

Screenshots of Jesus

A companion study to the podcasts of Amber Albee Swenson

John the Baptist

Origin story:

Read Luke 1:5-25.

1. What do we know about John's parents?

The words righteous and blameless do not suggest that Zechariah and Elizabeth were perfect. Rather, as my study Bible points out, they were sincere in their faith and faithful to follow God's commands.

2. Do you think people would say the same thing about you? Why or why not?

It's important to know God doesn't base our worth on what we do, how well we do it or even how much we're trying. His Word shows that he has always worked through flawed, sinful people and he always will. If you believe Jesus is your Savior, you are righteous in the sight of God because righteous is right with God! The blood of Jesus covers everything you've ever done and everything you ever will do.

So, why try?

Great question. There's salvation and there's sanctification, two big S words. Jesus did everything for our salvation. He delivered us from the situation we were in with regard to sin, death and the devil.

Sanctification is to be set apart. In the books of Philippians and Colossians the apostle Paul tells believers to live a life worthy of Christ. Christ died and paid a hefty price for our salvation. In response, we want to live in such a way that we honor him with our thoughts, words and actions.

Does that make sense? Is that confusing?

“The
Lord
has
done
this for
me.”
Luke
1:24

When my young adult children started dating, we were able to view our family through the lens of someone else. Someone else was saying, “why does your family do that?” Or, “In my family we would never do that.” It’s a chance to see, perhaps for the first time, generational sins. Things that seem totally normal to you because you’ve grown up that way, are not normal to another family. Here are some examples:

One family occasionally uses bad language while another family is careful not to do so.

One family may be careful not to buy unnecessary things while another family buys freely.

One family is careful not to say anything that could be taken as a put down, while another family uses sarcasm often.

Why do I bring this up? Because even Jesus said we often have blind spots. He said, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-5).

One of the easiest ways to find the blind spots is to go through the ten commandments, and if you have access to a Lutheran catechism, their explanations/meanings. In the explanations we are reminded that it’s not just about killing someone, but about treating them with hatred, taking their words at face value instead of talking about them behind their back, etc.

3. As you go through the ten commandments, which ones are a struggle for you?

4. Let’s get back to Luke 1. Read verses 14-17. What did the angel tell Zechariah about John’s life?

In case you haven’t ever prayed Scripture before, these verses are a great way to pray for your children/grandchildren. It would sound something like this:

Dear Lord, please let this child be a joy and delight not just to me, but to all who know them. Let him or her be great in your sight. Fill him/her with the Holy Spirit and use him/her to bring people back to you. Prepare him/her for kingdom service so he/she can prepare others for kingdom service. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Imagine the way God might answer those prayers!

Zechariah didn't believe what the angel said could happen. Note Gabriel's response in v. 19. Faith is believing what you can't see. In fact, Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Confidence and assurance express certainty. The apostle Paul said, "For we live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

5. Are there parts of Christianity/the Bible that you struggle to believe?

6. What can we learn from Elizabeth's response to becoming pregnant?

7. If we were to read on in Luke 1, we'd see Gabriel also appeared to Mary and told her she would carry Jesus. Her response was, "How will this be since I am a virgin?" Her response was not disbelief, but genuine curiosity. How do we know? Because Gabriel rebuked Zechariah but explained how it was possible to Mary. That was important. Without Gabriel's explanation, she might have thought she should get married quickly in order to bring a child into existence.

Can you think of another time in Scripture when people took things into their own hands in order to help God bring about what was promised? How did that work for them?

(If you need help, go to Genesis 16 and 21, and 27).

Big Idea: John's origin story is a reminder that we can trust God. He will do what he says he will do, even if we can't see it in the moment. Our sinful nature at times doubts, but we can trust all of God's promises. He will work for the good of his people and bring about what he promised to do.

Action Item: Find one Bible passage related to your biggest fear/struggle. I struggle to have confidence, so I keep 2 Timothy 1:7 in front of me. Find your passage and write it on a notecard or piece of paper. Put it on your bathroom mirror, or bedstand, on your desk or some other noticeable place.

Prayer: God, your Word is true. Help me to develop the habit of going to your Word so I can know you better. As I get in your Word, strengthen my faith and assure me you are with me and you will do all you've promised to do. In Jesus' name, amen.