

Sunday School Leader Guide

“Mary’s Faith”

Sunday, December 13, 2015

CONNECTION

1. How would you define FAITH?
2. Think of a person you know that has great faith. Describe that person. What characteristics does he/she have? How does he/she live? How is he/she different from others?

SCRIPTURE

Today’s focus scripture is Luke 1:26-56.

Today’s lesson will focus on the faith of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

LESSON & DISCUSSION

Luke’s description of this miraculous event teaches us several things about Mary’s exemplary faith:

1. Faith is the opposite of sight.

Read Luke 1:26-38.

In verses 26-38, an angel appears to Mary. As if that wasn’t unbelievable enough, the angel delivers the news that Mary, a virgin, will miraculously bear a son. And not just any son! Mary will bear the Son of God! Can you imagine how Mary must have felt as she encountered this angel and received his news? The Scripture says she was “greatly troubled” (v. 29) and she asked, “How will this be?” (v. 34). The angel explains the miracle with another miracle: “the power of the Holy Spirit will overshadow you” (v. 35). The angel explains that proof of God’s work can be seen in Elizabeth’s life, as she who was once barren “is going to have a child in her old age” (v. 36). So the angel’s explanation of this miraculous conception and birth is the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, and evidence of it can be found in Elizabeth’s miraculous pregnancy.

DISCUSS: *How would you have responded to the angel’s news?*

There must have been so many other questions going through Mary’s mind, but she doesn’t ask anything else. The angel’s final words to her are enough: “nothing is impossible with God” (v. 37). Her response to all of this is “I am the Lord’s servant, May it be to me as you have said” (v. 38). She doesn’t ask for more details; she doesn’t request a timeline or schedule; she doesn’t voice her concerns about what her parents of fiancé might think. There is no way Mary could have understood the whats, hows, and whys of what was coming, but she didn’t let that bother her.

I am a details person. Even as a stay-at-home mom, I like to have a plan and a schedule. I like to think ahead so I know who is going where when, and why. If things are left up in the air, or if I can’t visualize what is supposed to happen when, I get very uncomfortable. Because of this, it’s amazing to me to see how Mary, full of faith, blindly accepts the angel’s news. Her response in verse 38 demonstrates her complete trust and total surrender. She can’t see or explain what’s coming; she knows none of the details; but she trusts God. That is faith! And consider this: if Mary could have understood and explained everything, would it really have been a work of God? Henry Blackaby writes, “Faith is confidence that what God has promised or

said will come to pass. Sight is an opposite to faith. If you can see clearly how something will be accomplished, more than likely faith is not required.”¹

DISCUSS: *Is strong faith in God required for most of the events & relationships in your life, or is your life typically characterized by doing things you can accomplish in your own strength and with your own resources?*

2. Faith requires humility.

Reread Luke 1:38.

After the angel shares the incredible news, Mary’s response is “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said,” (v. 38). It’s impossible to miss Mary’s humble attitude here. The Greek word for servant used in this verse means a slave, or someone who is completely devoted to another and disregards his own interests. In essence, Mary is saying, “Lord, I live to serve you. Accomplish your plans in my life. It’s all about you, not me.”

DISCUSS: *What if Mary had been prideful instead of humble? How might she have responded to the angel’s news?*

Mary’s humility enabled her to understand her role and recognize God’s position. A person cannot be saved unless he first recognizes his need for a Savior and then trusts in God for salvation. Similarly, we can’t fully rely on God in our daily lives unless we clearly understand our role as servants and recognize God’s authority as LORD. In his book *Humility*, Andrew Murray writes, “the highest glory of the creature is in being only a vessel, to receive and enjoy and show forth the glory of God. It can do this only as it is willing to be nothing in itself, that God may be all. Water always fills first the lowest places. The lower, the emptier a man lies before God, the speedier and the fuller will be the inflow of the diving glory.”

The angel tells Mary that she has “found favor with God” (v. 30). Perhaps this is true because Mary walked humbly before the Lord, clinging to the promise that the Lord will “humble those who walk in pride” (Daniel 4:37) and will exalt the humble (James 4:10).

Read Daniel 4:37 and James 4:10.

DISCUSS: *Have you had a time when you felt God humbled you because of your pride? What about the opposite – have you ever felt God bless you because of your humility?*

3. Faith has feet.

Read Luke 1:39-45

Verses 39-56 describe Mary’s visit with her relative Elizabeth. Notice that verse 39 says that Mary “hurried” to Elizabeth’s house. After the angel gave her the miraculous news about her own pregnancy, he also told her of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Mary’s quick decision to go visit Elizabeth demonstrates her complete faith in the angel’s words. She hastened to go see Elizabeth in order to see God’s miraculous work in Elizabeth’s life! Mary’s faith influenced her actions. She put feet to her faith! When she arrives, Elizabeth even praises Mary, saying “blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord said to her will be accomplished” (v. 45). In this verse, the Greek word used for *believed* indicates a total trust that is more than just mere credence, but more like total reliance. It’s a faith so full of confidence that it inspires action.

¹ Blackaby, Henry. *Experiencing God*. Lifeway Press: Nashville. 1990. 113.

James discussed the importance of putting feet to our faith.

Read James 2:14-19.

DISCUSS: What does James mean by “faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead”? (v. 17)
Based on James 2:19, is there a difference in simply believing in God and having faith in him? How does faith differ from simple belief?

The way we live our lives is a testimony of how much faith we have in God. What does my lifestyle indicate about my faith?

4. Faith rests in a person.

Read Luke 1:46-55.

After seeing Elizabeth and experiencing proof of God’s miraculous work in her relative’s life, Mary breaks out into words of praise for God. Instead of listing the many blessings He has given, Mary lists his praiseworthy characteristics and worships Him! In these verses of praise, Mary admires God as Lord and Savior (v. 47), one who sees and knows His people (v. 48), a mighty and holy God (v. 49), a merciful God (v. 50), a just God (v. 51-52), a faithful provider (v. 53), and a merciful helper (v. 54). Instead of cataloging the blessings God has given her, Mary focuses on God Himself and who He is. Author Henry Blackaby writes, “Your faith does not rest in a concept or an idea. Faith must be in a person – God Himself. Faith is only valid in God and what He says and what He is purposing to do.” Perhaps in our own lives, we get too caught up with God’s gifts and forget to worship the giver.

DISCUSS: In your own prayers, do you spend more time thanking God for His gifts or praising Him for who He is? What does this reveal about our focus? Do we need to make any adjustments?

APPLICATION

1. **Faith is the opposite of sight.** In your life, are you engaged in any God-sized tasks which only God can accomplish? Or are you simply relying on your own resources to do things within your control? Is God calling you to join Him in a work that only He can accomplish? Pray for God to show you how you and your family can join Him in His God-sized work.
2. **Faith requires humility.** Take some time this week to write a prayer to God. Confess your shortfalls, sins, and weaknesses. Praise God for who He is, listing some of His attributes. Try to focus on the Giver instead of the gifts. Recognize your need and worship God’s limitless ability to provide.
3. **Faith has feet.** Work together to brainstorm practical ways that you can put feet to your faith. (Make a meal for a sick or elderly person, donate food/clothing, rake a neighbor’s yard, etc.).
4. **Faith rests in a person.** Take some time this week to make a list of all the ways God has been faithful to you and your family. You may even want to make a list and post it in a visible place within your home. Then pray and ask God to help you remember his past faithfulness and to strengthen your faith.