

GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 4
WEEK OF MAY 10



Growth Group Spring 2020

God's Favor

Week 4 – May 10, 2020 - Proverbs 3:1-4 and Luke 1:21-30

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

Setting the Context

The book of Proverbs is a book about wisdom. It instructs people on how to find and obtain wisdom and the value of wisdom. I Kings 3 tells us that Solomon could have asked for anything and what he asked for was discernment – the ability to distinguish between two things. To discern life in a way that the world does not always see. I Kings 4:32 tells us Solomon wrote over 3000 proverbs.

Proverbs 3:1-4 calls the listener to maintain love and faithfulness. It is interesting that the proverb does not call out specific adherence to the 10 Commandments, but instead looks for an inner sense of integrity that is revealed in interactions with other people and God. Love and faithfulness are to become part of the student’s heart and life. One can see the influence of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 on this proverb. A student who lives like this will win favor in the sight of God.

Our text from Luke 1 is a familiar text we often consider during the season of Advent. It has been 400 years since God has really been heard from in the book of Malachi. In the last verses of Malachi 4, God says that he will send the prophet “Elijah” to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents. This prophetic word is pointing to the arrival of John the Baptist. And now, God is on the move.

In Luke 1:8-9, Zechariah is chosen to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. He and his wife Elizabeth had been married a long time and they were unable to conceive. They were faithful and righteous, but were now beyond childbearing years. Yet, God had a different plan. Elizabeth would become pregnant. Zechariah could not believe this news from Gabriel and is told that he will not be able to speak until their son is born. They name him John, and he will prepare the way for Jesus.

Mary receives a visit from Gabriel as well. Her life is also totally changed by this visit. She will give birth to the savior of the world. Mary is troubled by his words because what he is saying probably does not align with who she considers herself to be. She is simply a peasant teenager out the middle of nowhere. How could she possibly give birth to the Messiah?



Although both of these women come from extremely different places and backgrounds, God shows his favor to them. God will bring his kingdom and it will start with these women. God's favor comes as both a gift and a surprise.

Exploring the Text

Read Proverbs 3:1-4

¹ My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, ² for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. ³ Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

Read Luke 1:21-30

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak. ²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵ "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." ²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God."

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Besides being with family and friends, what is the one thing you are missing the most during this time of sheltering in place? Eating out? Getting your hair cut? Going to the museum or concerts? Traveling?
- 2) The book of Proverbs is about wisdom. In Proverbs 3:1 we are told to keep God's commands in our heart. What does that mean to you and how does that help "prolong our years" (Proverbs 3:2)? What do you think the first two verses of this proverb are trying to say?
- 3) How would you define "God's favor?" What does it mean to find "favor with God?"
- 4) Luke spends a considerable amount of time in chapter 1 talking about Zechariah and Elizabeth. Why do you think he included their story in what he wrote? No other gospel mentions anything about them. Why is their story an important part of the overall story that Luke wants to share?
- 5) How do you reconcile the idea that Solomon seems to imply that if you keep God's commands and are faithful and loving, you will find favor in the sight of God, as compared to other stories where people seemingly were shown God's favor even though they did not seem like they were keeping God's commands or being faithful and loving (i.e. the thief on the cross or the shepherds in the field). Do you think we earn God's favor or is it given to us?
- 6) Toward the end of the sermon Pastor Paul shared three ideas about God's favor. He said God's favor:
 - 1) comes to us as a gift and reminds us that we are uniquely privileged
 - 2) gives us the strength we need to persevere through difficult times
 - 3) is given to us so that we might bless, encourage and show favor to othersWhich of those ideas is the most helpful for where you find yourself today?

- 7) Mary and Elizabeth both came from very different backgrounds and they are forever identified as the mothers of Jesus and John. Yet, they were obviously much more than that. The issue of identity is an important concept. Where do you find your identity? Is it in what you do, who other people say you are, who you say you are, or something else?
- 8) Share about someone in your own life who showed you “favor.” Someone who blessed you or encouraged you and made a difference in who you are today.