

UNSHAKEABLE

Title: Part 3 – “When Following God Feels Crazy”

Date: October 19, 2025

As we continue in this moment of worship and prepare our hearts for God's Word, let's take a minute and make some space for God to work in our lives. Our souls have a surface, a midlands, but God communicates to us in the depths. So, everyone close your eyes, I promise this won't be weird, but let's give God EVERYONE and EVERYTHING. Just say that under your breath, “God I give you everyone and everything...” Now as the band plays softly just take a few moments and give God all the things and all the people on your heart. Lovingly detach yourself from the cares of this world.

[PRAYER TIME]

This week I was walking through Lowes, and I was reminded we have officially reached that odd, transitional time of year where we have Halloween and Christmas stuff all vying for our attention and wallets. Have you noticed this at the stores too? The giant skeleton next to the inflatable Rudolf.

We have a rule in my house that you can't listen to Christmas music until the day after Halloween. BUT we don't have any rules about talking about the Christmas story AND today we are going to look at one of the most courageous responses to God's call in all of Scripture as we continue our collection of messages called ***“Unshakeable.”***

If you want to learn how to build a solid faith in a shaky world then Luke chapter 1 is a remarkable place to dive into. AND even though most of you have heard this story, my prayer this week has been that we would experience this with fresh eyes and that the Holy Spirit would give us new insights into how Mary was able to have such steadfast trust in God and His plan.

SO, Luke 1, starting with verse 26:

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² 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, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” ³⁴ “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.” ³⁸ “I am the Lord's servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Over the past two weeks we have been learning how to grow in our trust in God. Your faith can handle a bump or two, but as time goes by all of the dings and disappointments can erode our trust in God or even in the goodness of His character. Maybe that's your story today if you were honest. SO, how do we hang onto God in the hurricane that is our world today?

In week one we looked at Abraham learning to let go of control and last time we sat with Job as he discovered God's perspective is bigger than our pain. You can catch both of those on our app or website. BUT today we're going to explore what it looks like to say yes to God's plan when it seems absolutely impossible or even potentially dangerous.

I'm calling today's message:

"When Following God Feels Crazy"

See, I think we all share a universal fear. Whether you are still kicking the tires on faith or have been a follower of Jesus for a couple decades. I think we all in the back of our minds, in the deepest recesses of our souls fear that following God means He is at some point going to ask me to do something I can't handle. Let's have some honest confession today, raise your hand if there is at least a tiny part of you that worries God is going to make you do something too big and scary for you to handle?

Maybe it's forgiveness—you're afraid God might ask you to forgive someone who doesn't deserve it and hasn't asked for it. Maybe it's surrender—you're afraid God might ask you to give up something or someone you can't imagine living without. Maybe it's obedience—you're afraid God might call you to do something that seems impossible, impractical, or downright scary. Maybe it's a leap of faith—you're afraid God might put it on your heart to do something without a safety net and people will think you are crazy like Noah building an ark!

Here's what I've discovered: most people's fear of following God isn't really about God Himself—it's about what He might ask them to do. We're afraid that if we really surrender our lives to Him, He'll ask us to do something we're not equipped for, something that will ruin our lives, or something that will make us look foolish.

According to research from the Barna Group, 73% of Christians say they want to follow God's will for their lives (which is really encouraging), but 68% admit they're afraid of what that might involve. Right? We want God's blessings, but we're terrified of His assignments.

This fear keeps us in a perpetual state of spiritual adolescence though. We want the benefits of a relationship with God without the risks of complete obedience. We want Him to bless our plans without surrendering to His!

But what if I told you that the very thing you're afraid God might ask you to do is actually the pathway to the life you've always wanted? What if obedience to God isn't the thing that ruins your life but the thing that makes your life extraordinary?

That's exactly what we see in this young woman we meet in Luke 1 named Mary. We have these images of Mary being like this full-grown adult woman, maybe even in her 30's, full of grace and wisdom, but Mary was probably around 14 or 15 years old—barely more than a child by today's standards. BUT she was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter, in the small town of Nazareth. AND for a young woman living in this time and in this culture this meant her life was already planned out, predictable, but it was also safe.

Then one day, the angel Gabriel appeared to her with a message that would change not just her life but all of human history, look at verse 31 again:

³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

From Mary's perspective, this had to feel totally crazy, like jumping off a cliff. Think about what Gabriel was asking her to do:

- In first-century Jewish culture, pregnancy outside marriage was grounds for public shame, family rejection, and possibly even death by stoning. Mary would become the subject of gossip and scandal for years to come. Not to mention that...
- Joseph would have every legal right to divorce her publicly, leaving her destitute and unmarriageable. Her engagement—the foundation of her future security—would be destroyed.
- Spiritually, Mary would have to trust that what seemed impossible was actually God's plan. I mean let's get real today, outside of this 2,000-year-old story, have you ever known of a virgin birth? Because I can guarantee you Mary had no category in her mind for virgin birth. This was unprecedented territory. But beyond that...
- She'd now be responsible for raising the Messiah—the Son of God—without any parenting manual or preparation for such an enormous responsibility.

From every human angle, saying yes to God's plan looked like social suicide, relational disaster, and practical impossibility. It would have been completely reasonable for Mary to say, "Thanks, but no thanks. Find someone else, angel man!"

But despite all of this, Mary gave one of the most beautiful responses to God's call in all of Scripture, v38:

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

For a long time, I read that as blind faith. But this week it hit me. That's not blind faith—that's ruthless trust! Amen? It's the kind of faith that says, "I don't understand Your plan, God, but I trust Your character."

SO, how do we become a person like Mary? What are the practical takeaways we can apply from her story? Because I think as scared as we all are that God is going to make us do something scary

we also desperately want to be like Mary and say, "I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled."

If you are taking notes today, write this down:

God never calls you to something without equipping you for it.

That's the first thing we need to understand about Mary's story is that God didn't just give her an impossible assignment and say good luck, no, He gave her everything she needed to fulfill it.

Notice what Gabriel tells Mary in verse 35: **"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."**

In other words, God wasn't asking Mary to accomplish this mission in her own strength. He was promising to provide the supernatural resources she would need.

This is a pattern throughout Scripture. When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses protested that he wasn't eloquent enough. God's response? "I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." When God called Gideon to defeat the Midianites, Gideon protested that he was from the weakest clan and the least in his family. God's response? "I will be with you." When God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, Jeremiah protested that he was too young. God's response? "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to rescue you."

The pattern is always the same: God's calling + Our obedience + God's equipping = Success.
Amen? God's calling + Our obedience + God's equipping = Success.

Modern psychology has actually discovered something that confirms this Biblical principle. Research on what's called "behavioral activation" shows that people often develop confidence and competence through action rather than the other way around. We think we need to feel ready before we can act, but actually, we often develop readiness by acting.

In fact, I was reading this week about a neuroscientist named Dr. Amy Cuddy who researched something she called "power posing." What she demonstrated was that when we act confident, our brains actually produce the chemicals that make us feel confident. In other words, our actions can literally change our brain chemistry.

Mary discovered this principle 2,000 years ago! She said yes before she felt ready, and in saying yes, she received the strength and wisdom she needed for the journey ahead. AND here's what this means for you: God will never call you to something without giving you the resources to accomplish it. The same Spirit who overshadowed Mary is available to empower you! The same God who equipped her is ready to equip you!

But here's the key: the equipping often comes after the yes, not before it. You have to step out in obedience before you feel the net of God's provision beneath you.

This is good news for someone who is wrestling with God's will today because you don't feel adequate for the challenge. This is good news because God doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called! Amen?

Here's number 2, write this down:

Obedience is the pathway to freedom, not bondage.

One of the biggest lies our culture tells us is that obedience to God restricts our freedom and limits our potential. We're told that following God's will means settling for less than we could have if we followed our own plans.

But Mary's story demonstrates exactly the opposite. Her obedience to God didn't limit her life—it actually launched her into the most significant role any human being has ever played in God's story.

Think about what Mary gained through her obedience even though it felt crazy:

▷ **Purpose Beyond Her Imagination:** Instead of being remembered as just another carpenter's wife in Nazareth, Mary became the mother of the Savior of the World. Billions of people for thousands of years have called her blessed.

▷ **Intimacy With God:** Mary experienced God's presence in a way no human being ever had before or since. She carried the Son of God in her womb and raised Him as her child.

▷ **Impact on History:** Through her obedience, salvation became possible for all humanity. Her yes changed everything.

▷ **Personal Growth:** The Mary we meet in Acts, praying with the disciples after Jesus' ascension, is a mature woman of incredible faith and strength. Her obedience shaped her into someone remarkable.

▷ **Spiritual Fulfillment:** Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55 reveals a woman whose soul magnifies the Lord and whose spirit rejoices in God her Savior. Meaning she found deep, deep satisfaction in God's purposes.

AND this is the paradox of the Christian life: when you surrender your will to God's will, you don't lose yourself—you find yourself. When you give up control, you gain purpose. When you submit to God's authority, you discover true freedom.

Jesus said it this way in Matthew 16:

²⁵ "If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find it." (CEV)

Mary lost the life she had planned and found a life beyond her wildest dreams.

Modern research confirms this Biblical principle. People who find meaning and purpose through serving something greater than themselves report significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than those who focus primarily on personal happiness and pleasure.

The ancient Greeks had a word for this kind of flourishing: {yoo-di-MOAN-ee-uh} eudaimonia—often translated as the "good life" or "human flourishing." It's the deep satisfaction that comes from living according to your highest values and serving a purpose bigger than yourself.

Mary discovered eudaimonia through obedience. She found the good life by saying yes to God's life. Come on, how many of you could use some eudaimonia in your life today! Obedience is the pathway to freedom, not bondage.

Here's another practical takeaway:

Faith is not the absence of fear—it's obedience in the presence of fear.

Before we go any further let's stop and address this because so often we read about these Bible characters and think they possessed some kind of superhuman strength we can never possess. SO, here is the truth... Mary wasn't fearless. In fact, she was scared to death just like we would be!

Look at what the text tells us in verse 29:

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled... "Do not be afraid, Mary."

Meaning she was freaked out! She had questions, concerns, and fears about what this would mean for her life.

SO, the lesson we can learn is that courage isn't the absence of fear—it's doing what's right despite the fear. Mary felt afraid as any human being would, BUT she said yes anyway. That's not recklessness; that's faith!

Recklessness is:

- Acting impulsively without considering consequences.
- Ignoring wisdom, counsel, and clear warning signs.
- Taking unnecessary risks to prove something or feel something.
- It's based on emotion, ego, or desperation.
- It's often rooted in rebellion or pride.

BUT faith is:

- Acting courageously despite fear but WITH wisdom.
- Responding to God's clear direction even when it's scary.
- Taking necessary risks because God has called you.
- It's based on God's character, promises, and track record.
- It usually requires humility and surrender. AND it...

- Aligns with God's revealed will and Biblical principles.

Mary's response showed wisdom because she asked clarifying questions: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" She sought confirmation from Elizabeth. She considered God's character and faithfulness. AND she weighed this against Scripture's promises about the Messiah.

This means:

- ▷ **You can be afraid AND faithful!**
- ▷ **You can ask questions AND obey!**
- ▷ **You can seek wisdom AND take risks!**
- ▷ **You can be cautious AND courageous!**

Mary wasn't jumping off a cliff hoping God would catch her. She was stepping into God's clear calling with both wisdom and courage. That's the model we should follow.

Dr. Susan Jeffers, in her research on fear and personal growth, discovered that most people's fears fall into three categories: **Fears of things that happen to them** (aging, illness, loss of loved ones). **Fears of things requiring action** (changing careers, ending relationships, making decisions). And **fears about their ability to handle whatever comes** (I can't handle being alone, I can't handle failure, I can't handle success).

Mary faced all three types of fears! She was afraid of what might happen to her (social rejection, family disgrace). She was afraid of the action required (raising the Son of God). And she was afraid of whether she could handle such an enormous responsibility.

BUT Mary discovered what researchers call "post-decisional confidence"—the phenomenon where people often feel more capable and confident after making a difficult decision than before making it. Once Mary said yes, she wasn't paralyzed by fear anymore. She went to visit Elizabeth, who confirmed God's plan. She sang a song of praise that revealed deep theological insight and spiritual maturity. AND she handled each challenge as it came with grace and wisdom.

My point is, the decision to obey transformed her from a frightened teenager into a confident young woman who could handle whatever came next.

This is why waiting until you feel ready to obey God is often a mistake. Readiness comes through obedience, not before it. Confidence develops through action, not contemplation.

Alright, here's the final thing Mary's story teaches us: what looks like a detour from your plans might actually be an upgrade to your plans. Write this down:

God's plans are always better than our plans.

Mary had plans. She was going to marry Joseph, have children the normal way, live a quiet life in Nazareth, and probably never be remembered by history. From her perspective, Gabriel's announcement was a complete disruption of everything she had envisioned for her future.

But God's plan wasn't a detour from her life—it was an upgrade to her life! Instead of being forgotten by history, she became one of the most celebrated women who ever lived. Instead of having a few children that only she and Joseph would influence, she gave birth to the Child who would influence all of humanity. Instead of living a safe, predictable life, she lived an extraordinary life filled with purpose, meaning, and eternal significance.

This is how God works. Isaiah 55:9 says:

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

God doesn't just have a different plan for your life--He has a better plan! His perspective is higher, His wisdom is deeper, and His love for you is greater than your love for yourself!

BUT here's the thing: God's better plan often requires you to let go of your good plan. You can't receive what God has for you while you're still clinging to what you planned for yourself.

SO, how do you say yes when God's call feels impossible? Let me give you a few practical strategies for developing the courage to say yes to God's seemingly impossible calls:

1. Focus on God's character, not your circumstances.

When God's call seems impossible, shift your focus from your limitations to His limitless power. Mary didn't focus on her youth, her inexperience, or the social consequences. She focused on the fact that "no word from God will ever fail."

Create what I call a "God's Faithfulness File"—a collection of stories, verses, and personal testimonies that remind you of God's track record. When fear tempts you to say no, this is something you can go back and review His faithfulness in the past and let it fuel your faith.

You can also:

2. Take the next small step, not the whole staircase!

You don't have to see the entire plan to take the first step. Mary didn't understand everything about how virgin birth would work or what raising the Messiah would involve. She just said yes to what Gabriel asked and took next step after next step.

Instead of being paralyzed by the enormity of what God might be calling you to, just focus on the next step of obedience He's asking for right now. Obedience is like walking up a staircase in the dark—you don't need to see the top to take the next step. Amen?

3. Surround yourself with faith-building community.

After saying yes to Gabriel, Mary immediately went to visit Elizabeth, who encouraged her and confirmed God's plan. Don't try to obey God in isolation. Find people who will remind you of God's faithfulness when you forget, pray with you when you're scared, and celebrate with you when you see God come through.

Courage is contagious—surround yourself with people who are living courageously!

4. Remember that God's approval matters more than people's opinion.

Gabriel told Mary she had "found favor with God." That divine approval gave her the strength to face human disapproval. When you know God is pleased with your obedience, you can handle other people's misunderstanding.

Before making decisions, ask yourself: "Am I more concerned with what God thinks or what people think?" The person who lives for God's approval can handle anyone else's rejection.

The last one is to practice what I call:

5. Practice incremental obedience.

Start saying yes to God in small areas so you'll have the spiritual muscle memory to say yes in big areas. If you can't obey God in the little things, you probably won't obey Him when He asks you to do something that feels like jumping off a cliff. Amen?

Practice daily obedience in areas like forgiveness, generosity, truthfulness, and service. Each small yes builds your capacity for the bigger yeses God may ask for later.

BECAUSE here is what I know. God is calling someone in this room to take a step of faith that absolutely terrifies you. Maybe it's forgiving someone who hurt you deeply. Maybe it's having a difficult conversation you've been avoiding. Maybe it's making a career change that doesn't make financial sense. Maybe it's surrendering a relationship that's not God's best for you.

You've been waiting to feel ready. You've been waiting for the fear to go away. You've been waiting for a guarantee that it will work out. BUT here's what I need you to understand: the fear never completely goes away, and God rarely gives you the whole plan upfront!

Mary was terrified, and she said yes anyway! She didn't feel ready, but she obeyed anyway! She couldn't see how it would work out, but she trusted God's character anyway!

Some of you have been wrestling with God's call for months, maybe years. You know what He's asking you to do, but you keep making excuses. "I'm not qualified." "I'm not ready." "The timing isn't right." "People will think I'm crazy."

But let me tell you what Mary discovered: God doesn't call the equipped—He equips the called! He doesn't wait for you to be ready—He makes you ready through obedience! He doesn't need your qualifications—He needs your availability!

The same Spirit who overshadowed Mary is available to overshadow you! The same God who turned a teenage girl's yes into the salvation of the world wants to use your yes to accomplish His purposes in your generation!

You think you're not ready, but Mary wasn't ready either! You think you're too young, but so was Mary! You think people will reject you, but they rejected her too! The difference is that Mary said yes anyway, and through her obedience, she participated in the greatest story ever told!

BUT here's the beautiful truth: when you say yes to God, He says yes to you. When you make yourself available to His purposes, He makes His power available to you. When you surrender your plans to His plan, you discover that His plan is better than anything you could have imagined.

Mary walked into that encounter with Gabriel as an unknown teenager in an insignificant town. She walked out as the chosen vessel for God's greatest miracle. Her yes didn't limit her life—it launched her into significance beyond her wildest dreams.

The same God who chose Mary is calling you. The same God who equipped her wants to equip you. The same God who used her obedience wants to use yours.

Maybe you're here today and you're not sure about this whole God thing yet, but something in Mary's story resonates with you. Maybe you've felt like life is calling you to something bigger, but you're scared to take the leap.

Here's what I want you to consider: even from a purely human perspective, research shows that people who live with purpose and meaning, who serve something greater than themselves, and who take reasonable risks for worthy causes tend to be happier and more fulfilled than those who play it safe.

Mary's story suggests that maybe the voice calling you to something bigger isn't just your imagination—maybe it's the God who created you inviting you into the life you were designed for.

Church hear me, you don't have to have perfect faith to take the next step. Just consider this: What if the thing you're afraid to do is actually the pathway to the life you've always wanted?

Your response to God's call will determine the trajectory of your life. You can live a safe, predictable life by saying no to anything that scares you. Or you can live an extraordinary life by saying yes to the God who wants to do more through you than you could ask or imagine.

The question is simple: What is God asking you to say yes to?

Some of you have never said yes to Jesus as your Savior. Today could be the day you surrender your life to Him and discover the purpose you were created for.

Others of you said yes to Jesus years ago, but you've been saying no to specific things He's been calling you to do. Today could be the day you stop limiting God's plans for your life.

The same God who turned Mary's yes into the salvation of the world is waiting for your yes. What He wants to do through your obedience may not be as historically significant as what He did through Mary, but it will be eternally significant in ways you can't imagine.

Let's bow our heads and close our eyes. If you're ready to say yes to God's call on your life, even when it feels like jumping off a cliff, this is your moment to respond...

[PRAYER TIME]