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COMMUNITY GROUPS

RIVERS CROSSING CHURCH

Community Group Discussion Guide

December 3, 2023

The Greatest Story Never Told Week #1

Pastor Paul Taylor / Zechariah and Elizabeth

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. Icebreaker Questions | What's your all-time favorite Christmas tradition? If you could spend Christmas anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?
2. This is the final week of the Fall Quarter. If this is your last group for the year, spend time reflecting and celebrating. Below are questions that can facilitate this time.
 - a) Reflect on your last several months in group. What has God been teaching you and where have you grown in your faith? How has the group supported you?
 - b) Reflect on the past year. What are you most thankful for? What events and relationships have grown your character, impacted your relationship with God, and affected how you live out your faith?

Psalm 107:1-2 (NIV) – ¹Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. ²Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story...

- c) The Winter Quarter begins in mid-January 2024. Does your group plan to continue meeting? If yes, are there any changes you'd like to implement? For example – shared group leadership, logistical changes (day, time, childcare plans), welcoming new group members, increased focus on prayer, etc.

DIVING DEEPER

3. We began our series *The Greatest Story Never Told* by exploring the biblical story of Zechariah and Elizabeth as told in the first chapter of Luke. Read this entire chapter together as a group before discussing the corresponding questions.

Note – Measuring by verse count, Luke 1 is the longest chapter in the New Testament. As such, feel free to split this reading up amongst multiple group members. A link to the full text of Luke 1 (using the NLT translation) is provided below:

Luke 1 | <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1&version=NLT>

Luke 1:11-25 (NLT) – ¹¹While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹²Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to

accept the wisdom of the godly.”¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”¹⁹ Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news!²⁰ But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long.²² When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.²³ When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home.²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months.²⁵ “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”

a) What stands out to you from this narrative in Luke 1? Explain why.

b) Like Zechariah and Elizabeth, we’re not to worry about what everyone else thinks. Instead, we’re to be primarily concerned with how God sees us. How well would you say you do with this? What areas and/or relationships feel like weak spots?

c) Zechariah and Elizabeth received pushback from obeying God and naming their child John (Luke 1:61-62). What, if any, pushback – from people, culture, or our spiritual enemy – have you received from obeying God? Do you have a specific story that illustrates your experience?

4. Zechariah was righteous in God’s eyes and served the Lord (Luke 1:6). Yet even he struggled to believe by faith what the angel Gabriel had prophesized about his family concerning the birth of their son (Luke 1:12-20). Ultimately, Zechariah’s faith led him to obey the Lord and Zechariah’s voice was restored (Luke 1:57-66).

Pastor Paul shared that there is blessing in obedience as God graciously uses our follow through to provide breakthrough in our lives. Zechariah’s experience reminds us that obedience isn’t simply a call to stop sinning, but also a call to step out in faith and act upon the revelation God has given us – through His Word and Holy Spirit.

a) Has God ever spoken or revealed something to you – whether directly or through another person – that you had a hard time initially believing or acting upon? If you’re willing, share about that.

b) If you eventually obeyed God in the above situation, what was the result? If you’re still hesitant to act upon and believe what God revealed to you, why is that?

TAKING IT HOME

5. Prayer Prompts | As you conclude your Community Group this week, spend time intentionally praying for the following...
- For gratitude for what God has done for us through Jesus Christ (Luke 1:67-79)
 - For the generosity of our church family through the Christmas Offering
 - For 8-to-15 invites to our upcoming Christmas services (12/22-12/24)
 - For a filling up with and deeper experience of the Holy Spirit this Christmas
 - For faith to believe and act upon the things God has revealed to us
 - For any personal prayer requests that are shared

Luke 1:78-79 (NLT) - ⁷⁸Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."

PRAYER REQUESTS

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RIVERS CROSSING - THINGS TO KNOW

1. Serve at Rivers Crossing | One of the marks of a fully engaged follower is their willingness to invest into God's kingdom with their time, talents, and resources. We have opportunities to serve all throughout the week! Find the team that's the right fit for you and partner with us to create an environment for people to become fully engaged followers of Jesus. Learn more at <https://riverscrossing.com/serve-here/>
2. Christmas Offering | On December 17th, Rivers Crossing will come together for the Christmas Offering. Every penny you give to the Christmas Offering will go toward our local and global missions. Your generosity will plant new churches, serve our city, and fund Joshua's Place, our ministry that works to break the cycle of generational poverty in our community. Learn more at <https://riverscrossing.com/christmasoffering>
3. Christmas Eve at Rivers Crossing | Experience the joy of Christmas! Between bright carols, twinkling lights, and falling snow, your kids will love our candlelight service. Most importantly, you'll leave with heartwarming memories and hope for the future.

Mason Service Times	Deer Park Service Times
Friday 12/22 - 7pm	
Saturday 12/23 - 1pm and 3pm	
Sunday 12/24 - 8:45am, 10:15am, 12pm and 11pm*	Sunday 12/24 - 10am

For Christmas Eve, RC Kids programming is provided for kids in Preschool and younger. Kids in Kindergarten and older are invited to attend our services.

**There is no RC Kids programing for the 11pm service at Mason on 12/24.*