

Small Group Discussion Questions

Advent: Do Not Fear

These questions are designed to invite group reflection on today's Bible passage and life application of the themes introduced in today's sermon.

Week 2: Do Not Fear Shame

Luke 1:18-25

1. Can you recall a time in which you were consciously aware of feeling shame? What were the circumstances? Is there something about which you consistently feel shame?
2. Last week we were introduced to Zechariah. This week we take a closer look at his wife, Elizabeth. In Luke 1:7 we're told the couple are childless. To which partner does Luke attribute this? What was a practical consequence of childlessness for a family line? In ancient Israel, what was childless thought to symbolize spiritually? How do you imagine childlessness impacted Elizabeth's perception of herself?
3. In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham that his descendants will be "blessed in order to bless the world". By Zechariah and Elizabeth's lifetime, what has become of this promise? In what way does the metaphor of the "barren woman" apply to God's people? How do you imagine God's people felt about themselves under Roman occupation?
4. In our culture, what are some of the ambitions and acquisitions about which people feel pride? What are conditions in which people seem to feel shame? What are some of the mechanisms by which our culture uses shame to punish people? What are some of the consequences of shame in people's lives? How do we compensate for, or try to recover from, shame?
5. What might Elizabeth assume about God based on the source of her greatest shame? How do God's words to Zechariah change Elizabeth's assumptions? How might God's action impact the way Elizabeth sees her relationship with God? How does God's action, for and through Elizabeth, also address the shame of God's people?
6. What is Zechariah's immediate reaction to the angel's message? What is the angel's response to Zechariah? Is this response purely a punishment? In what ways might Zechariah's temporary condition strengthen the bond between Zechariah and Elizabeth during their time of waiting?
7. What does God's intervention for Elizabeth, Zechariah and Israel teach us about God's promises? How might this impact your perception of God's presence and promises – especially during periods of perceived emptiness and difficulty?
8. In Elizabeth and Zechariah's life, God uses waiting and barrenness to amplify the glory of His action. How does this impact the way you see disappointments or times of waiting in your life?
9. When God introduces redemption to Elizabeth's life, He gives her a chance to become someone new. God does the same for His people. How might God's redemptive action through Jesus Christ change the way you see yourself? Imagine your life as a "new creation" – free of the burden of guilt and shame – through Jesus Christ.

Pray: For God to heal past and present sources of shame; for God to reshape your self-image by reassuring you that He sees you through the righteousness of Jesus; for God to remind you that in Jesus, you are a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21).

