

- **Main Passage:** Luke 1:5-17
 - **Purpose:** To understand that men of God are called to be set apart from the world and expected to point others to Christ.
 - **Session Snapshot:** The expectation of what it means for someone to “be a man” in the world today is strikingly at odds with what the Bible tells us. By looking at the events preceding the birth of John the Baptist, we see exactly the kind of qualities God is looking for in a faithful servant. If we want to be men who honor God with our lives, we need to distance ourselves from the pressures of the world and worldly definitions of success and embrace the distinct identity to which God is calling us.
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GETTING STARTED

Kick off your time together by introducing a new theme or reviewing what you did in the last session.

FIRST, explain to your group that they will be beginning a video series on John the Baptist that is part of a larger study on looking at the real men of the Bible. Remind men that the Bible is true and the stories in the Bible are true. The men you are studying are real people who lived real lives. Remind your group that God wants us to learn what it means to be in a relationship with Him from the example of these men.

THEN, if this study on John the Baptist is your first study in the Real Men line of curriculum, consider introducing yourself, if necessary, and having the men in your group introduce themselves. Then, ask for volunteers to share what they want to get out of their time in this study. If you want to pass around a contact sheet or do any other first-session "housekeeping tasks," this is the time to do it.

If this is not your first study in the Real Men line, consider asking men to recap what they remember from the last man you studied together. Ask them what has been the biggest takeaway so far, or to share how the studies you've completed have impacted them.

FINALLY, if there are no questions or other input, transition into the *Digging In* section of your leader's guide.

DIGGING IN

Jump into the session by watching this week's video.

FIRST, if this is your first study, explain to the group the basic structure of your time together. Explain that you will watch a video that is usually about 15 minutes long, followed by a short discussion of the video. Then, you'll spend a few minutes in Bible study, followed by a closing activity. Consider encouraging men to take notes as they watch the video.

THEN, play the video. You can access the video by logging into your Iron Hill Press account.

When the video is over, lead men in a short discussion based on what Rick covered. Feel free to come up with your own questions, or consider asking some similar to those below:

- **Are there upcoming events that you look forward to? Maybe a big football game (or any sport), or a weekend in nature, or a trip with your family? Why do you look forward to those things?**
- **Now, be honest. Do you think much about the second coming of the Lord? Why do we tend to look forward more to these earthly events instead of heavenly events?**
- **If the second coming of the Lord was on your mind more, how might your life look differently?**
- **As Rick explained, John the Baptist had a role to play. Do you feel that you have a role to play in God's Kingdom? Or do you sometimes feel like you're still waiting for an assignment? How should any Christian man understand his role?**
- **Do you believe some actions would hinder your ability to carry out your God-given role? Rick gave the example of alcohol. What other common struggles for men come to mind?**
- **Some men find a way to justify these struggles, even when the struggle has evolved into a clear pattern of sin. Why do you think sin is so deceptively harmful? Is it possible in some cases, like Rick said, that we do just need to stay away?**
- **Stop for a moment and consider: what is your absolute greatest desire for your children (or future children)? Is that desire more along the lines of worldly success or Christ-like faithfulness?**
- **How can we as men of God begin reshaping what the world considers success, both inside and outside the church?**

FINALLY, transition into the *Opening the Word* portion of your time together by saying something like the following:

- **Everyone in the world is striving toward “success” by some standard, but we all define success differently. If we’re not careful, we’re going to adopt a worldly view of success and not a biblical one. Let’s spend some time studying this passage and considering the qualities that God expected from His faithful servant John the Baptist, as well as the role John was expected to carry out in God’s Kingdom.**

OPENING THE WORD

Spend time going deeper into a specific concept Rick introduced in the video.

FIRST, explain that you’re going to take a more in-depth look at Luke 1:5-17. As Rick stated in the video, John the Baptist had a role to play as a servant of God, and our role is not all that different. In this passage, we’re going to see the kind of God-honoring life that John was called to live.

We must make sure your people have a good understanding of the context of the passage you'll be studying. Provide the context for the passage using the following bullet points:

- **Author:** Luke was a doctor, a Gentile Christian, and a companion of Paul.
- **Time frame:** The Gospel of Luke was written around 60 AD.

- **Purpose:** Luke is the only Gentile author of the Bible. His entire purpose was to write an accurate account of Jesus's life to present Jesus as Savior, fully God and fully man. It is one of the synoptic Gospels, having much in common with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

THEN, read or have a volunteer read Luke 1:5-13 to help set the scene. When the volunteer has finished, direct your group in a brief discussion of these verses. Say something like:

- **What stands out to you as unique or unusual about the events leading up to John's birth announcement in this passage?**
 - Answers may vary. Have your group notice each of the following:
 - Zechariah and Elizabeth's old age, making childbirth extremely unlikely.
 - Zechariah being chosen as the priest to burn incense. Many scholars suggest that there were around 20,000 priests, and this was a once-in-a-lifetime event.
 - People were praying all around Zechariah while he received this news.
 - An angel appeared and spoke to him!

Before transitioning to the next question, say something like:

- **Most people who have had children will probably acknowledge that their experience wasn't *quite* this unique. We can see that God's hand was all over these events in many different ways! God was working toward something very special with Zechariah and Elizabeth's son: He needed a servant who would play a powerful role in building His Kingdom. If we want to become faithful servants of the Lord in our own lives, we should pay attention to the qualities God was expecting in the life of John the Baptist.**

NEXT, direct your group's attention back to Luke 1:14-15 and have a volunteer read these two verses. Then, ask:

- **According to this passage, why are people going to experience joy, gladness, and rejoicing in connection to John?**
 - Answers will vary. As verse 15 explains, their gladness and rejoicing were connected to John's being great before the Lord or "great in the sight of the Lord" (NIV, CSB). John's relationship with the Lord would extend beyond himself and would point others toward God. As men of God like John, our lives should also point others beyond ourselves and toward a relationship with God.
- **For John to be great in this way, what was required of him? Why do you think this was required?**
 - *Answer:* John was supposed to abstain from wine or strong drink and instead be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is reminiscent of the Nazarite vow in Numbers 6:1-21. There is considerable debate among scholars whether John took the full Nazarite vow. Still, the idea behind the vow is certainly applicable: he was to be separated (or dedicated) to the Lord (Num. 6:2). If he was going to serve God wholeheartedly, he had to be sober-minded and distanced from worldly practices such as the consumption of alcohol, which could lead to distraction.
- **Do you think being great for the Lord today still requires being set apart from the world? Why or why not?**
 - Answers will vary. But yes, this is the 1 John 2:15 principle that we are not to love the world or the things of this world. If we are consumed with love for the created rather than the Creator, we will never be able to faithfully serve God. John the Baptist was to grow up avoiding such things so they would not have a hold on him, and we must also learn to avoid these worldly strongholds.
- **Does our being set apart require complete abstinence from alcohol, as it did for John?**
 - Answers will vary. As Rick pointed out, there is a clear biblical command to avoid drunkenness, which is named a sin, but the mere consumption of alcohol is not named as such. However, we must think critically and carefully about how alcohol affects our actions and our witness, why we are consuming it, and whether or not we should continue doing so.

THEN, read the next two verses, Luke 1:16-17, and stop there. These verses begin to put John's whole ministry into perspective. It's important to understand that John wasn't just being raised to be a good man, but that he would be fighting a spiritual battle and contending for the hearts of men. Remind your group that at this time in Israel's history, they had not heard from God in hundreds of years. Explain the significance of John's role as the person who would prepare the nation of Israel to meet and trust in the long-awaited Messiah. After reading verses 16-17, ask:

- **What does it mean that John will "turn" many to the Lord?**
 - *Answer:* Simply put, many Jews (and certainly Gentiles as well) were not pursuing the Lord. They were distracted and wayward, as we frequently see throughout the Old Testament. John was going to help point these people back to the God they had abandoned. His ministry would cause people to reconsider God's love and goodness, especially in light of the coming Messiah.
- **Is there still a need for this in the world today? Is this the role of pastors and church leaders, or all believers?**
 - Answers will vary. Yes, our world today is in desperate need of "turning" to the Lord. All Christians, regardless of vocation, are called to live in such a way that testifies to the gospel of God's grace, as Paul says of himself in Acts 20:24. Part of loving God includes loving others, and loving others will naturally include pointing them to the love of God and hope of Jesus Christ through the Gospel.
- **Verse 17 is a reference to Malachi 4:5-6. What does the phrase "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" mean?**
 - Answers will vary. This phrase has a few different interpretations. Most likely, the idea has to do with fathers loving and caring for their children—specifically to train them up to love God. John's ministry was not just aimed at corrective teaching about Judaism and the Messiah but was intended to impact multiple generations as men were captured anew with an intense love for God and His Kingdom as they prepared to meet the Messiah.

FINALLY, have a volunteer turn to Malachi 4:5-6 (the last verses in the Old Testament, right before Matthew), and explain to your group that these are the verses quoted here at the end of this segment in Luke 1. After reading, say something like:

- **Why is the angel in Luke 1 quoting from the very last verses in the Old Testament? He is connecting John's ministry back to the very last words God had spoken hundreds of years earlier. More than that, he connects John's ministry to God's grand redemptive plan that spans the entire Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi. Consider the last phrase of Malachi 4:6—that if hearts don't change, then "utter destruction" awaits. Those who remain in sin are on a path of destruction and eternal separation from God. The 1st-century world needed a John the Baptist to point people to Jesus, and the 21st-century world today needs faithful men of God to do the same.**

Ask if there are any questions. If there are none, transition into *Accepting the Challenge*.

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

Focus your group's attention on one key takeaway from your time together.

FIRST, explain that you want to challenge the group to focus on the takeaways from this session. Consider starting this portion of your session by asking your group what they think are the main application points from your session. Allow discussion to go until there are no more suggestions.

Then, if necessary, supplement your discussion with the following application points. Say something like:

- **After considering how John the Baptist was to be set apart from the world and on mission for God, some of us need to ask, “Do I live like the same calling is on my life?”**
 - Or have I been content leaving that up to my pastor or ‘professional’ Christians?”
- **Others of us need to consider how John was to abstain from alcohol as a means of being wholly dedicated to the Lord.**
 - We may need to ask, "Are there areas of my life in which I love the things of this world more than the things of God? Are there worldly things keeping me from being sober-minded and singularly focused on the Lord?"
- **Some of us need to consider our role as men who point the world to Jesus.**
 - We need to ask, "Who do I need to reach out to this week? Who do I need to invite to church, or invite to lunch, or have a conversation with about my faith?"

Allow the group to consider where they find themselves in these three questions. If it feels appropriate, allow some discussion about the kind of processing they find themselves doing.

FINALLY, encourage men to continue to think about these questions in the week to come. Challenge them to listen to what God is trying to tell them and to respond accordingly. If there are no more questions or input, close your time together in prayer.