

Pastor Jason Huffman

12/21/2025

Message Title: The Hard Way

Big Idea: Gods got a plan; do you want the easy way or the hard way?

Luke **1:5** There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. **6** And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

“In the days of Herod” tells us this was a real time period.

7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

Zacharias: “God remembers” & yet they seem to be forgotten.

1. Trust God’s timetable.

8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, **9** according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. **10** And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

Priests would serve twice a year for a week at a time.

Incense is symbolic of the prayers of God’s people.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. **12** And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. **13** But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. **14** And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

2. Keep showing up.

15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. **16** And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **17** He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

18 And Zacharias said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.”

19 And the angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.

3. Listen to those who live in God's presence.

20 But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." **21** And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. **22** But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

4. Trust God even when you don't understand.

God's discipline is part of His discipleship.

67 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:
68 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people,

76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, **77** To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, **78** through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us **79** to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

5. Get to a place of praise.

LIFE Group Discussion Guide

General Timeline: (Adjust as appropriate for your group's needs.)

5-10 minutes connecting personally with how everyone is doing.

45 minutes going over message with discussion questions and life applications.

5-10 minutes praying for each other

Discussion Questions

Look over these questions before your group time. Write down your answers or ideas for at least a few questions if not all. You may not get to every question during your time but speak up if you want to talk about one of them in particular. Always try to start with question #1.

1. What stood out to you and/or what do you think God might be speaking about from this message?

2. How can Zacharias's example help you when you wait on the Lord?

3. Zacharias asked, "How shall I know this?" (v. 18) This revealed his struggle and doubt. What are the differences between when we have doubt or real unbelief?

4. Who do you get most of your direction from personally? Who in your life demonstrates a close walk with God? How could you be more intentional about seeking wisdom from them?

5. Are you in a place where you can praise the Lord in any circumstance?" What usually keeps us from being able to do that?

5-Day Devotional

Day 1: When God Seems Silent

Reading: Luke 1:5-7; Psalm 13:1-6

Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous before God, yet they faced years of unanswered prayers. Like them, you may feel forgotten when God's silence stretches on. But God's delays are not denials. Their barrenness wasn't a curse—it was preparation for a miracle that would impact generations. When you're tempted to believe God has forgotten you, remember that He is working behind the scenes, orchestrating details you cannot see. Your waiting isn't wasted; it's purposeful. God remembers your name, knows your pain, and has appointed a time for His appointed purpose in your life. What prayer or desire have you been waiting on God to answer? How might God be shaping you during this season?

Day 2: Keep Showing Up

Reading: Luke 1:8-10; Hebrews 10:23-25

Zacharias continued serving in the temple despite his disappointment. He didn't abandon his post when his personal prayers seemed unanswered. This is the power of faithfulness—showing up even when you don't feel like it. God met Zacharias precisely because he was where he was supposed to be. Your consistency in worship, prayer, and community matters more than you know. Don't let unmet expectations pull you away from spiritual disciplines. The breakthrough often comes to those who remain faithful in the mundane, who keep burning incense even if their own hearts feel cold. God honors those who honor Him through persistent obedience. What spiritual practice have you been tempted to abandon? How can you recommit today?

Day 3: The Cost of Unbelief

Reading: Luke 1:18-22; Hebrews 3:12-19

When Gabriel announced God's miraculous plan, Zacharias responded with doubt instead of faith. His unbelief cost him his voice for nine months—a divine discipline designed to soften his heart. Sometimes God must silence us to teach us to truly hear Him. When we reject God's word because it doesn't align with our understanding, we risk losing our spiritual voice and influence. Zacharias needed a transformed heart before he could raise a prophet. God's discipline isn't punishment; it is loving correction that prepares us for greater purposes. Hard hearts require hard lessons. Do you usually choose the easy way of trust, or learn through the hard way of consequences? Where has doubt crept into your relationship with God? What might He be trying to teach you?

Day 4: Learning in the Silence

Reading: Luke 1:23-25, 57-66; Psalm 46:10

Nine months of silence transformed Zacharias. Unable to speak, he was forced to listen—to God, to his own heart, and to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes God removes our voice so we'll finally hear His. In the quiet, Zacharias learned obedience. When the moment came to name his son, he chose faith over family tradition, writing "John" as the angel commanded. His obedience immediately restored his voice, but now it was a voice changed by humility and surrender. The

wilderness seasons of forced silence aren't meant to break us but to remake us. What seems like loss is actually preparation for greater fruitfulness. What has God spoken to you in your seasons of silence? How are you growing through waiting?

Day 5: From Doubt to Praise

Reading: Luke 1:67-79; Ephesians 5:18-20

Zacharias's journey ends not in shame but in Spirit-filled prophecy and praise. The man who questioned God's promise now proclaims God's faithfulness. His restored voice didn't return to complaining or doubt—it erupted in worship. This is the destination God desires for each of us: a place of praise regardless of circumstances, a heart tender toward His voice, a life surrendered to His purposes. Zacharias learned that God is good even when life feels hard. His painful discipline produced a powerful testimony. Where are you on this journey? Still doubting? Silent and learning? Or ready to praise? Get to a place of praise—it's where God's power flows freely through surrendered hearts. What would it look like for you to praise God in your current circumstances? How can you move from doubt to declaration?