

Well, I suspect these kids have already made it pretty clear what they're hoping to get from Christmas. I don't know about you, but Christmas to me is always the opportunity for me to be very disappointed. Anyone grow up, like, yeah, I always wanted that gift, and my parents never got. Or Santa Claus never got it for me. Mine was.

My dream gift was a train set. My uncle had one. My uncle had one where you'd open these giant bifold doors in the closet, and it felt like 20 plywood sheets would fall down or fold down. And there was this amazing train set on the board, and that's what I wanted. Every year I'd ask for it.

Oh, like this one, the one that you're looking at. This is like my dream, except that you don't see the whole range of mountains in the background. And the tunnels, the tunnels that the train would go through. I mean, I could picture myself on the train, riding the train through the tunnels, experiencing just that amazing alpine train ride. Anyone?

Anyone also want a train set when they were a kid? How many of you actually got one? I don't like you right now. So this is the train set I wanted. However, this is the train set I actually ended up getting, like, when I was 14 years old.

Can we show that picture? That's it. That's it. And that wasn't even a Christmas gift. I found that someplace, and I took it home and put it on the shelf.

And I think I thought, like, you know, like Geppetto and Pinocchio. If I just wished hard enough that would become a real, real train. It never. It never did. Oh, we've all experienced disappointment of things not going as hoped or expected.

With disappointment often comes maybe a little bitterness, like, why does Bobby get the train and Timmy doesn't get the train set? Timmy is a lot better than Bobby. So what's the deal as adults? Our disappointment and the bitterness that can come alongside of it can affect our relationship with God. Disappointment can affect our faith.

This morning, do you have a disappointment? Are you living with some sort of disappointment in your life right now? And today I'm hoping you will be encouraged because we're going to look at another woman in the story of Christmas whose disappointment actually paved the way for the Messiah. So I'm going to pray. I'm going to have you guys turn to Luke, chapter one, and we're going to be hanging out in Luke for a while, and we'll be touching on stuff that I don't have scriptures up there for.

So if you got your Bibles I'm going to encourage you to turn to Luke,

Matthew, Mark. Luke is the third gospel. It's the third book of the Bible that has red letters in it. And it's the one where we get probably the most detailed, detailed narrative of the birth of Christ. So turn there.

I'm going to pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word that speaks to us, encourages us. Even in the disappointments of life, we can turn to your word and find there encouragement and a reminder of important things. So Lord, we pray that your word would not return void, but it would do that. It would instruct us, it would encourage us and would remind us of your faithfulness.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Well, as I said, Luke's Gospel is perhaps the classic Christmas account. This is where we meet the angels, this is where we meet the shepherds. We get to hang out with some sheep for a little bit.

We meet Joseph, of course we meet the innkeeper, all of that stuff. Of course we meet Mary. But before we meet Mary, we actually meet another woman. Anyone know what her name is? Elizabeth.

Her name is Elizabeth. Now the name Elizabeth is our English translation of it. The word that she would have, she would have been known by all her neighbors as Elisheva. And Elisheva actually means God's provision, God's providence, God's abundance, which sounds like Elisheva. Elizabeth lived sort of this Instagram worthy life where everyone was so jealous of Elizabeth.

Look what Elizabeth has got. But in fact, exactly the opposite. Elizabeth lived with a lot of heartbreak and sadness and disappointment. Her life opposed was different than God's blessing. It seemed that God had actually done the opposite in Elizabeth's life.

You see, she wanted a child. She wanted a child for herself. She wanted a child for her husband. She wanted a child for God. So let's read her story from Luke, chapter one.

It begins this way. In the time of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, remember his name, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Now those are two names that we're not going to hit on anymore. You just need to know this.

Aaron was Moses. Brother Moses appointed Aaron as the first high priest of Israel when they came out of slavery in Egypt. And Abijah was Aaron's son. Aaron had a bunch of sons. And down that line, Zechariah was eventually born.

Now Elizabeth can also, her dad can trace his lineage back there as well. So those are the two people we'll move on from them. His wife,

Elizabeth. Aha. We're back on the story again.

His wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God. They did life right. They observed all the Lord's commands, and they and his decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Now, in this passage, we learn a couple of things. One, Elizabeth is old. Maybe that's the first thing that struck out to you. It doesn't say how old she was. She was just older than she should have been if she wanted to have kids.

So her age itself was a factor. But she had been childless for a long time and couldn't have kids. She had experienced many, many, many years of being disappointed with herself. I know there's families in our congregation who have struggled with fertility. And I think there's a very natural tendency to try to figure out what's wrong with me, that I can't seem to manage what everyone else seems to manage just fine.

So I think with Elisha, it's fair to say that she had some disappointment with herself. But she was also the wife of a priest. We understand this. And the priesthood was sort of hereditary. So a priest passed on the priesthood to his son, and that son passed on the priesthood to his son.

Again, it goes all the way back to Aaron at some point. So for this man, Zechariah, the priest, having a child, having a son was very important to pass on the lineage of his role that God had called his family to. So Elizabeth is not just disappointed in herself, but I think it is fair to say that she struggled with the idea that she was a disappointment to her husband. Zachariah, are you tracking with me now? They were good people.

I don't think Zechariah ever made it an issue. I don't think he ever blamed Elizabeth. But because they were good people, they were righteous. The scriptures say they were blameless before God, which I don't know about you, but it sort of baffles me sometimes why the most incompetent adults in the world can have kids. And those who are like, oh, my word, they would be amazing parents.

Struggle to have children. It's an interesting thing. You've thought it yourself. I'm sure God has his reasons, of course, that we can ask about at some point time, but in the meantime, we just. We just struggle with this.

It was the hope also of all Jewish women to potentially bring into the world the child God promised Eve Remember that a couple of weeks ago when God said, a child of yours is going to crush the head of the

serpent? So every Jewish mother, every Jewish young girl thought, this child that I have could be the offspring of Eve that will finally crush evil and Satan, the Messiah. So it's not a big leap to go from, well, I could have a child to stop evil, but God doesn't even trust me with a child to do that. So not only is my physically unable to do it, but. But maybe there's something spiritually wrong with me that God doesn't trust me.

Maybe I'm a disappointment to God. Has anyone ever felt like a disappointment to God?

So this adds up to a lot of disappointment in Elizabeth's life. I was talking to Maggie Mobley about this. Maggie gave me so much good information on Elizabeth, and it was stuff that I wouldn't even have thought because I'm not a person who's ever struggled with barrenness. But she brought this, a lot of stuff to my attention. So I owe her a debt of gratitude for this sermon.

And what Maggie brought out is this. What's amazing about Elizabeth is in the midst of all this disappointment, she stays faithful to God. Many times in our disappointment, we get frustrated and we say, well, fine, if that's the way God's going to be, I'm just going to do my own thing for a while. But she doesn't. She stays faithful to God even in the midst of her disappointment, which sort of makes it even deeper, that disappointment, because we all sort of live with this expectation.

Maybe we learned it early on when we teach our children about, well, be good because Christmas is coming. That if we do the right things, if we observe all the rules and the commandments and we do this and we do that and we do that, then surely Santa will bring us that train that we're dreaming of. Maybe God will bless us with a child if we do all the right stuff. And so this expectation goes unmet in Elizabeth's life. She does all this stuff, and yet there's no child to show for it.

Disappointment is the beginning, the source of disappointment. Unmet expectations are the source of disappointment. There's a world religion called Buddhism that teaches us that happiness really ultimately comes when we sort of release from our lives all expectations. Which sounds on the face of it. I mean, that sort of makes sense, doesn't it?

If we don't have any hopes, then we can't get our hopes dashed. And there's some truth in that, because as believers, we know that God doesn't promise to meet all our expectations. That's not a promise from Scripture. But that doesn't mean that expectations and hopes and dreams are wrong. Not at all.

The Scriptures tell us that God gives us the desires of our heart. And

that doesn't mean that God gives us everything on a Christmas list. But I think that does mean that God gives us the expectation and the desire and the dream things being good and right, not just in our lives, but in other people's lives as well in the world. He sort of helps and prompts us to put these things on the Christmas list, even if his plan is not for this Christmas. Those dreams, those hopes, those aspirations are our gifts from God.

And so these expectations. Good. But we are told to hold those things loosely. Why? Because how God answers our expectations is up to him one and rarely how we expect them to be answered.

We always get surprises in our lives, don't we? Let's go back to Elizabeth, because Elizabeth is in the process of learning how this works with God. She's dealing with disappointment. She's secretly wondering if she's the disappointment. Has she done something to disqualify her from God's blessing and to get a picture of this?

This happens another time in the life of Jesus. Jesus is walking along and he meets a man who's been blind from birth. And the crowd wanting to get some answers on how this actually works. Is it karma or is it something else? Because what did this guy do to deserve his blindness?

Was it something he did or maybe something his mother did? Maybe they messed up somehow and now this guy is blind from birth. And Jesus says, no, no, you're looking at this from the wrong way. He says, it doesn't work like that. He says the challenges.

Jesus says the challenges that we experience in the now could be a setup for a miracle that we experience in the later. And he's got this scripture right here that he points to. John 9:3 says, this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. The challenge of the now is merely a setup for the miracle of tomorrow. So how will the works of God be displayed in Elizabeth's life now?

Let's take a little side trip. We're going to go and hang out in Zechariah's shoes for just a little bit. Zechariah's role as a priest requires him to leave his home out in the countryside, a beautiful place, it sounds like, in the hill country of Judea, and live for three months in temporary housing, temporary quarters in Jerusalem. So Elizabeth is old. Her husband's working most of the day.

She's in a new place, doesn't have a lot of friends and acquaintances here, so she's by herself a lot of times. And then one day her husband comes home and she thinks he's had a stroke. Kurt, you know how this is. He can't talk and he's gesturing wildly, trying to make himself understood. Something has happened.

And I don't know about you, but have you ever had those days where it just seems like every days, years, months. I don't know what it is,

life where things just pile up one after another, and you're, like, overwhelmed. And so when Zacharias comes in the door and he's like, I had her. She's like, what? God?

What are you doing? Somehow Zechariah makes it clear. Here's what happened. In the course of his priestly duties, his work is interrupted by an angel. Now, not a cherub.

We've all seen the pictures of the cherubs with the little harps and their fat little kids, and they're cute as a button. But those aren't angels. Angels are terrifying things. And I think Zechariah was absolutely terrified. And the angel says, don't be.

I caught on very good terms. I'm not here to. I'm not here to make things worse for you. I'm here to actually make things better. I've come to tell you that your disappointment is going to be answered.

You're going to have a son, and you're going to name him Yohanan. Now, we know him as John, but Yohanan means God is gracious. Now, Zechariah is completely taken aback by this one. I think Zechariah might have. Like me, maybe like you, we don't dwell on our disappointment.

We think it's better to sort of just man up, chin up, and move on in life. And I think perhaps Zachariah has been this way. He has resigned himself a long time ago to the fact that he's not going to have a kid. And so he is completely overwhelmed by this.

By this idea that he's going to have a son. The graciousness of God. The angel says, he will be a joy and a delight to you. And many others will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. Now, we had some beautiful little kids up here.

Every one of them. No, every one of them. Every one of them. Every one of them is a blessing from the Lord. I ran through the list Just real quick.

But no, I'll say with confidence. Every one of these kids is a blessing from the Lord. But this one, that John, that is going to be given to Zechariah and Elizabeth, well, he's something special. The scripture says he's going to be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he's born. He's going to bring back the people of God to the Lord.

He's going to go before the Lord, meaning he will precede the Lord in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Messiah for the Lord. Now, this is big news. And again, Zachariah, who's sort of given up on that dream a long time ago, is overwhelmed. Wouldn't you be? He says, ah, yeah, I'm too old.

That's his first thought. That's his first thought. I'm too old. I'm too old. And my wife, too.

It's like Adam and Eve all over again. Well, no, no, no. She's really the problem, Lord. You know how old she is. She's getting along in years.

And the angel says, zachariah, buddy, what's going on here? Do you not trust the word of God? Are you saying you don't believe? Look at me. Are you saying you don't believe that God's in the middle of this right now?

Here's what's going to happen. You're going to lose your ability to speak. Thankfully, that's the only ability he lost. Because within a very short time, Elizabeth is pregnant.

After years and years of persistently hoping and praying, even when heaven was silent, after years and years of faithfully trusting God, even when his plan was not her plan, after years and years and years of just feeling like a disappointment, God is answering disappointment with abundance. Elisha Ba. And when she gives birth, she names him. Of course. What are you going to call him?

We're going to call him. God is gracious. Yohanan. Here's how Luke describes this. Luke 1:5.

All the neighbors now, all those neighbors. Think about them. They'd lived beside Zechariah and Lid all this time. They had walked with them through their disappointment. All the neighbors were filled with awe.

And throughout the hill country of Judea, people were talking about all of this. What did Jesus say? These things are so that the works of God will be displayed. And look what happens. What Elizabeth and Zechariah have gone through.

It's been hard but now, look, all over the hill country of Judea, the works of God are on full display. Now, can I just go back to just something else, Zachariah? Because I'm a little bit like Zechariah when I deal with disappointment. I tend to be. Let's put a good face on it, and let's just not talk about our disappointment, because that makes me look weak.

If I admit that something is not the way I wanted it to be, it's sort of a sign of strength to go, Yep, it's not what I wanted. But by golly, we're going to muscle through it and it's going to be good. We're just going to God's got to plan. Have you ever said that? All the time, going, I hate this plan.

I hate this plan. Here's what I love about Elizabeth. Elizabeth owns her disappointment. How do I know that? Because all the people around her knew what Elizabeth really wanted with all her heart, and she was not ashamed to say it out loud.

I want a child. All her neighbors knew this. And so when God finally does it after all those years of Elizabeth being honest before God and before others with what she wanted, the neighbors see it. And God gets the glory from all of this. Now, if you're following along in your scriptures, you notice we passed over a very interesting little passage there, because here's what happens.

Mary. Yes, that Mary, that we're going to learn about next week. Mary learns she's pregnant. She travels a hundred miles from her town of Nazareth to where Elizabeth's home is in the hill country, and she wants to spend some time with her. And as soon as Elizabeth sees Mary, and again, Mary's just learned she's pregnant.

But Elizabeth's been pregnant for a while, and there's a baby in there. And that baby leaps for joy when Mary gets close to him. Seems that baby John, baby Yohanan, is already eager to get started on the purpose that God has for him. Now, what is that purpose? Well, Zechariah gets his voice back.

And when he gets his voice back is when Elizabeth says, we're going to call him John. And all of a sudden, whew, those stroke symptoms are gone. And Zechariah is able to say, here's exactly what's happening. So at this dedication of this baby, Zacharias says this In Luke, chapter 176 through 79, he holds this little baby in his arms, and he says, you, my child, will be called a prophet of the most High. You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.

You will give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy, the graciousness of God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness in the shadow of death. This is a reference back to the prophet Isaiah, by the way, to guide our feet in the path of peace. Now, here's what Maggie said about all this. That's amazing right there, isn't it? But this isn't really about John the Baptist.

We're still on Elizabeth. So here's what's amazing about all of this. This is all about the way God works in time. This is about God's timing in our lives and our disappointment. See, Elizabeth means the promise of God's abundant blessing.

But here's something interesting. If Elizabeth's promise had been fulfilled in the normal course of time, when all her high school friends were getting married and having babies and raising families, if that is when God had fulfilled this deep desire of Elizabeth's to

have a child, what would have happened? Her child would have been born in the wrong place, in the wrong time to serve as the ambassador of the Messiah, who was also born at an appointed time. These things have to match up in God's timing. God's timing is perfect.

His plan is perfect, and it's beautiful. And while he doesn't protect us from disappointment, I love this passage from Ecclesiastes. I talked about this over the summer. He makes all things beautiful in his time. In his time, all things are made beautiful.

First Corinthians 2, 9 and 10. Paul draws upon an old poem and it goes like this. What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no human mind could ever possibly conceive of on its own, the things that God has prepared for those who love him well, these are the things that remain a mystery for a while. Paul seems to imply. But these are the things that God has revealed to us by His Spirit.

He brings us in. He lets us know in his time, when we feel like we're drowning in a disappointment. It's hard to imagine that God might be preparing something incredibly good for us. But by his spirit, in his time, in his time, he makes all things beautiful and he makes all things clear. And until that time, just know this.

God wants to be your Elizabeth. God wants to be your Elisheva. He wants to be the God of promise and the God of provision. Even in this place where you may be, where you're disappointed with how your life is going, in one aspect or another. He wants you to draw daily upon the joy of the Lord to be your strength in this place of disappointment.

I don't know. I think it was Rascal Flatts who sang Life is a Highway and I want to ride it all. Remember that song? I'd love a highway. My life is a roller coaster.

Anyone know that world? Yeah, a highway would be, like, fantastic. Yeah, I will ride it all night long. But the roller coaster, I want to get off those things as quick as possible. Life is a roller coaster.

Most of you know about some of the incredible changes in my life this past year. It has been a roller coaster ride of exhilarating expectations and some very discouraging disappointment.

But on this roller coaster ride, I am seated beside two amazing young men who are riding this with me. People, young men that I have been tasked with learning how to love and care for. God did something that I never in a billion years could have thought to ask for or dream or imagine. But God just does that, doesn't he? And here's something that I thought of when I was prepping this a year ago.

The boys had been with me for about a month, and we were. Mason and I

had been to Lowe's to pick up a tree. I didn't have a tree. I didn't have lights, all that stuff. I'm basically an atheist when it comes to Christmas stuff.

So we went and we're gonna. We're gonna be a Christian home here for Christmas, and we're gonna put up a Christmas tree and have an attempt and all the stuff. Light a candle, for crying out loud. So we go and get the stuff and we're putting the tree up, putting the lights on, and Mason says, what this Christmas tree really needs is a train to go around the base of it.

This is the child God has given me. This is amazing. So we didn't get it that year. Budget was tight. But this year I said, you know what we're going to do?

We're going to get a train. And so, yeah, yesterday we went and got the train, and Mason spent some time putting that little train together. It's a simple train. You saw it.

One of those trains that just fit under the tree. You can get them at Walmart. But here's the deal. No mountains, no tunnel, none of the cool little bridges. I don't have a whole village set up around it.

But because it has this God of graciousness gift attached to it in the form of Mason Robert, that train is far grander than anything I could have come up with. Here's the deal. Our prayers are rarely answered the way we think they should be. We can give God all the advice we want, but God has another plan for us, more than we can ask or imagine. And in the short run, that can be disappointing.

But in the long run, we see that these temporary challenges, these temporary setbacks and disappointments, nine times out of 10, pave the way for an absolute miracle in our lives.

That's the message right there. Don't grow discouraged. Don't go weary and well doing. Keep pushing in with God. Because I believe God has put that desire in your heart.

And God will answer that desire in his time and in his way. And it's going to be a beautiful, amazing way at the perfect time in your life. Amen. Okay, let's move into time of communion. One of the names that I love most in Isaiah talks about the virgin shall have a child and she'll give birth and you'll call him.

God with us, Emmanuel. God with us. Wonderful counselor. Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Everlasting Father. We know that all of all those names.

There's one name that for me, always sort of resonates deeper than any of those other names. And maybe that's just where I'm at in my life

right now. But this is the name Emmanuel. And we know what that name means. It means God with us, wherever we're at in our lives.

That name points back to a promise in the Old Testament where God told the Israelites time and time and time again, that I will make my dwelling with you. I will be your God, and I will make my dwelling place with you. So that name points back to an old promise, but it also points forward to a future promise. In Revelation 21, here's what the writer tells us. John tells us.

He says, I heard a loud voice from heaven. This is the vision. This is the experience he had in the presence of God. He says, I heard a loud voice from the throne, and it said, look, look, look around. God now makes his home among his people.

It's been promised for a long, long time. We've gotten a taste of it there for three years when Jesus had his ministry on earth. But now look in God's perfect time, in God's perfect way. He's making all things beautiful now makes his home with the people. He will live with them, and they will be his people.

And God himself will be with them and be their God. And he'll wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death. There will be no more sadness. There will be no crying, no more pain.

There will be no more disappointments.

Why is this a communion meditation? Because when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, kneeling there, praying, Jesus had His own will in mind. Now, if that sounds heretical, stick with me. Jesus had his own will in mind. And he said, if it's possible, Lord, allow this cup to pass from me.

Here's what. Here's what, in this moment I wish could happen, Lord, Father, if this cup could pass from me, allow it to. He didn't pray that casually. I know. And then he follows it up with this.

Nevertheless, we know this. We know how this goes. Nevertheless, what does he say? Not my will, but yours. But yours.

That willingness and humility to trust the Father in the present. And then what's going to come, and he knows it's not going to be good, means that we now have. We now have the way opened up for us that we can live in this hope of an abundant providing God who is gracious to us and will bring us to that place where we will be his and he will be ours, and we will live together with no more disappointment.

Today, as you take the bread and the cup, these point to the obedience of Jesus and the trust of Jesus and His Father. This is a moment where you can bring your own disappointment to the cross as well. Say, lord,

here's what I hoped and here's where it is. And you know what I want. But in taking the bread and the cup, I once again say, not my will, but thine.

And in so doing, you're going to renew your trust in the God who keeps his word. I never doubt that. Who keeps his word and who is faithful to his children. And it will bring all things and make all things beautiful in his time. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can bring our lives to you.

You are God with us. You're Emmanuel. You know us. You live in our world. You live in our hearts.

You understand our minds and our thinking. You understand the things that frustrate us, the things that bring us delight and joy, you know, the things that trip us up and the snares that we get so easily entangled in. And you love us. You do not abandon us. You do not forsake us.

You do not leave us. You are God with us, Emmanuel. And so today, in just the honesty of the moment where we're struggling with some stuff in our lives, Lord, we pray that we would be able to bring those to you and trust you to make beautiful the disappointing parts of the world that we live in. Lord, we thank you for all the times where we can look back and see exactly how you've done that that teach us to know that all things will work out for your glory and our good simply because you love us. We give thanks for that.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church. Did you know you can watch all of our video content, both current and past, on our YouTube channel. Visit [YouTube.com sherwoodoaks](https://www.youtube.com/sherwoodoaks) to watch messages, series and complete worship services.