

**BIG IDEA: God is at work.**

Did you know that God is not just the God of the details of this universe, but He is equally the God of the details of your life? He has a perfect plan for your life and feelings of deep meaning, purpose, and significance will be forever elusive until you find a sense of confidence that you are in the middle of your destiny. This idea of providence means believing that God is intentional, directive, active, not passive, not lackadaisical about the intricate details of this world. And not only this world but also our individual lives. He is orchestrating the elements of our moments to lead and direct us into a specific future.

**Luke 1:28-30 (NLT)**

Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for **you have found favor with God!**"

**Key: Moments of providence are when God uses worldly events to advance His eternal plans.**

**Note:** Each of us have found favor with God if we are a born into His family through a vow of devotion to Jesus and that favor ALWAYS means we have a part, a role to play in His plan!

**Questions**

1. Can you think of time when you felt like God revealed to you something that He wanted you to do? Maybe it was time in your life when you were at a crossroads or had a decision to make. How did God direct you?
2. Have you had a similar experience in this global pandemic? Do you have a sense yet what part you are supposed to play in all this? Remember, you don't have to fully understand everything that God is doing to have a sense for what He is asking of you. Mary had no idea what God would do in the world over the next 100 years after Jesus' birth, but she knew her part!
3. How can you be an encouragement to others to help them either discern God's role for them? How can you inspire them to be faithful and courageous to walk in obedience and faith once they feel like they know what God is asking of them?

**Memory Verse:** And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (Romans 8:28 NLT)

**BIG IDEA: Redemption**

Be careful in reading through the Old Testament, especially books like Numbers, that you are not dismissive of their ability to reveal life transformative, life enriching truth. In Number 3:39 we read that there were 22,000 Levites numbered in the census. However, there were 22,273 firstborn males among the remaining eleven tribes. Since God had established that the priestly service of the Levites was a redemptive price in exchange for all the firstborn males that belonged to the Lord (Numbers 3:11-13), there was a gap of 273. There were not enough Levites to fully redeem all the firstborn. Picking up with verse 44, "The Lord spoke to Moses again: Take the Levites in place of every firstborn among the Israelites, and the Levites' cattle in place of their cattle. The Levites belong to Me; I am the Lord. As the redemption price for the 273 firstborn Israelites who outnumber the Levites, collect five shekels for each person...give the money to Aaron and his sons as the redemptive price for those who are in excess among the Israelites." This lesson in Numbers is God teaching us about the coming of Jesus. He wants us to understand that no religious system will ever be enough to redeem and rescue mankind. When Jesus died on the cross, He died for more than just our forgiveness, He died to redeem EVERY situation and circumstance the world would ever endure! Jesus' death brought every world event (past, present, and future) into alignment with the sovereign plans of God!

**Luke 1:37 (NLT)**

For the word of God will never fail.

**Key: God does not need to cause a worldly event to redeem it, to rescue it, to use it to advance His eternal plans.**

**Note:** Don't be distracted by questions about whether God causes, allows, or could have prevented this global pandemic. The more pertinent questions is how is God going to use this crisis for good...how will He redeem it?

**Questions**

1. What are some ways you can envision God using this crisis for good? How could God use this tragedy for the good of others, for your good?
2. Can you think of something from your past, a time of crisis that God used for your ultimate good?
3. What is an example in Scripture where God used something tragic to ultimately benefit those involved?

**Memory Verse:** You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! (Isaiah 26:3 NLT)

## BIG IDEA: Favor

How can our hearts not be captivated by Isaiah 61:1-2!

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor...”*

Jesus identified Himself with this prophecy in Luke 4 when He was rejected in Nazareth. I find the context of Jesus’ personal identification with Isaiah 61 deeply instructive. He was being rejected. God’s favor always begins the same way for us all...a declaration of faith that defies our present circumstances...beginning first as a message long before becoming our moment. Preached and proclaimed at inception, carried forward in faith, and realized only after a divine time of waiting. Hold fast, your year of the Lord’s favor draws nigh! And when that time of waiting happens to coincide with a providential moment, the feelings we must endure can at times be overwhelming.

### Luke 1:29 (NLT)

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

**Key: The favor of God is often conditional, on our not giving up during the moments of our trial.**

**Note:** Don’t let confusion, responsibility, sacrifice, and interdependence chase you away from the favor that is waiting for you!

### Questions

1. Is this global pandemic causing you to feel confused to the point of feeling distressed? Do you have feelings of dread? It’s okay, you don’t have to justify those feelings or understand them...let’s start by talking about them.
2. Is there a sacrifice that is being forced upon you because of this crisis that feels unfair and is risking the stability of your finances, relationships, or career?
3. What responsibilities are being forced on you, for which you are ill-prepared, responsibilities that are causing you to feel overwhelmed and anxious?
4. Who are people your life is now dependent upon? Whose decisions are having a direct effect on you that could harm you if they choose poorly?

**Memory Verse:** God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. (James1:12 NLT)

**BIG IDEA: Waiting**

Let's keep talking about waiting. If there was one recurring theme throughout the history of Abraham and Isaac to identify, it is waiting: God's promise of a child for Abraham, God's promise that the lands would be his and his descendants, Sarah's longing for a child, and God's promise to Hagar and her son Ishmael. I was struck how chapter 22 in Genesis began, "After these things God tested Abraham..." Are you kidding me! What's been happening for more than a century of his life to date? But the key is found in chapter 22, "Here I am." Being a "waiting person" is being a "here I am" person, completely given to the sovereignty of God. I sometimes wonder if that wasn't Esau's downfall. He couldn't even wait for a few more moments for one of the family servants to fix him a meal. One would think that Jacob being a lying, conniving, scheming, manipulating, man of deception was enough flaws for the purposes of God to find another instrument. Was it in the end a waiting deficiency that disqualified Esau?

**Luke 1:35 (NLT)**

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.

**Key: All of the promises of God that contain the word "will" mean that there is a period of waiting to follow!**

**Note:** If we are going to wait well then we need to learn to trust in His principles while we wait for the manifestation of His promises.

**Questions**

1. How does the principle of the sovereignty of God help me confront my confusion?
2. How does the principle of reciprocity help me accept whatever sacrifice I am having to make?
3. How does the principle of the perfection of God help me accept my present responsibilities?
4. How does the principle of community with God's people help me overcome my fears of interdependence?

**Memory Verse:** Review verses from days 1-3.

## **BIG IDEA: Pathways**

How long can you hold your breath? Your spiritual breath? You might be saying, “Fred, I’ve got some human limitations when it comes to everything you are talking about.” Well, then you are in good company! In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, “And you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you!” He’s upon you! And you should be devoted this year to hold your spiritual breath like never before, venturing into the depths of eternal life, to depths that you thought were impossible...and take your family with you, your community, your church!

### **Matthew 1:19a (NLT)**

Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man...

**Key:** There is a righteousness that comes from Christ through grace, and there is righteousness that comes from effort as we build on that grace.

**Note:** Jesus’ death on the cross was God’s plan for our righteousness through grace, and His spiritual disciplines (pathways) are God’s plan for our righteousness through grace inspired effort.

### **Questions**

1. What is my plan to make Scripture, Prayer, Worship, Fasting part of the routine of my life?
2. What is my plan to make Gathering, Relationships, Accountability, and Reaching part of the routine of my life?
3. What is my plan to make Rest, Stewardship, Generosity, and Service part of the routine of my life?
4. Have I downloaded the free pdf of Praxis from [www.letspraxis.com](http://www.letspraxis.com) to learn more about these Pathways and how they can become my effort?

**Memory Verse:** Thus says the Lord, “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths...” (Jeremiah 6:16a NASB)