live in Community**

Small Group Study

**Volume Overview**

**Navigate Hardship**

The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time. ([Psalm 34:19](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ps34.19))

*Life is hard, even for believers. We all know it or discover it soon enough. Life tests our patience, our hope, and our sense of God’s presence. But we are not left hopeless in our challenges. God’s presence is more certain than even our hardships. Still, there are times in life that we need to be reminded that He is present. It’s in hardships that we learn to recognize it. We also learn to depend on God, to wait, and to look forward to His rescue.*

**Session Overview**

**Acknowledge Dependence**

**Biblical Encounter:** Zechariah and Elizabeth’s Wait Is Over ([Luke 1:6–25](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.6-25), [57–66](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.57-66))

**Outcome:** Depend on God even in the face of hopelessness and delay.

*In this session, we’ll explore what it looks like to trust God, even when things don’t go like we expect. We live in a culture that loves everything instantly. We like fast food and constantly updated news—and we hate waiting. It’s so difficult when life doesn’t cooperate, and we feel helpless. It’s hard when we feel like God doesn’t hear or see us. In this session, we’ll look at some people who learned to trust and depend on God, even when faced with a situation that seemed hopeless.*

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| First time leading *Live* for Adults? Check out the [Facilitator Guide](https://0b769b0ed3569ef9d18b-f88d8272f61086866d50d048b43ef630.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/sites/biblengagementproject/Listen_Facilitator_Guide.pdf). |

To access session content and videos from a computer, visit: [BibleEngagementProject.com/downloads](https://bibleengagementproject.com/downloads)

**Engage**

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| **QUESTION**Where and when does waiting bother you the most? Give a recent example. |

Many adults today are too young to remember the days before the Internet and cell phones. Very few remember what life was like before televisions and microwaves. In this era, we don’t even have to wait for movies to release in theaters or albums to release in stores. No one a hundred years ago would have minded waiting weeks for a reply to a letter. Now we get frustrated when someone doesn’t reply to a text message right away.

We can have pretty much everything we want right now, and that makes waiting for anything difficult. How confusing it is, then, when some things just don’t happen like we hope they will—big things, like marriage and children and jobs. It can make us feel so frustrated and out of control. Let’s look at one couple who learned why it’s important to trust God in the waiting.

**Watch**

As we watch this video, think about your answer to this question: What’s one area where you struggle to depend on God?



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| **QUESTION**What’s one area where you struggle to depend on God? |

**Consider What the Bible Says**

Although the Bible was written a long time ago, the people in today’s discussion were real people just like us. They lived in a close community and probably had family and friends all around them. Zechariah had a job that followed his family’s profession, and they had been married a long time. Day by day, they lived their life with their hopes and dreams. But something was not quite right.

**Zechariah Finally Hears from God**

Read [Luke 1:5–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.5-20).

Zechariah and Elizabeth were very committed to God. They followed the Law and obeyed God in every way. Even still, one thing they both wanted—to have a child—had just not happened. They were already considered old. Zechariah and Elizabeth could have easily become bitter and slipped into thinking that God owed them something since they had obeyed Him all those years. They could have easily given up all hope.

So, when the angel delivered the amazing message about a baby soon on the way, Zechariah seemingly couldn’t believe the good news. All those years of disappointment and delay made him question God’s provision. Then, since he questioned the angel’s message, Zechariah couldn’t talk for a time. But soon he and his wife would have a vivid reminder of how much they depended on God for everything.

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| **QUESTION**If Zechariah and Elizabeth had asked you for advice before God finally answered their prayer, what would you have told them? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you think you would respond if the angel Gabriel showed up in your life? |

**The Couple’s Response**

Read [Luke 1:21–25](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.21-25).

Zechariah must have taken an unusually long time in the sanctuary that day. The people waiting outside wondered if everything was okay. Everyone knew right away that something unusual had happened when Zechariah came out of the sanctuary because he couldn’t speak. But God was actually using Zechariah and Elizabeth’s lives to impact many people. The long wait they had endured was now serving God’s greater purposes.

After years of disappointment and frustration, Elizabeth realized she was really pregnant, just like the angel had declared. She was amazed by the kindness of God, who knew her heart’s desires. Finally, He had answered their prayers with the baby they hoped for.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think the people in town were thinking and saying after hearing about Zechariah’s encounter? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you think Zechariah and Elizabeth’s understanding of God and His timing changed through this experience? |

**The Birth of a Prophet**

Read [Luke 1:57–66](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.57-66).

In God’s perfect timing, their son was born. When people heard the news of his birth, everyone rejoiced with Zechariah and Elizabeth. They all knew how long the couple had waited. To everyone’s surprise, Zechariah and Elizabeth named their baby John, obeying God’s instructions. And then Zechariah’s speech was restored.

This baby named John would eventually come to be known as John the Baptist. As the angel had declared, John was the one who would prepare the way for Jesus, our Lord. John’s entrance into the world had the whole region wondering what God was up to. His life was special right from the start, and this baby boy was redirecting hearts and lives toward God. Already the angel’s message was coming true.

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| **QUESTION**When do you think Zechariah had a change of heart in his relationship with God through this experience? |

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| **QUESTION**How can we depend on God even when we face delay or disappointment? |

**Did You Know?**

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| *The inability of a woman to have children, known as barrenness, was viewed harshly by many during Bible times. For the families dealing with this difficulty, the cultural view added more pain to an already painful situation. In many people’s eyes, infertility was incorrectly seen as an absolute sign of God’s disapproval, likely because of sin. Yet, of the eight women Scripture notes as unable to have children, God’s favor was displayed as He miraculously intervened in all but one of their situations.1* |

**Reflect**

**Depend on God even in the face of hopelessness and delay.**

Technology really is amazing. The amount of information and resources that can be shared every day around the world is incredible. Anyone who lived in a previous era would be blown away by what most of us take for granted now. But one huge drawback to our technologically advanced society is that we can begin to think we can rely on ourself to fulfill our needs. We might begin to think that we don’t need God at all. We forget we can control almost none of the vital things in life on our own, like making our heart beat, our eyes see, or our lungs breathe.

Zechariah and Elizabeth’s life story reminds us why believers need to depend fully on God and His timing. This couple, who had served God faithfully through years of hopelessness and delay, had their eyes opened to who God really is. His perfect timing in this surprise pregnancy reminded them that He has a plan that is greater than any of us. He is good and faithful. We may not always understand it, but we can be sure that He is always dependable. And we can trust that God is making a way for us and so many others to know His goodness.

**Listen to God**

Let’s pause and listen to what God might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Respond to the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

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| **QUESTION**What lessons do you think Zechariah learned while his voice was gone? |

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| **QUESTION**What is a disappointment or delay in your own life, and how have you responded to it? |

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| **QUESTION**Who in your life might benefit from seeing how you respond to disappointment or delay? |

**Activate**

God is always active in remembering us, although His timing is not always what we expect. In the waiting, we are sometimes tempted to give in to frustration or despair. Or we are sometimes tempted to take matters into our own hands. These emotions can lead to unhealthy choices in speech and action. The best antidote to these negative thought patterns in life is to actively choose gratitude instead ([Philippians 4:8](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Php4.8)).

**Challenge**

This week, think about one or two things that have been a source of frustration in your life—anything that feels hopeless or has taken much longer than you expected. Purposefully ask God to give you grace and patience to really trust Him. Reflect on His timing and reason for those situations or relationships. Think of what you can be grateful for in the season of waiting. Purpose in your heart to replace the negative thought with prayers of gratitude. Each time you notice the negative pattern, practice replacing it with thanksgiving ([2 Corinthians 10:5](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.2Co10.5)).

**Prayer Requests**

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| *Note any requests from the group and pray together. Also remember to pray for them during the week.* |

Life is always full of unexpected twists and turns. Walking with God each day, we learn through His Word and our experiences to trust Him and His wisdom in our life. We can learn to acknowledge our dependence on Him and not on our own abilities and ideas. This week’s devotions will further explore learning to depend on Him even through frustration and delay.

**Live on Your Own**

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| *Before you begin each devotion, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word. Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.* |

**Day 1: Zechariah and Elizabeth’s Wait Is Over**

Read [Luke 1:6–25](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.6-25), [57–66](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Lk1.57-66).

Look back over Live in Community and complete your responses to the Personal Reflection Questions. Plan how to complete the Activate component if you haven’t already done so. If time permits, reread the Scripture too.

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| **QUESTION**What is God saying to you about depending on Him even in the face of hopelessness and delay? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 2: Dependence in Adversity**

Read [Genesis 39:1–23](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ge39.1-23); [41:40](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ge41.40).

Joseph had such a complicated life. God had given him dreams of greatness as a young man. But his older brothers hated him so much that they sold him into slavery ([Genesis 37:28](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ge37.28)). Selling him was merciful since some of them actually suggested killing him. In spite of that, everywhere Joseph went, God was with him and blessed him.

Slavery and imprisonment didn’t seem to be the path to greatness Joseph felt destined for, but it turned out they were. All those years, Joseph honored the Lord and served Him in humility. He didn’t let bitterness or hatred take over his heart. He trusted God to see him through all the difficult times and served Him no matter what his situation happened to be. In [Genesis 41:40](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ge41.40), we find that Joseph was elevated by the Egyptian ruler to be second in command of the whole kingdom. God allowed the difficult circumstances in Joseph’s life and used them to make him into a great man.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think Joseph might have been thinking when Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him? |

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| **QUESTION**How is your own life challenged by Joseph’s story? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 3: Dependence in Danger**

Read [1 Samuel 24:1–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Sa24.1-20).

Saul was the first king of Israel. God had always been the true King of His people, but the people had complained and cried out to be like all the other nations and kingdoms around them ([1 Samuel 8:19–20](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.1Sa8.19-20)). At first, Saul did fine, but he allowed pride, rebellion, and jealousy to enter his heart. So, eventually God rejected him as king.

God chose David, a shepherd boy, to be the next king. Even before this, Saul had a love-hate relationship with David. Saul was proud of David when he had the courage to slay the giant Goliath when no one else was willing to stand up against this enemy. Saul loved it when David sang and played the harp to calm him down. But then he began to be jealous of David, and even tried to kill him. Imagine working for someone like that! David listened to God and didn’t ever retaliate to Saul’s rage and insanity. David remembered that the Lord was with him, so he didn’t let circumstances affect his decisions. He was dependent on God and trusted that God was leading him, no matter what.

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| **QUESTION**If you had been David, what would you have wanted to do to Saul that day? What do you think you would have actually done? |

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| **QUESTION**How does David’s humility challenge you? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 4: Dependence in Frustration**

Read [Nehemiah 4:1–23](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ne4.1-23).

Nehemiah had the interesting job of being cupbearer to the king. This included making sure no one had poisoned the king’s drink. So, he was close to the king several times a day. Remember, Nehemiah was one of a great number of Jewish people who had been captured by the Persians. Amazingly, when the king found out that Nehemiah wanted to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the fallen walls of the city, he allowed Nehemiah and some others to go ([Nehemiah 2:1–8](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Ne2.1-8)).

But just because the king allowed it didn’t mean that Nehemiah’s task would be easy. When Nehemiah and the others arrived and began to rebuild the walls, they were met with serious opposition. Nehemiah had a choice. He could give in to their enemies and give up, or he could stand up and rally everyone. He remembered that God had brought him to where he was, and he trusted God to see them through. Miraculously, by working together they were able to finish the wall in just fifty-two days!

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| **QUESTION**How do you think Nehemiah felt in the face of so much opposition? |

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| **QUESTION**If you had been in Jerusalem then, how would you have guessed the story would end? |

**Live on Your Own**

**Day 5: Dependence in an Attack**

Read [Job 2:1–10](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Job2.1-10); [42:12–16](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Job42.12-16).

Job’s life story is a testimony to depending on God even in seemingly hopeless situations. We can learn so much from his experience. In the first chapter of Job, we see that God allowed Satan to do whatever he wanted to Job’s family and possessions, but not to lay a hand on Job. The enemy did his worst, but Job didn’t curse God. Then we see that God allowed Satan to strike Job’s body, as long as he wasn’t killed. Satan again did his worst, but Job still kept his heart pure.

Job’s situation teaches us so much. When we walk through difficult times, we can trust that God is still with us. Satan really is trying to kill, steal, and destroy, but God tempers the blow and helps us to become more like Jesus in the process. Even Job’s wife tried to get him to curse God and die. But Job stayed faithful, just as God knew he would. And in the end, God blessed Job abundantly.

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| **QUESTION**What questions would you like to ask God about Job’s experience or a hard time you have faced? |

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| **QUESTION**What is God speaking to you about staying faithful to Him in your own life? |