

CHRISTMAS AT NEW LIFE: HOPE FOR BARREN

Read Luke 1:1-25

THREE LIFE LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH:

1. YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ~ Romans 5:6-8 (NLT)

2. GOD'S PLAN IS SOMETIMES PAINFUL

¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. ~ Hebrews 12:11 (NKJV)

⁸ Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ~ Hebrews 5:8 (NKJV)

Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." ~ Acts 14:22 (NKJV)

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Ask yourself: "What fruit might God be growing in my life through this hardship?"

3. GOD'S TIMING IS ALWAYS PERFECT

He has made everything beautiful in its time. ~ Ecclesiastes 3:11a (NKJV)

"But what does God do? He casts his eye all across the land of Israel and finds a woman who can't have a baby! While all her friends in the little desert town seem to have gotten pregnant, she has remained childless. Then God waits and waits until she is past childbearing years so that even if she could have conceived a child, it is now too late. She is doubly disqualified as a special mother for this special child. And the God of heaven says, "That's the one! As the boy grows up, from the time he is nursed to the

time he grows into manhood, his mother will be able to tell him over and over the story of his birth, the miracle of his aged parents - all of it reinforcing in his tender mind that 'nothing is impossible with God.'

~ Jim Cymbala

For with God nothing will be impossible." ~ Luk 1:37 (NKJV)

Thanks *be* to God for His indescribable gift! ~ 2 Corinthians 9:15 (NKJV)

This Christmas, let God's presence be your focus. Instead of stressing over what hasn't happened or what's still uncertain, intentionally rest in the truth that Emmanuel—*God with us*—has come.

NEXT STEPS

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There's a story told of a little boy named Ethan who loved Christmas more than any other time of year. Ethan wasn't just excited about presents and candy canes; what he loved most was helping his dad set up the nativity scene on their living room mantle. Every year, they'd carefully unwrap the fragile figures: Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Wise Men. But Ethan's favorite piece, without question, was baby Jesus.

One Christmas, when Ethan was around eight years old, something happened. After arranging all the figures just right, Ethan noticed that the baby Jesus was missing. He searched high and low in the storage boxes, crawled under the couch, and even peeked inside the Christmas stockings. Nothing. He ran to his dad, almost in tears. "Dad," Ethan said, "we can't find Jesus! How are we supposed to celebrate Christmas if He's not here?"

His dad smiled and knelt down beside him. "Ethan," he said, "Jesus will show up—at just the right time. Let's keep looking." Days went by, and every night Ethan would stand in front of the nativity, staring at the empty manger. He couldn't understand why Jesus wasn't where He was supposed to be.

Finally, on Christmas morning, as they were opening presents, Ethan's dad called him over. He handed him a small box with a bow on top. Ethan tore it open and gasped. There, nestled inside the tissue paper, was the tiny baby Jesus. His dad explained, "I hid Him because I wanted you to understand something special this year.

Sometimes it feels like Jesus is missing, like He's not showing up when we need Him to. But the truth is, He's always there. And when the time is just right, He always makes His presence known." Ethan gently placed Jesus back in the manger, and for the rest of

the day, every time he walked past the nativity, he'd pause and whisper, "Thank you, Jesus, for coming—right on time."