



AN UNLIKELY
advent

“Nearly 2,000 years ago, God did the ‘Unlikely’ – He showed up. Before He arrived, He revealed His coming to the most ‘Unlikely’ cast of characters with an ‘Unlikely’ message. And when He arrived, well, He came in the most ‘Unlikely’ way. Regardless of how ‘Unlikely’ it all was, when God showed up, He brought with Him Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.” - Michael Davis

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How to use this ebook:

This Christmas Season, GENESIS will celebrate 'An Unlikely Advent.' Hope, Peace, Joy and Love – these will be the themes we celebrate this Advent Season. And the good news of Advent is that God is still using 'Unlikely' people to bring about Hope, Peace, Joy and Love to a world in desperate need of knowing the God that offers us ALL of this and so much more as we look to Him and Him alone!

In this book, we will have daily Advent devotions that focus on some of the most unlikely people from Scripture, and how Jesus brought them Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

Our hope, is that through this devotional, you would not only see that God can use the people in the Bible to do great things, but that He can and wants to use YOU to do great things too!

Everyday

- We are excited to offer a few verses for you to meditate upon each day
- After the Scriptures, a short devotional will focus on our weekly theme and unlikely character
- Then, a few questions will try to address how God wants to use you this year to do something incredible
- Finally, we will end each day in prayer

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Week 1:

An Unlikely Hope

“The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity—hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory—because at the Father’s will Jesus became poor, and was born in a stable so that thirty years later He might hang on a cross.” - J.I. Packer

“Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again--my Savior and my God!” –
Psalm 43:5

Day 1:

Today's Verses: **Psalm 127:3-5**

³Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him. ⁴Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior's hands. ⁵How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them! He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.

Devotion: **An Unlikely Story**

In Elizabeth's day, children were a sign of God's blessings upon your life. To have many of them meant that the favor of God was resting upon you and your family in the most clear and tangible ways. It meant that you would be a blessing, not only to yourself, but also to your neighborhood and nation. It meant that you would have a heritage, and someone to look after you when you were old.

Now, imagine how Elizabeth must have felt. There had been so much excitement surrounding her and Zechariah's marriage. The local women would tease and laugh with her over how many children the LORD was going to bless her with, while the men would tell stories of strong sons who were zealous for God. And, since Elizabeth was a righteous woman, everyone knew that she would be blessed with many children.

After the first year, no one seemed to notice that Elizabeth had not yet become pregnant. Things like this take time, and the LORD would bring children to her when the time was right. She was a righteous woman; she had no need to fear.

After a few more years, however, things began to change. The women of the town were not laughing with her any longer. The men got together less and told far fewer stories. The people who knew her probably encouraged her to repent from her sins, all the while wondering what was keeping them from having children. Needless to say, the pressure was starting to mount for Elizabeth.

By the time we meet Elizabeth she is an old woman. A woman who no longer is having to endure the awkward conversations surrounding pregnancy, because she has passed the age of having kids. But, she was a woman who had lived with the painful reality, for far too long, that she had not been as blessed as the other women had been. Yet, things were about to change. She was about to experience something completely unlikely.

Discussion:

What are some of the things that you have been praying for, but at this point, God has not answered?

If God were going to write a brand new story for you, what would that look like?

What are some ways you that you can identify and live out that new story today?

Prayer:

Lord, I know that you have put me where I am for a reason. Sometimes it may not feel that way, but I am going to trust you. I am going to trust you to lead me, to guide me, and to change my story of brokenness into a story of victory this advent season. God, I am the most unlikely person, but I know that you are a God who can do unlikely things with people like me! Amen.

Day 2:

Today's Verses: **Luke 1:11-13**

¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. ¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer.

Devotion: **An Unlikely Encounter**

Zechariah was a priest. He was born a priest and he would die a priest. It was all that he had ever known to do and it was all that he had ever wanted to do. As a boy, he had dreamed of the day when he could enter the great temple of Jerusalem and serve the LORD his God. While the other boys were playing with sticks or skipping rocks across a pond, Zechariah was probably reading, studying, and daydreaming about the role that God would one day have for Him.

I'm sure, as a boy, he read of the times when the Spirit of the LORD came down upon the temple. It was this same God who had led Israel as a cloud by day and as fire by night. It was this same God who had violently separated the waters and dry land so that his people could cross the sea. It was this same God who had made the sun stand still in the sky and had shook the mountains with His awesome glory. It was this same God who had chosen to fill the temple with His holy presence!

In the old days, especially on the holiest of days, priests would spend hours cleansing themselves before going into the temple. They knew that God was a holy God, and that they needed to be clean and pure to interact with Him. After all the preparations were made, just in case there was some sin they had forgotten to come clean of, they would tie a long rope around their waist, so that their friends could pull them out of the temple, instead of risking their own life to go inside and get what remains. And while the holiness of God was a frightening thing, Zechariah probably longed to have an encounter with Him. But, after years of silence from God, his anticipation may have faded.

When we meet Zechariah, one of his life-long dreams is finally coming true. For, on this day, he is finally getting his shot to serve in the great Jerusalem temple. This must have been one of the greatest days of his life! Yet, it also seems that he did not expect to meet an angel on that day. He knew all of the stories. He had read the times when God or His angels had showed up delivering messages. But on this day he was completely unprepared for that most unlikely encounter.

Discussion:

What are some of the things about a relationship with God that may overwhelm or scare you?

What are some of the things that keep you from expecting an encounter God?

How do you think that you would have responded?

Prayer:

Lord, sometimes I am not looking or expecting to see you. I spend so much of my time worried about what is going on in each day, or week, or month that I forget to slow down and look for you. But, I do not want to live this way. I want to live expecting to encounter with you, and expecting to have fresh stories of all the good things I have seen you do. Would you help me to see you? Would you help me to have an unlikely encounter with you this day? Amen.

Day 3:

Today's Verses: **Luke 1:18-20**

¹⁸Zechariah 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." ¹⁹Then 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! ²⁰But 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."

Devotion: **An Unlikely Response**

Zechariah had been praying for years for a daughter or son. He had served God faithfully as a priest; he had been a good husband; and he had longed to pour that love out upon a child. But, as the years went by, I wonder if Zechariah began to doubt God's plan for his life.

Zechariah knew that God could bring a child to a childless couple. He had read the stories of his ancestors Abraham and Sarah, who had a child in their old age, just like God had promised them. He knew about the barren woman Hannah who had prayed for a son and God had heard her prayers. But what did any of that have to do with him? He had not heard God make any promises to him. He had not seen any answers to prayer. Maybe, he thought, "God's will is different for me". Maybe he even said: "I want a child, but maybe it is just not in the cards for me".

Now, standing in front of the angel, I imagine that this message was pretty hard from him to believe. He may have wanted to trust the LORD's message; He may have wanted to start rejoicing, but he had lived a lot of years with disappointment. He still had so many questions and so many doubts. How could he believe the message that the angel was giving him? And, at least for a moment, Zechariah doubted the angel's message.

And, what looks on the surface to be an unlikely response from the angel, it is actually an act of incredible grace. For in the next moment, Zechariah would have clear unmistakable proof that God had answered his prayer. He did not have to wait for his wife to begin showing, he had the proof of that child that very day, in the fact that he could no longer speak. God had answered his prayers and gotten his attention. And, now, he needed only to wait and see the good things God was about to do.

And after months of silence, when Zechariah could finally speak again, it says the first thing he did was "he began praising God" (1:64). What an unlikely, but, beautiful response!

Discussion:

Is there something God could tell you that would be hard for you to believe?

What are some of the disappointments and unmet expectations that you are carrying?

What are some of the things you have begun believing about yourself after years of disappointment and waiting?

Prayer:

Lord, there are many times when I convince myself of things because I am disappointed. I convince myself that I am not worthy of your love when I feel like I have disappointed you. I convince myself that _____ must not be in your plan for my life, because I have been disappointed in my waiting. Lord, I do not know what your exact plan for my life is, but I do not want to go on living with disappointment. So, I am praying that you will help me be positive; to help me see all of the good things you want to bring in to my life and that I would be able to celebrate and praise you when I see it. I want an unlikely response to you, instead of what has been typical for me in the past. Thank you God for loving me and leading me Amen.

Day 4:

Today's Verses: **Luke 1:26-28**

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" ²⁹Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

Devotion: **An Unlikely Definition**

When God was with you, it meant that you had peace in everything you did. It meant that your family and country were thriving and prospering. It meant your borders were secure and that your enemies could not harm you. It meant that your agriculture, horticulture, and your economy were booming. But, when the angel came to speak with Mary, none of these things were happening.

When we meet Mary, she is engaged to a descendant of the great and mighty king of Israel, David. And, under normal conditions this would have been incredible! She would have been in line to be the queen. Her son would have been the next great ruler of her people. She would have had the wealth, power, and status that only few could ever know. But on this day, Mary was met with the promise of a low class income, a powerless existence, in a conquered country that no longer had a king from David on its throne. This was certainly an unlikely scenario.

To make matters even more ironic, she and Joseph were preparing to make a life for themselves in the Podunk town of Nazareth; a far removed backwoods village that felt worlds away from the royal birthplace of king David in Bethlehem. Instead of donning his sword, shield, and crown, Joseph had opened a small carpentry business, just trying to make ends meet. This was certainly an unlikely setting.

To stretch the bounds of reason, the angel not only greets her, but he calls her favored. Then, without even taking a breath in between, he goes on to tell her how her LORD is with her! And, Mary's response is so typical. It says she was confused and disturbed.

You see, all her life, she had been told what life would look like when God was with you. She already had a definition in her mind, and her life did not make the cut. And now, when one of the very angels from God, comes to her, and tells her that He is with her, it looks a whole lot different than what she had been told! He had an unlikely definition of what it meant to be favored by God.

Discussion:

How is your life an unlikely setting for something incredible?

What circumstances or beliefs have caused you to wonder if God could ever use you?

What definition of the blessed life or favored life are you living with?

Prayer:

Lord, we have been taught many things about what favored or blessed really means. And, we have believed many things about what life will look like when we are being blessed by God. But, God, my definition of favored and yours do not always match up. Lord, help me to know the lies that I have believed, that confuse me and disturb me. Help me to understand that you can use anybody to do incredible things. Even me! Lord, help me to believe that and walk in that this season! Amen.

Day 5:

Today's Verses: **Luke 1:30-38**

³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" ³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." ³⁵ The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷ For the word of God will never fail." ³⁸ Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

Devotion: **An Unlikely Promise**

The morning before the angel came to visit her, Mary probably looked out her window to see a Roman soldier beating a member of her village. Then, as she turned away from that scene, she may have seen her father tired and overburdened in the fields; trying to survive and feed his family after paying more than sixty percent of his income in taxes to Rome. Then, as she turned from the window, she may have noticed her mother mending clothes that had been torn more times than she could remember, along with cupboards so bare that the mice were even hungry. Her world was different than she would have imagined it, but yet, it was all that she had known.

So, imagine what she was thinking, when the angel came to her that evening, telling her that she had found favor with God. Imagine what she would have thought when he told her that she would bear a son, who would be great, and would rule upon the throne of her ancestor David. Imagine her shock when the angel promised that He would have an everlasting reign and a kingdom without end. And, while puzzling over these promises, she probably wanted to know how in the world she was going to get pregnant!

This was an unlikely promise from God. Yet, God often deals in the unlikely. He comes to unlikely people, and asks them to do unlikely things. Why? So that He can do something incredible through them! Mary may not have been the most likely candidate for the job. But, when we know that the Word of God will not fail, even the most unlikely promise that He could give will certainly come about.

Discussion:

What is something unlikely that you feel God is calling you to do this season?

How would doing that thing, communicate the hope of God to those around you?

Describe an unlikely person, who is in your life that you could share the Hope of God with.

Prayer:

Lord, we have seen that your promises are much bigger and greater than we could ever imagine. Like Mary, we know that you have more in store for us that we could even conceptualize. We also know that you are calling us to have faith, and to believe the unlikely promises that you have given us, because your Word never fails. You are always true. Help us to believe like Mary. Help us to be used by you to show your Hope to those around us. Reveal to us the unlikely people who need to hear this, and then give us strength to share. Amen

Day 6:

Today's Verses: **Luke 1:39-45**

³⁹A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town ⁴⁰where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. ⁴³Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? ⁴⁴When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. ⁴⁵You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

Devotion: **An Unlikely HOPE!**

Today, three stories come full circle, as we see Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah all under the same roof. We see joy, celebration, and blessings poured out upon them from God. Yet, what united them all together was the hope that each of them found in God

Zechariah initially doubted that God could, or maybe even wanted to give Him a son. He questioned the angels message and was struck mute for the entirety of his wife's miraculous pregnancy. Yet, when his voice returned to him, he sang a song of hope about the God who keeps His promises (Lk. 1:67-80)

Elizabeth had been the subject of ridicule for years. She was unable to have children, which meant to those around her, that God's blessing was not upon her. She endured shame, isolation, and maybe even guilt, as she wondered why her womb was still empty. Yet, it's Elizabeth's name that tells her story best. For her name, which means "God is my oath" tells us something about this woman who would not stop believing that God would keep His promises. She believed in a God who was faithful to the things He promised, and she had hope in Him because of this!

Mary, was just a girl when the angel came bringing the message of God. From a human standpoint, she may have felt like she had everything to lose if this unlikely promise came true. Her fiancé would divorce her. Her parents would disown her. Her community would demean her. And the leadership might even stone her. Believing God was not an easy thing for Mary. Hope was difficult and came with a lot of baggage. Hope did not mean clarity for Mary; it meant a lot of unknowns! Yet, she believed that the Lord would do what He said, and she had hope in the God who keeps His promises. Her hope was not rooted in her circumstances, but in the God who transcends them! Today, you can have that same unlikely hope. All you need to do, is believe what the LORD has said and expect it to come true, even if your circumstances are saying something different! That is an unlikely, but beautiful kind of hope!

Discussion:

What thing(s) are you believing God for this season?

How would the things you are hoping for from God, actually cost you if they came true?

How would having an unlikely kind of hope, change the way you view God and approach the world?

Prayer:

Lord, we need an unlikely kind of hope today. We need a hope that defies our circumstances, transforms our doubts, and cause us to celebrate our God, who always keeps His promises. You have promised that you would never leave us; help us hope in that! You have promised that you would never forsake us; let us hope in that! You have promised that you would be with us always; let us hope in that! You have promised that you will use us to bring your hope to others; let us hope in that! Amen.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,
says the LORD. They are plans for
good and not for disaster, to give you a
future and a hope.”*

- Jeremiah 29:11



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