

RESPONSE

A 12 Week Devotion
Luke 1: 26-38; 46-55

Youth Becoming Leaders 2026
Dr. James Hampton

YOUTH BECOMING LEADERS
High School Christian Leadership and Global Transformation Institute

ASBURY UNIVERSITY
Academic Excellence & Spiritual Vitality

Credit for these devotionals goes to Lauren Edgell Hampton and Dr. James Hampton, with the following individuals:

Dr. Brian Hull

Caleigh Smith

Jenna Brock

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INTRODUCTION & INSTRUCTIONS



Sometimes there are stories you've heard all your life, stories that are so familiar you know them by heart. Often with these stories, they become so familiar, so commonplace, that we can miss their beauty. Such is the story of Mary's call by God.

During YBL, we talked about this story for two weeks. Our two great speakers preached on it during the evening worship services. Wise teachers instructed each day on the topic of "Response." And we examined our own communities to discover what needs are present and how we might be a part of meeting those needs.

For the next 12 weeks, you and your mentor or protégé will continue to look at this call story through a series of 12 devotions. "But why?" you ask. "Isn't this a bit of overkill? Won't this do the very thing you talked about—make it so familiar that we miss the beauty of the story?"

We believe strongly that sometimes the reason something becomes commonplace is precisely because we fail to continue to look for new themes, new angles to the story, and new ways of seeing God at work. Our goal is that the next 12 weeks will serve as just that—a collaborative effort between the YBL participant, the mentor, and the leaders of YBL (who wrote these devotions) as you continue to ask and answer the question, "How do I Live into God's call on my life?"



For each of the 12 devotions, we'd like you to have read it individually and answered the questions. We want to encourage you to write out your answers. Then, when you come together, use the questions and answers as a guide for your time together with your mentor/mentee.

You don't have to always agree on things. In fact, you sometimes won't. That's OK. What is important is how you engage each other in this process and that you take the Scripture passage with all of its implications seriously. Part of biblical interpretation is recognizing that when we study Scripture together in community, we often arrive at different ways of reading and interpreting it than when we study it alone. Therefore, we must read it individually, seek to interpret it, and understand its implications for our lives.

But we must also bring those interpretations and implications to the community and seek clarity together on what the passage means. When we do this, we believe that the Spirit helps correct error and points us in the right direction as we attempt to now live into this new understanding.

As you work through the devotions, you may encounter new ways of thinking about this parable that you've previously discovered. We believe that God's truth is always relevant, and that no matter how many times we may have read a passage, God still has new truth for us to ponder and new implications for us to live out. Only as we open ourselves to this possibility can God speak to us through the passages we've read or heard countless times, such as the story we are studying over the next 12 weeks.

Please know that you both are in our prayers as you begin this journey. May God's wisdom enfold you, the Lord's peace surround you, and the Spirit's grace overwhelm you as you work together to discover what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

Note: All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise indicated.



WEEK One

Read Luke 1:26-28.
Pay particular attention to the typical journalism questions: who, what, where, when, why.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:26-28)

I'm sure the day Mary was visited by the angel, Gabriel, was just like any other day. She woke up, and like a thousand other girls in Galilee, began her daily chores. As a female in Galilee, she would have been responsible for helping run the household—preparing meals, cleaning the house (after all, those dusty roads meant a lot of dirt tracked in!), and perhaps most important in that environment, drawing water. Many commentators believe it was while Mary was in fact drawing water that she encountered Gabriel.

To read this story well requires us to have some knowledge of the context in which Mary was located. You may know (or recall from the YBL speakers and professors) some of this, but it's always good to ensure we all are on the same page when it comes to understanding the context.



WEEK One

First, location. Nazareth was a small, insignificant, backwater town in Galilee. Estimates are that at its height, there might have been 1600-2000 residents. People from that area were considered second-class. Compared to Jerusalem, the capital, Nazareth would have been nothing more than an afterthought.

Second, gender. As a female, Mary would have had few rights or privileges. She would have been considered property—first her father's, then her husband's. In our modern-day culture, we find it hard to accept, with women rightfully asserting their independence and serving as leaders. But in Mary's day, it was the norm for her to be considered more as property than an equal.

Third, age. While we do not know Mary's exact age, we can hazard some guesses. The average Jewish girl would have been considered "marrying age" when they reached 12 to 12.5. While some girls might not be married until age 17 or 18, the average age during this time was approximately 14-15. So, for the sake of argument, let us say Mary was 15 (the age of some YBL students!).

Understanding this context is crucial for us. It is too easy to read the story of Gabriel's visit to Mary in a holy hush, much like we do at Christmas, and forget that this was a real teenager in a real town who was being asked to do something that would rock her world and the lives of her friends and family.

So, what qualified Mary to be the mother of Jesus? It certainly was not her money. She came from a family that would have owned truly little. It was not her fame or popularity. Outside of her immediate family and a few neighbors, Mary probably was not well known. And it most definitely was not her power. As a female in her teens, she would have had none.

WEEK One

All these factors would seemingly have prohibited Mary from being chosen by God for this incredibly important task. Yet what we view as problematic, a hindrance, or nonsensical, God sees differently. God did not look at what Mary did not have. Instead, God looked at what she did have—a willing heart.

What is your context? Big city or small town? Female or male? Lots of power or powerless? Older than 21 or younger? It is easy for us to look at those issues and, like Mary, feel like we have so little to offer God. "How will this be?" we wonder. "How could God possibly overcome my background, my age, my gender, my lack of experience?"

While our context matters, the truly amazing thing is that God can take the little we offer from our context and, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, use us in extraordinary ways.



WEEK One

As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:

1. How does understanding the context Mary found herself in when God called her help you better understand God's call on your life?

2. What part of your context do you find it hardest to believe God can use? Why?

3. Has anyone ever told you that you could not do ministry because of your age (too young or too old), or your gender? How did that make you feel?

4. Is there an area of ministry that you have felt called to do, but up to this point chose not to engage, because you felt you were unqualified? Name that ministry, and then encourage one another to pursue this ministry now.

Take time to pray for one another. Pray that over the course of the next 11 weeks (and hopefully beyond), each of you will learn how to be a better follower of Jesus.

WEEK Two

Please read aloud the story of Mary's call as found in Luke 1:26-38. When we read something aloud, it often helps us find points of emphasis that reading silently fails to emphasize. For this week, let me encourage you to read it aloud from the New International Version (NIV).

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. (Luke 1:29).

We often read or hear this story during the Christmas season. When we read or hear it, Mary's response is uttered with a holy respect that suggests she was eager to take on this role, eager to be God's servant and to bring the Christ child into the world. Let us dispel that myth right now.



Biblically accurate Angels for those wondering

WEEK Two

The phrase “was greatly troubled” is like the verb used to express Zechariah’s alarm in Luke 1:12. It is not a verb of mild distress or concern, but rather one that shows great fear, confusion, and disbelief. Mary was distressed at this appearance. She would have known that angels did not just appear for no reason, but whenever they did, it foretold something big about to happen.

Karoline Lewis expresses well the bewilderment and fear Mary had: “To call attention to Mary's response to the angel's first words is to emphasize to what extent Mary cannot even believe this impossible possibility. Me? Who am I? Why am I favored? How can the Lord be with me? She knows her place. She knows who she is. And this should not be happening. She's a she, a teenager, and from the wrong side of the tracks.”1

Again, it is easy to believe this was all just an ordinary encounter, and Mary behaved with the reverence we typically attribute to her.

However, think about the 15-year-olds you know (or think about how you, as a 15 to 18-year-old, would respond). How would you have responded if an angelic being simply appeared while you were going about your daily duties? Can you imagine being calm and collected? Or would you have been terrified by this sudden appearance of a being that is clearly not of this world?

Mary’s fear is real and understandable. We understand Mary’s fear, don’t we? How many things in life are we fearful of? I’m not just talking about being scared of spiders or snakes or clowns. Rather, the fear you and I often have is the fear of the unknown, the fear that we are not good enough. We give up hope that God could actually use us. We are terrified that once God knows who we really are at our core, God will give up on us.

WEEK Two

What are the fears you have about serving God?

Are you scared the Lord will call you to be a missionary in a far-off land?

Are you dismayed thinking that you will have to give up your hopes and dreams in order to follow God?

Are you anxious that God is calling you to do something that you do not believe you have the gifts to do?

All of these are real fears, and just as importantly, they are normal.

However, it's far too easy to let these fears dictate our lives, and consequently, we miss out on what God has for us.

Imagine if Mary's fear had kept her from ultimately saying "Yes" to God. How would her life have been different? Would we even know who she is today? Fears are part of being human, but we do not have to be controlled by them.

WEEK Two

As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:

1. What are your greatest fears in life? Why do you have them?

2. When it comes to following and serving God, what most scares you? Why does it scare you?

3. In one sense, we often fear what we don't understand. How would knowing more about God help you not to be as scared about following the Lord's will for your life?

4. As you reflect on what God is calling you to do with your project, does anything about it scare you?

Close in prayer, asking that God would help you overcome your fears and instead give you a sense of peace in following Jesus.

WEEK Three

This week, read through Luke 1:26-38 again, this time from the NRSV. (Students, yes, we know you memorized it. But please read it again out loud. This will keep you from allowing it to become commonplace.) We will utilize different versions as we go along to keep the story fresh and to see how different versions emphasize certain elements of the story by their interpretation of Scripture.

30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him 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 ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”



Without a pause, Gabriel proceeds to tell Mary something that blows her mind.

He tells her she is going to have a baby. And not just any baby. She is going to give birth to the Son of God!

WEEK Three

What, really, do you say back to Gabriel? Now here comes this stranger with the most preposterous-sounding thing you have ever heard in your life. Do you argue? Do you ask for clarification? Do you call 911? Do you say, “Who are you and how did you get in my house?” Do you laugh out loud?

Listen again to these words you have heard time and again. But this time, remember that you are 14, deeply in love, and looking forward to your wedding day. In at least this sense, your life seems perfect. Everything is proceeding as planned and life could not be any better. And now comes this angel with a proclamation that is going to turn Mary’s life upside down. In one sense, we could say that this was a significant interruption in Mary’s plans for her life.



WEEK Three

The reality is that God often interrupts people's lives throughout Scripture. He interrupted Moses, then just a shepherd, by appearing at a burning bush and inviting him to be Israel's deliverer. He interrupted Jonah with a call to preach repentance to a country of rebellious people. He interrupted Saul's life of persecuting Christians with a blinding light from heaven and changed him into an apostle of Jesus. God often interrupts people and changes the direction of their lives from what they had planned, but it is always an invitation to something better. It may not be safer or easier, but it will be better.

Like Mary, we already have things planned out. We know what we want to do with our lives (college, finding a dream guy/girl and getting married, having a great job that pays well, etc.), and we map things out to try to achieve them. So, when God comes calling, it can certainly seem like a genuine interruption in our lives, requiring us to rethink our future plans.

Many of us shake off God's invitations, calling them "interruptions," when God really wants to do something new and different in our lives. I do not know what this will look like for you, but if you will be sensitive enough to begin to think through the "interruptions" in your life as invitations from God, the Lord might take your life somewhere new or different, to do something special that you could have never predicted or planned on your own. The key question is this: "When God provides us with an invitation, will we see it as an opportunity to engage together with God to change the world, or will we see it as an interruption from our plans?" How we answer that question will determine how we view God and whether we honestly believe God has our best intentions at heart.

WEEK Three

As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:

1. Share with each other what your plans are for your life as you currently envision them.

2. Do you think Mary was justified in being concerned with this invitation from God? Why or why not?

3. Why is it so difficult for us to see God's call as an invitation rather than an interruption?

4. What invitation could God offer you that would give you significant pause in being able to accept it? In other words, what could God ask you to do that would cause you to be really concerned with whether you would be willing to accept the invitation?

Pray for each other that both of you would be willing to accept God's gracious invitation, regardless of what that may do to our own plans.

WEEK Four

As you prepare to read the story today, take a few moments to center and quiet yourself. Ask God to help you see the story anew, with fresh eyes, in order to capture the heart of what God has in store for you.

Again, read the story (Luke 1:26-38) out loud. Choose a version you have not previously utilized. If you do not have multiple versions available on your bookshelf, use the Bible app you downloaded on your iPad. This will give you access to dozens of Bible versions.

How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34)

Between the "pledge" and the "wedding feast" was a period usually lasting six months to a year (similar to our modern engagement period). During that period, the couple was considered married and referred to as husband and wife, but they did not live together and did not consummate their marriage physically. Following the custom of that day, Mary would live with her parents and Joseph with his. Only after the public wedding feast would Mary and Joseph live together as husband and wife.



It is right at this point that God breaks in. The Lord is about to ask an unknown teenage girl to take part in something so shocking as to be unbelievable. What God asks Mary to do will change her life forever.

WEEK Four

Gone are the happy dreams of a beautiful wedding; gone are the days of sweet anticipation; gone are the carefully thought-out plans for the wedding feast; gone are the hopes for “the most beautiful wedding to the most wonderful man who ever lived.”

She will be married, but not before rumors spread through the countryside. There will be a wedding feast, but not the way she planned. She will have a home, and it will be filled with children, but over her family will rest an uneasy cloud of dark suspicion.

Was Mary afraid? Whenever we meet something new and strange, we get confused. The patterns we are used to are disrupted, and little alarms go off in our heads. That is the way God made us to respond to change; it is a built-in conservatism and defense mechanism.

But while the alarm system Mary felt is normal and healthy, there is a dangerous—and sinful—kind of fear that can grip and control us. People often live in fear of death, fear of a spouse leaving, fear of sickness, and fear that they will not be able to pay their bills. When fear lives in us, rather than being a momentary reaction to something new, we become warped. We respond to situations out of fear rather than out of faith and make pretty poor disciples. We must resist entrenched fear, for it is the breeding ground for unbelief; it must not control us. When we study our passage, we see that Mary accepted the angel's "Fear not" at face value.

Mary only has one question, a technical matter she would like cleared up: ‘’How can this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’” (34) This is a perfectly natural question. Mary is betrothed but not formally married. She has never had sexual relations with any man. How then can she become pregnant and bear a son?

WEEK Four

It is instructive to note that Mary does not doubt the angel's word, even though it must have sounded incredible. She believed what the angel said. Her only question concerned how it would happen.

One important thing we need to understand is that it is okay to trust God and still have questions. Trust is not blind. While we can hold unswervingly to the belief that God's invitation is for our good, we can still have lots of questions. And the reality is, God is OK with that. Mary's question is not dismissed. The angel Gabriel takes her question seriously and responds.

In the same way, God will patiently answer our questions when we have them. We must recognize that those answers won't always come when we want them, and that they may not always be what we want to hear. That said, when the answer comes, we can trust, like Mary, that God knows what's best for us and will respond accordingly.



WEEK Four

As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:

1. If you were in Mary's place, what questions would you have had?

2. Last week, we talked about God's invitation and how that can be seen as an interruption. If God were to invite you to do something that might turn your world upside down, would you have questions for God? Why or why not?

3. Share a time when you doubted God. What was God asking of you that caused you to doubt Him?

4. As you consider your future (as you currently understand it), what questions might you have for God?

As you close in prayer, make sure to pray for God's guidance, as well as answers to the questions given in answer 4.

WEEK Five

Working through the story verse by verse, as we are doing, can sometimes cause us to lose sight of the larger picture. Let me encourage you to read through the entire Scripture passage (Luke 1:26-38) again. Read it aloud from a different version of the Bible than you normally use. This will ensure you see how the various parts we're discussing fit into the larger story of Mary's call.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end."
(Luke 1:28-33)

When most of us hear the word "favor," we think of doing something kind for someone else. "Hey, can you do me a favor?" However, that is not what is intended here. The word "favor" as used in these verses reminds us that God approves of Mary. Note, however, that this favor is not because of anything Mary has done. It is all because God chose her that she is favored. While I do not doubt that Mary was a deeply spiritual young woman, the reality is that Mary does not have favor in and of herself; rather, she is the recipient of divine favor. This is a grace freely given to her by God.

WEEK Five



"You have found favor with God." Mary hears that she is favored and blessed. We need to know that God's "yes" always comes first. The Message says, "You are beautiful with God's beauty." What does this mean about where Mary gets her identity from? In short, it's a gift from God.

Notice that the angel repeats the phrase. Why? It's at least in part because all of us need affirmation that God views us with favor. However, this affirmation is immediately followed by God's invitation: to partner with the Creator in bringing salvation to the world. God's call always has two parts—affirmation ("you have found favor") and invitation ("join with me"). Think about the 13-year-olds, you know. Think about when you were 13. Can you imagine them (or you) being the mother of God? Mary is 13, poor, a woman, and unmarried– all factors mitigating against her. As we discussed last week, most young people would never be considered the ideal candidate. However, because they are such unlikely candidates for ministry, I am convinced that God often sees them as the most likely candidates for the Holy Spirit to use, because they are open to the possibility.

WEEK Five

However, we live in a world that tells us a different story. Like Mary, all we tend to hear are the negative stories: you are not talented enough, not old enough, too old, not popular enough, you do not have enough resources, you live on the "wrong side of the tracks," etc. All those stories have weight and add up over time, causing us to believe them and act accordingly. Thus, when God comes calling, it is difficult for us to hear and believe that God sees us as favored.

It is no small thing to be regarded, to be favored, especially when you are exceedingly aware that you should not be. All of us want to know we are wanted, needed, that others notice us. How much more so do we want to know for sure that God wants us, needs us, notices us? In short, we have an innate desire to know that God favors us. That's why it is so important to hear the same message that Mary heard: YOU ARE HIGHLY FAVORED! God looks at you and sees someone that the Creator loves desperately, one whom the Lord views as being special, not because of what we've done, but because of what Christ has done for us. And because we are favored, we can then accept God's invitation to join the Holy Spirit in God's Kingdom work in the world.

What God invites us to join and to believe may appear impossible. Here, as throughout the Bible, God demonstrates that Jesus "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). Elizabeth can become pregnant, and so can Mary, though it seems impossible. What is humanly impossible is, in fact, possible with divine collaboration. And so, the Annunciation (the announcement by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive a son by the power of the Holy Spirit to be called Jesus) is ultimately an invitation to accept God's favor, to submit to the Lord's will, and to join what the Holy Spirit is already doing.

WEEK Five

As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:

1. Why is it so important that we get our identity from God, rather than the world?

2. What are the false stories the world tells us that you are most susceptible to believing about yourself? Why do you believe them?

3. How does it make you feel to know that you are “highly favored” by God”? What difference does this make in how you then respond to God’s invitation?

4. Do you ever think that what God is asking you to do is impossible? Why or why not?

5. As you pray together, remind each other that God sees both of you as being highly favored, and commit to accepting the invitation God extends to you.

WEEK Six

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.” (Luke 1:34-36)

These verses stress two facts about Mary. First, she is a virgin. The Greek word involved (parthenos) means a young woman of marriageable age who has never had sexual relations with a man. Second, she has no idea what is about to happen. Mary is completely in the dark, without a clue that her life is about to be changed forever.

She only has one question, a technical matter she would like cleared up: “How can this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” (34) This is a perfectly natural question. Mary is betrothed but not formally married. She has never had sexual relations with any man. How then can she become pregnant and bear a son?

Mary doesn’t ask for a sign, but she is nevertheless given one. She’s told of her cousin, Elizabeth’s pregnancy. A woman who was thought to not be able to have children has conceived because of God’s power. The same God who caused this miracle will bring about the miracle of Mary’s own pregnancy.

WEEK Six

It is instructive to note that Mary does not doubt the angel's word, even though it must have sounded incredible. She believed what the angel said. Her only question concerned how it would happen. In essence, she says to Gabriel, "All right. I'm willing to do my part, but you need to explain how we'll handle this one little problem." That's real faith. That's believing the impossible. That's trusting God even when the "facts" argue against it.

I love that neither God nor Gabriel demands that Mary understand everything. What is required of her is only this: that she believes and willingly submits. She doesn't have to understand how everything will work out. She doesn't have to fully know what God plans to do. All she must do is believe that God is able and trust the Lord will bring about what God has promised to her through the angel Gabriel.

You know, a lot of people say that fear is the absence of faith. But I believe fear is faith...it's just faith in the wrong things. Fear is placing your faith in the "what-ifs" of life.

What if things fall apart? What if he/she becomes president? What if I lose my job? What if someone I love gets cancer? What if I never get married? What if my parents divorce? What if I won't be accepted? And the fears just go on and on – fear is placing our faith in the worst-case scenario.

"How can this be?" Mary asks. In other words, she says, "You've got to be kidding!" Scripture is full of people who, when God came calling, said something similar. Think of Moses, Sarai, or Zechariah. Each one said basically, "Yeah, right!" when God called them. Like Mary, we have our excuses: how can this be since I have these things going on in my life—this commitment and that circumstance.

WEEK Six

Perhaps I'll be ready next year. Once I figure out my life, then I can start learning how to welcome what God is doing—once I finish school, once the rush at work settles down, once I fix that relationship, once I conquer this sin, once I find the right job, once I start a family, once I become more spiritual, and so on. How can this be since we are virgins (in a way), all of us?

But that's not how God operates. God doesn't wait until we think we are ready, because God knows we always have all that we already need. That's what grace means: God has already given us all that we need to welcome God's new life. So, God announces and waits with us. What grace God gives!

Yes, God waits with us—that's an important part of the good news.



WEEK Six

As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:

1) Are there times when you struggle to trust what God has called you to do? Why or why not?

2) Mary believed even when it didn't seem plausible. What would it take for you to have that kind of faith?

3) What are you trusting in today? Do you trust fully in God, even when what God is asking you to do doesn't seem possible?

4) What difference does it make that God waits with us?

5) Close in prayer, asking God to help us see things through his eyes, and to believe that God is worthy of our trust.

WEEK Seven

Sometimes hearing the story from a child's perspective can help us discover things we might otherwise miss. Let me encourage you to read the story of Mary's call as found here:

"Nothing is impossible with God." (1:37, CEB)

Sometimes we look at a situation and think, "That's impossible!" Everything we see and hear suggests that there is no possible way this will work, no way that this can be fixed. And so, like most people, when we face those situations, we tend to just walk away, assuming it wasn't meant for us and that we need to look elsewhere.

There will be times in your life when God might interrupt you with an invitation that seems impossible, and God is going to ask you to have faith. But you are going to look at it and say, "I do not see how that is possible. I cannot even imagine how that could possibly take place." God might ask you to forgive someone that it feels impossible to forgive. The Lord might ask you to be generous when it feels like you do not have much to give. Jesus might tell you that the Holy Spirit wants to heal a relationship when, in your mind, that will never happen. And in that moment, I want you to remember what the angel said in verse 37, "Nothing is impossible with God."

I want you to play a little game with me for a second. I want you to imagine something in your life that you feel is impossible.

WEEK Seven



Maybe it is your marriage that is in bad shape. Maybe it's a relationship with one of your friends. Maybe it's a need or a calling you have felt in your life that you keep blowing off because you cannot imagine it as a real possibility. Now I want you to answer a question. If God had in mind to fix that situation, do you honestly believe that the Creator could make it happen? Do not worry about how for a second. Does God have the ability to make it happen? Did God have the ability to get his people released from captivity even when the Egyptian Pharaoh said they would never leave?

Even when that same Pharaoh later sent his armies after them? And when the people stood between the sea and the armies, did God have the ability to part the sea so the Hebrew people could walk through, while causing the waters to drown the Egyptian soldiers? As Moses experienced it, of course, he did!

Did God have the ability to make a virgin girl pregnant? As Mary discovered, he certainly did. Given the circumstances, it would have been easy for Mary just to dismiss what Gabriel said. Virgins do not have babies! That is impossible! Doesn't God know his biology? That is simply crazy talk!

WEEK Seven

Did the Creator have the ability to raise the Father's dead Son from the grave after Jesus was crucified? Didn't God know that dead people do not come back alive?

Repeat verse 37 out loud. "Nothing is impossible with God." Say it again, "Nothing is impossible with God." Do you believe that? Do you really believe that?

Look at Mary's response in verse 38; she sets the perfect example for us. In verse 38, she says, "I am the Lord's servant." When God interrupted her life and put before her a charge that was so scary and so intimidating and so impossible and so completely different from her own plans for her life, Mary had to remind herself who she was and whose she was: "I belong to the King of Kings. He is my Lord, and I am called to serve Him. And even though I don't understand, and can't figure it all out, and it will certainly cost me, and it's probably going to be far harder than I can even imagine, I belong to Him. And because I belong to Him, I can trust Him with the outcome, and I will be obedient."

Again, what is the "impossible" that God might be calling you to do? And are you willing like Mary to believe that "nothing is impossible with God"?



WEEK Seven

As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:

1. What are some things in your life that seem impossible to you?

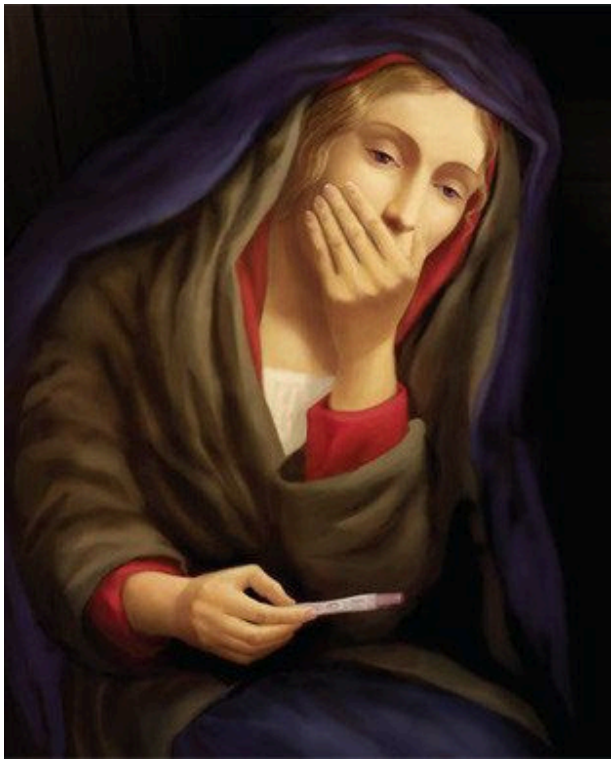
2. Do you really believe God can make possible the impossible? Why or why not?

3. Scripture is full of examples of how God did the impossible. So why is it so hard for us to believe he can still do that today?

4. What will it take for you to believe that “Nothing is impossible with God?”

5. Close in prayer, asking God to help each other believe the Holy Spirit can bring about the impossible things you each mentioned in question one.

WEEK Eight



Read the story aloud again by reading from the New Living Translation (NLT) version. If you don't have it, it can be found on the "Bible" app or can be found at www.biblegateway.com

38 Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And the angel left her. (NLT)

When reading any piece of literature, we must always read "between the lines."

No piece of literature can tell us everything we need to know, given limited space. Therefore, we often must look at what is said and consider what is missing, what else might have been said, or what might have happened. Such is this passage.

All we read is that Mary says "Yes" to God's invitation. However, when we read between the lines, we are forced to reckon with what it cost Mary to say "Yes" to God. From that moment on, she faced the incredulity of her friends ("Oh Mary, how could you expect us to believe such a bizarre story?"), the scandalous gossip of the neighborhood ("Did you hear about Mary being pregnant out of wedlock?") and the whispers of promiscuity that have lasted 2,000 years. Mary knew–or would soon realize–that saying Yes to God meant misunderstanding and public shame. Gone was her pure reputation.

WEEK Eight

Since we know the end of the story, we may tend to overlook the possibility of divorce. But Mary had no way of knowing how Joseph would respond to her pregnancy. Would he blow his top and walk out on her? Would he humiliate her publicly? Would he divorce her? As the story turned out, Mary had every reason to worry about Joseph. He did not blow his top or try to humiliate her, but he did intend to divorce her. Only an angel's intervention kept that from happening. That, too, was on Mary's mind. By saying "Yes," she risked losing the man she loved. Her whole future was on the line.

And all these things were just the beginning. Mary could not know what the future would hold. Before it was all over, she would experience heartache, opposition, slander, confusion, anguish, despair, and loneliness. In the end, she would face the greatest pain a mother can endure when she would watch her son die on a cross.

All we really know about Mary is that she said "Yes." Again, reading between the lines, I have often wondered, "How many stops did Gabrielle make before finding someone willing to say 'Yes'? The reason you came to YBL is that you were willing to say Yes. Notice that God does not force Mary. God simply expects that she will say "Yes" and believes that she will. Love is always a choice, not a coercion. And our God is a skillful lover. And here is the key: teens are capable of extraordinary commitment to something that matters, to someone who believes in them 100%.

WEEK Eight

Do you remember what it was like when you finally said “Yes” to God? I have spent 40 years trying to reclaim the purity of that type of faith. Mary is present in every teenager who has ever said “Yes” to God before.

When did God call you into ministry? One elderly Methodist bishop was asked this question. He thought about it for a minute and stated, “I guess the last time was this morning.”

Mary did not know the full cost of saying Yes. But having made her decision, she never looked back. Those two aspects of her life may be the greatest things we can say about her. What about you? Are you willing to say “Yes” to God’s invitation, even when you do not know the totality of what it might cost you? And once you have made that decision, are you committed to not looking back, but fully trusting that God will lead you?



WEEK Eight

As you prepare to meet with each other this week, answer the following questions:

1. Mary had to sacrifice her reputation in order to do God's will. Would you be willing to sacrifice your reputation, if needed, in order to do God's will?

2. It is hard to say "Yes" when we do not know the future or what it might cost us. Given this, what would it take for you to say, "I will trust what I know to be true of God even though I'm not sure what God is up to."

3. God's ministry does not end with Mary's "Yes." Instead, it begins. What is God calling you to do for God's Kingdom now that you have said "Yes"?

4. What does God want from us? The same thing the Lord wanted from Mary. Simple faith that God will keep his word in unlikely and unexpected ways. What will it take for you to have this same type of faith?

5. As you pray together, do not just pray for more faith, but pray for courage to exercise the faith you already have, to be more like Mary, willing to believe despite our doubts.

WEEK Nine

Read the story (Luke 1:26-38) aloud again from your favorite Bible version.

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. (NIV)

Truth be told, we are often afraid of God’s plans. Whereas the first reason is that His interruptions are often inconvenient, the second reason we fear is that God’s purposes are often different than our plans.

I wonder if there are times when we feel like Mary? Perhaps today is one of those times. We look at our lives and we see chaos and mess: relationships are not how we would like them to be. Perhaps there is financial stress as we think about college, or our current employment is causing anxiety. Perhaps we feel trapped and unable to escape from our day-to-day pressures. We may look at our lives and all we see is a mess.

Sometimes it seems such a stark contrast to the hopes and dreams we once held, and we may wonder where God’s favor has gone in our lives.

But, of course, something else was happening in this story about Mary. Yes, her life was a mess: but there was an emerging miracle in that mess: Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World was growing in her, and while she considered the external circumstances and could only see mess, God was looking through all that and witnessing the birth of a miracle.

WEEK Nine



Truth be told, there is a miracle in every mess. But it needs to be sought out carefully: we need to allow it time to emerge, nurture it, safeguard it, and allow it to grow in our lives.

If I asked you, “What is the mess in your life?” you might be able to give me a quick, clear answer without thinking. But if I asked you, “What is the miracle emerging from the mess?” Could you answer that? Have you seen it yet? Are you able to nurture that miracle now?

God does not somehow transcend the chaos and mess of our lives and work a miracle in us despite them. Instead, God uses the chaos and mess to give birth to the miracle. Your chaos, your mess, is the womb for God’s miracle - a miracle will emerge from the mess because this is the right place at the right time for the right thing.

If we look at our lives from a purely human perspective, we may only see mess. But if we try to discern God's hand in us, we may just see a miracle emerging from the mess. Sometimes, we need to sift through the rubble and debris of bad decisions, inappropriate actions, and wrong choices, but as we do, the miracle can be observed. It is an act of grace that even those circumstances that may seem beyond redemption can not only be redeemed but can even be blessed and can be the soil in which a beautiful miracle will grow.

WEEK Nine

The miracle may not be birthed today, or even tomorrow— it may be growing inside of you, and you will need to guard it secretly for a while longer.

But in the right place at the right time, the miracle you need will be born. It will emerge into your life, and it will be the right thing for you.

Like Mary, we need to look deeply into our messy circumstances and trust that God is growing a miracle inside us. If we can do that, we will be able to make some sense of the mess and see it for what it is: the birthplace of a miracle. And then our faith in God will increase, and we will be able to join with Mary and say: “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.”



WEEK Nine

Discuss the following questions:

1. Mary had a lot of “mess” in her life that, at least on the outside, would seem to keep her from doing anything significant. How do you think she felt when Gabriel told her about the miracle God wanted to produce in her life?

2. As you examine your life, what are the “messes” that may be present that keep you from seeing the miracle God wants to bring about in your life?

3. Can you begin to identify the miracle that God wants to create in your life? If so, share it with your partner. If not, discuss why you think you cannot yet see it.

4. How can God use the mess present in your life to bring about a miracle?

5. As you pray together, ask God to reveal the miracle that may be in your “mess” and ask for God’s wisdom to recognize it.

WEEK Ten

Read Luke 1: 46-55 aloud from the NIV© version of Scripture.

And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.” (Luke 1:46-49, NIV)

Today, we turn to the portion of Scripture often called “The Magnificat” (based on the Latin version of Scripture where the word for “magnify” is “Magnificat”). When we look closely at the first part of this song, we see that Mary offers a song of praise to God. But this is no ordinary song of praise where we offer a few polite words about God. This song seeks to make it known to everyone just how great God is.

As Mary sings her song, the words pour out of her. This is no known song. Instead, Mary draws on numerous examples in Scripture of others praising God. In fact, one could say that the entire Magnificat is an intentional medley of Biblical texts that Mary would have heard multiple times in the synagogue. Mary’s song reflects the same ideas as found in Hannah’s song (1 Samuel 1), as well as those found in Psalm 146. This demonstrates Mary’s familiarity with Scripture and her desire to use words already familiar to her about who God is.

But this is no mere dry reciting of Scripture. This is an ebullient song, one that seeks to truly offer praise to God for what God has done. The words just flow out of her because she knows them, she has lived them, and she has seen how God has worked in the history of her people.

WEEK Ten

Scripture tells us that Mary “magnifies” the Lord. Think back to a time when you used a magnifying glass. The magnifying glass does what its name states—it “magnifies” things. In other words, it enlarges them, it makes them grow. This is the same idea for Mary. She intended to magnify the name of God, to let others know just how great the Lord is.

In verse 47, Mary says, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior”. The verb for rejoicing suggests someone who is so overjoyed that they literally cannot contain their excitement, their happiness. Her song literally bursts from her depths, demonstrating the intensity of her praise and gratitude toward God. She cannot help but tell others about who God is and what the Lord has done in her life.

Mary will be honored “From now on” by all generations, not because she is special, but because she has herself received God’s grace and mercy, and therefore stands as a model for all people that God’s grace and mercy are available to them as well. We will explore this concept more in the next two weeks, but for now, think about how Mary must have felt to be chosen by God to bear Jesus into the world. What an honor! And when one is given such an honor, one cannot help but offer thanks back to God for the amazing gift!



WEEK Ten

Most of the time, when we think about praise, we tend to gravitate toward the songs we sing during worship. But in this case, Mary was not at church. She was simply overwhelmed with the goodness of God in her life and burst out in song.

In today's culture, we tend to use #blessed for every little good thing that happens to us. #Blessed has come to mean living a life of privilege and comfort. Using the term has become a way of celebrating those moments when everything is going well, and all seems right with the world — or at least one's own little corner of it. And while we need to acknowledge these things as coming from God, Mary's song demonstrates a sense of blessedness; she speaks not just of what God has done for her, but for all humanity. And sometimes being "blessed" by God does not always mean things will go well. Think about the grief Mary will feel in 33 years when she sees her beloved son tortured and then crucified. Mary's blessing, like ours, is cross-shaped, "a condition of complete simplicity (costing not less than everything)" as T. S. Eliot so memorably said.2 Brings a whole new meaning to being "blessed," doesn't it?

Bursting out in song in public may not be your go-to, but Mary's song does remind us of the incredible responsibility we have in offering our praise and gratitude to God for all that the Lord has done for us. It should remind us of the need for us to magnify the Lord, to tell others of God's greatness, power, and mercy in our lives. And in so doing, we can help others see how God can also work in their lives.

WEEK Ten

Discuss the following questions:

1. Identify the things Mary praises God for in this passage of Scripture. Why do you think she chose these things to offer praise for?

2. Think about your life. How has God blessed you? Think not just in terms of the good things you have, but how has God truly blessed your life in ways that do not have to do with material possessions?

3. If you were asked to give a 3-minute testimony about God's magnificence, what would you say about God? What attributes of God would you most extol to others? Consider writing this out and sharing it with your mentor/mentee.

4. Even when things do not look great (think crucifixion), we are still blessed. Mary's status did not change when Jesus was killed. How can you continue to offer praise to God even during challenging times?

5. As you pray together, ask God to help each of you to truly magnify God for who the Creator is, both for your own sake, and for the sake of others who hear about the Lord.

WEEK Eleven

Read Luke 1: 46-55 aloud again from the NLT© version of Scripture.



“He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever.” (Luke 1:50-55).

As we saw last week, Mary spends the first few verses of the Magnificat in praise and adoration of God. She has heard how God has operated in the past, and she has witnessed firsthand how God has blessed her. Now she also sings of how God continues to work into the future.

The verbs Luke records in Mary’s song use are what in Greek are referred to as “prophetic aorists.” This means that what Mary says is not only true of God in the past but is also true of God for now and in the future. As Mary sings, it is with deep confidence that the same God who lifted her out of her marginal place in society will do the same for others, as God brings justice to the poor and oppressed.

WEEK Eleven

In other words, Mary sings with incredible confidence that the same God who has blessed her, will bless others. But just as it was with Mary, God's blessing only comes to those who have humbled themselves, who seek to live in integrity, and who understand that God is holy. What God has done for Mary by blessing her anticipates and models what God will do for the poor, the powerless and the oppressed of the world.

As Mary remembers how God has treated her, she sings that is this also how God will treat others.
"All who have felt rejected, who have been oppressed, who have been the victims of others—these also will find the grace, mercy, and favor that God has given to Mary. God sees the poor and humble, he honors them, even as we tend to look down on them at best or ignore them at worst. God sees incredible value in every person. Mary's song reveals God's character and attributes not as abstract expressions of holiness, mercy, and saving power, but in concrete, relationship to people and in the detailed working of their lives."3

Maybe you can relate to Mary's situation – not because you are pregnant, but because you find yourself in circumstances beyond your control. Maybe you relate because, like Mary, you feel that you have nothing to offer. You come from the "wrong side of the tracks." Your talents are lacking. You do not come from a family of wealth or power. You see so many others around you who are so much more qualified to live out this call God has placed on your life. In short, you wonder how God could possibly love you, much less use you for the Kingdom.

WEEK Eleven

Mary's song magnifies the Savior who loves the whole world with a love that makes creation whole. Even when we tend to believe that no one, not even God, could love us, God's saving power reminds us that we are valuable.

Even when we feel we are the marginalized of society, God lifts us and exalts us, reminding us that all people will call us "blessed" not because of what we have to offer, but because of our obedience and loyalty to God.

As Mary states, "the Mighty One has done great things for me...He has filled the hungry with good...He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."

In other words, regardless of our imagined position, status, or power, God has chosen to do great things through us if we are willing to let go of the things the world says are important, to humble ourselves, and be willing to receive the mercy God offers. Are you willing?



WEEK Eleven

Discuss the following questions:

1. Mary had her own limitations, yet God still chose her. As you think about yourself, what are the limitations you have? How can God redeem those for his purposes?

2. Ponder for a few moments on why you think the God of the universe would choose you. Write down what you come up with.

3. What are the “great things” that God has done in your life?

4. As Mary states, it is those “who are in awe before him” who receive the waves of mercy God offers. What does it mean to be “in awe before him”? How can you regularly practice living this way?

5. As you pray together, pray not only that God will regularly remind you that it is not what you have to offer that matters, but what God has to give to us that really matters.

WEEK Twelve

Read Luke 1: 46-55 aloud again from the The Message© version of Scripture.

He bared his arm and showed his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts. He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud. The starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold. He embraced his chosen child, Israel; he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high. It's exactly what he promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now." (Luke 1:50-55).

It is easy for some to look at a passage like this and assume Mary is only singing about spiritual issues. Others look at it and can only see Mary describing God's justice being aptly demonstrated by raising the poor, the powerless, and bringing low the rich and mighty. The reality is that both are true. This is one of those "both/and" passages.

One has to understand Mary's (and really, all of Israel's) context to fully comprehend what she is singing about. Remember, Israel was in bondage. In fact, if one looks at Israel's history, almost half of its existence has been spent in bondage. Consequently, when Mary speaks of those who are the callous rich, the tyrants, she is talking about their Roman conquerors, who have heavily taxed the Israelites and used their military might to keep them bowed down. So, in one important sense, Mary's song is obviously about her current reality.

But remember, Mary's song uses those "prophetic aorists," which means that what Mary says is not only true of God in the past but is also true of God for now and in the future. In other words, Mary's song is not just about her context, but it is the recognition that this is the way of the world.

WEEK Twelve

There have always been and will always be people who are cruel, who practice tyranny over others, who seek to bolster their own wealth at the expense of others.

In one sense, almost all of us reading these devotions fall into the category of the “full” and the “rich,” of being wealthy by the world’s standards. "The poorest half of the global population barely owns any wealth at all, possessing just 2% of the total. In contrast, the richest 10% of the global population own 76% of all wealth…The bottom 50 percent own almost nothing."4 For a family of four that makes a little more than $122K per year, that puts them in the top 10% of wealth earners in the world. When Mary talks about the rich and the full, she is talking about us. And what she sings about us is not particularly comfortable: the callous rich were left out in the cold.



WEEK Twelve

As Stephen Shoemaker states, “There are only two ways you can enter the kingdom and experience its joy. One is to be among the poor, oppressed, bruised, blind, and brokenhearted; those to whom God comes as healing, comfort, justice, and freedom. The other way is to be among God’s people who are going to the poor, oppressed, bruised, blind, and brokenhearted and bringing God’s healing, comfort, justice, and freedom.”5 This is the spiritual side of things—can we recognize how we have not only wealth, but spiritual freedom? Can we see that because we have been given much, much is expected of us? (Luke 12:48)

You see, true worship of God always leads us to action, in this case, on behalf of the poor and the marginalized of our society. Worship should always cause us to look carefully at what we have and to see how we can use our wealth to help those who are often overlooked or even downtrodden by society. Mary’s song reminds us that unless we use our wealth, our status, and our power for the sake of others, it will be taken away from us and given to others who will use it for the Kingdom.

According to Mary’s Magnificat, Jesus comes to turn this world upside down. Those who are low in this life, God will lift up. Those who are high in this life, God will bring down. Does this comfort you in the way you live your life? Or does it bring despair? Your response will largely be determined by how you see the wealth, status, and power you have. Is it for your enjoyment and fulfillment, or is its purpose always to help others?

WEEK Twelve

Discuss the following questions:

1. Compared to your friends, you probably don't feel wealthy. But compared to the world, you are rich! Given this, what needs to happen in your life for you to have a clearer sense of how much you have to offer others?

2. As stated, Mary's song has both spiritual and economic significance. In what ways are you wealthy spiritually? How can you "spend" that spiritual wealth for the sake of others?

3. It can seem at times that we are helpless in terms of making a difference in the world. But we do not do this in our own power, but in the power of God. Therefore, what are some of the needs in your community that you think God might be calling you to help address? (This can be through investment of money, time, prayer, etc.)

4. "True worship of God always leads us to action." Given what you have read and lived out over the last 12 weeks, what are the next steps God is calling you to take as an extension of your worship of Jesus?

5. As you pray together, thank God for the mentoring relationship that has been established, for the lessons learned from studying Mary's call and her Magnificat, and for the changes you have experienced as a result.