

PREFACE: FROM MARY NAEGELI

When asked to write a group Bible study that would cover the entire gospel of Luke in nine lessons, I immediately felt a burden of impossibility. Having taught Luke almost line-by-line in adult Bible studies and preached from its text often, I was forced to take an entirely different approach for this project. While you will judge whether we were successful, our goals for this study were these:

- expose the participant to the entire gospel, though not necessarily in chronological order,
- favor texts that are unique to Luke (there is much overlap between Luke and Matthew especially), and
- focus on themes and emphases that Luke himself brings out.

The result of my commitments to these goals is the list of nine themes, each of which is explored in its own lesson. Saying “yes” to these commitments meant saying “no” to some other potential features of a Luke Bible study:

- No, we do not cover the life of Jesus Christ in chronological order.
- No, we are not able to capture all of Jesus’ teaching.
- No, we miss some very famous events and parables, because they were not unique to Luke.



Whether your group will be studying Luke over nine months or nine weeks, we do hope that throughout your study time you will find the discipline of personal study and group discussion to so pique your curiosity that you will be ready to read the gospel straight through in preparation for Lesson Nine! By then, our hope is that the dramatic arc of the story, the strong personal impression Jesus makes, and the chosen themes will find their way into your heart.

The question has arisen often in my Bible study classes, “Why do we have four gospels instead of just one?” To answer this question, let me give you an illustration. When the stage musical *Les Misérables* first came to San Francisco, my husband, Andy, and I were lucky enough to obtain tickets. We were alerted by friends who saw it first that the story line goes very fast in the first act. They advised us to see “the movie” to get familiar with the narrative. The 1937 Charles Lawton version in black and white focused on the moral choices and dilemmas of the characters. When we returned the film, we noticed there was a full-color 1976 version, so we watched that one, too. Shot on location, this effort focused on the romances and relationships of the story. Oh wow, we wondered, that’s so different from the first one. But familiar now with the characters, we attended the musical, which seemed to highlight the political maneuvers and personal grudges. So we had to ask, “What is the real story?” To find out, Andy got the book and read all 1232 pages written by Victor Hugo. His conclusion? The story was so rich, so verbose, so multi-faceted, that no one genre could contain it all.

And that is why we have four gospels. Jesus’ life was so rich, so grand, so multi-faceted, that no one account could possibly capture everything important about him! Luke chose, as did Matthew, Mark, and John, what he would emphasize, which stories he would include, and even in some cases which order events would be presented to reinforce the message God had placed upon his heart for the world to hear. He couldn’t say everything there was to say about Jesus, but he tried to be faithful to the task. The end result is what we have as “the gospel according to Luke.”

With this humbling reminder, I acknowledge that the Bible study we offer you is another feeble rendering of a magnificent whole. I trust that you will use it as a doorway into the first century and discover the remarkable personality, purpose, and power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Mary Holder Naegeli

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY



Since our goal is to become familiar with the entire gospel of Luke, this study is constructed in a way unique to our NPWL offerings of past years. Please read this guide thoroughly to prepare yourself for its joys and rigors and to understand the reasons for the choices we made.

Understand the General Structure. Each lesson includes a *personal study assignment* designed to help you, the individual learner, dig into the Luke texts appropriate to the lesson's theme, and a set of group discussion questions for your meeting. The *group discussion questions* require higher levels of thinking (such as analysis or synthesis) than the exploratory questions of the personal study. This is done to help the group use the information you have gathered on your own to identify and develop appropriate application to life. We found this to be the best method for doing justice to the book, and we hope it will enable you to get beyond information to transformation!

Embrace the Time Commitment. Be forewarned! Waiting until the night before your group meeting to do the lesson will not allow you enough time to process the material. In fact, with an average of ten paragraphs from Scripture to unpack each lesson, it would be wise to schedule several quiet times for your personal study—a good habit that will enrich your spiritual life permanently! Overall, we hope that you will spend sufficient time - perhaps several hours - to prepare your part of the study.

Take Your Shoes Off. Approach this study as though walking through a door onto white carpet. “Take your shoes off, for the place you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). In other words, leave your preconceived notions at the door, and try to open Luke as though reading it for the first time. God wants to speak to you, and will do so through the book of Luke, if you are willing to approach in reverence and with a willingness to listen.

Focus on the Text. In this study of Luke, we will mine as much information from the text as possible. You spend time considering its impact on your faith, life, and future decisions. You will delve into the Luke text and base your answers on what you see there first. Though this is not a “line-by-line” type study, it is text based. Once you are clear on what the Word actually says, then you can go on to the “What does it mean?” and “What implications does it have for my life?” questions with confidence.

Grapple with the Questions. My aim has been to ask questions clearly, but that does not necessarily mean the answers will be clear. In fact, some of the best questions for discussion can be answered several different ways, so don't be afraid of some ambiguities or unknowns. My philosophy of question-writing is this: without giving anything away in the wording, ask questions that require a close scrutiny of the Scripture text and a thoughtful look into one's heart! When you get stuck, just mark it and keep going. You never know when some new insight will pop up, and at least you will be ready. If all else fails, bring your unresolved queries to the group; you're probably not the only one with the same question! And remember that prayer helps, too. God really does want to be known and desires this wonderful revelation to be a part of your life. So expect God's help and wisdom, which is promised to all who ask.



Having investigated everything carefully...I wrote

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY



Face the Tensions You Might Feel. Some internal tensions might build as you do this study, but persevere through them for your own spiritual growth.

- Feeling that you are not “getting it”—understandable, and absolutely no reflection on your intellect or worth. Don’t be afraid to ask questions!
- Resentment about the time it is taking you to prepare the lesson—make the choice to stretch yourself in this area, and you will be rewarded richly for the effort. You can go as far as you want with these questions, so do what you can with the time you have. If we’ve done our job right, your curiosity will build and the time factor will diminish.
- Reticence to explore the very personal implications of some of the lessons—this is fundamentally a spiritual issue, and all we can say is, God cares about you and will help you live in faith and trust if you ask. No one is too old, too learned, too young, or too inexperienced to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. But it won’t happen if you keep that “hall closet” with its skeleton locked and inaccessible to our Lord.
- Maintaining appropriate privacy while welcoming legitimate accountability with the members of your discussion group—this issue comes up when you feel the answer to a particular question is just too private to share. It’s okay to say, “Pass,” and the others will understand; but we also expect you not to avoid this issue in your life and will want to pray for you.



Love Your Group. Listen carefully to each other and welcome contributions to the discussion. Be sensitive to group dynamics by not monopolizing the conversation. Come prepared and share honestly. Open yourself to the ministry and love of your small group members. Pray for one another, and allow the others to know what is concerning you, too. Take this opportunity to deepen your relationships not only with Christ but with each other!



...so that you may know the exact truth. Luke 1:3-4

THE BACKGROUND OF LUKE

Who wrote the gospel?

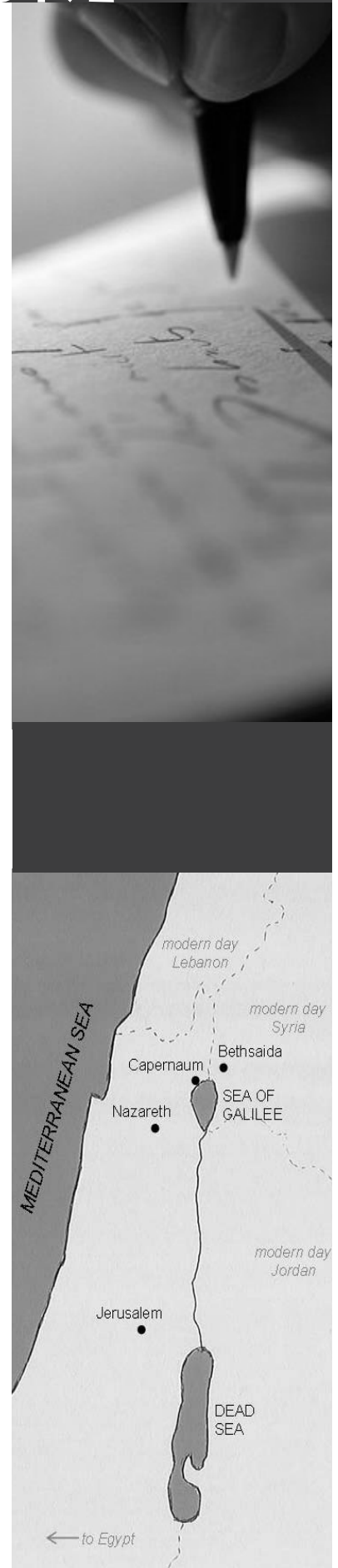
Luke's name is not found in the gospel, so we must do a little sleuthing to piece together a plausible identity of the author and his audience. Our main sources from the Scripture are Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:3, Acts 16:10-17 (and other subsequent "we passages" in Acts), and Colossians 4:10-11. From these references we can deduce:

- Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus' life, death, or resurrection; therefore, he was not an apostle. He was not one of the original twelve disciples.
- Luke was probably not Jewish, according to Colossians 4:10-11, but certainly was a Christian believer.
- Luke was an occasional companion of the apostle Paul, starting with Paul's second missionary journey. Luke likely joined the party in Troas (Acts 16:10-17). We know this because the narrative in Acts shifts to "we did [this]" in Acts 16.
- Luke is identified as "the doctor" (Colossians 4:10-11). There is some demonstration of the author's medical interest in the gospel, but no special medical vocabulary is used. Physicians of the first century would have used the knowledge and methods of Hippocrates (4th century BC). Though organized, Hippocrates' theories were incomplete at a time when medicine was considered an art rather than a science. Nevertheless, there was a body of medical data that was categorized and added to by new observation. [The "scientific method" would come almost 1,000 years later.] Luke knew how to gather evidence.
- Luke's vocabulary is extensive and varied, suggesting a higher education and a certain intelligence.
- Luke researched the life and work of Jesus carefully, by interviewing eyewitnesses. He desired to produce an orderly account of Jesus' ministry and life in the early church. We presume that one of his primary sources was Paul himself. Because of the similarities in their introductions, vocabulary, and style, there is little dispute that the gospel and the Acts of the Apostles were written by the same author. This joint account represents a significant amount of work, as the story's time line spans several decades and encompasses many characters.

Where did the events of Luke's gospel take place?

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Israel, about five miles south of Jerusalem. The geographical range of most gospel activity encompasses Nazareth, Capernaum and Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, and Jerusalem to the south, altogether spanning no more than 80 miles. Travel was primarily on foot and skirted Samaria between the two regions. Matthew and Mark record journeys to Tyre and Sidon on the Lebanese coast and the cities of the Decapolis, another 80 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. But Luke does not mention these excursions, favoring instead to relate encounters with non-Jews within the area we now call the West Bank. Unlike John, who has Jesus going back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem during his three-year ministry, Luke has Jesus turning his face resolutely toward Jerusalem in 9:51 as the culmination of his ministry approaches.

Just as movie directors make decisions that simplify or streamline a plot so that the main point is not obscured, Luke has arranged the rich and varied information about Jesus' life and ministry into a cohesive whole for our benefit. As the story unfolds, we see that Luke's emphasis is on Jesus and the nature of God's saving work through him. "To you is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!" May you experience his vitality and recognize his mission in your life as you study Luke's account.



BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

BY MARY HOLDER NAEGELI

GUIDANCE FOR THE PERSON LEADING DISCUSSION

THE TASK OF LEADING A DISCUSSION GROUP

The best discussion groups involve the participation of every person present at the meeting, with just a few prods and suggestions from the group's leader. Your role as facilitator of discussion can be seen in many different ways, depending on your personality and the needs of the group. At any particular time you might be coach, networker, sympathizer, expert (only for a minute), encourager, pray-er, or organizer. Depending on your spiritual gifts and those of your small group members, you may only have to say, "Let's start," and the group galvanizes into action. Most groups take some time to build trust and a rhythm of working together, and your leadership will help steer the process in the right direction.

The truth is, a small group develops over time, and it would be your goal as its facilitator to foster an environment in which every voice can be heard and respected (not necessarily agreed with), where God is sought and honored, and where the Scriptures are "handled rightly." At the beginning of a group's life, the leader is more directive until each person feels comfortable with the reason for being together, practiced in the routine of getting together, and familiar enough with one another to be able to share at a deeper level.

If your group has been together for awhile prior to starting *Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke*, many of the developmental dynamics have already taken place. You should have no trouble digging into this study, and even rotating leadership. However, I would not advise newly formed groups to rotate discussion leaders for at least four weeks, until the patterns have been established and buy-in to the study is complete.

The discussions will go much, much better if your participants actually do the homework in the first few pages of each lesson. Those questions are not reiterated in the group time, which assumes that each member has accumulated the knowledge of the texts and thought about their personal application. Urge your members to read the material that appears at the beginning of the workbook, where the case is made for coming prepared.

In the event that you have group members who are not able to do the homework ahead of time, you may ask at the beginning of the discussion what the main points of the Luke texts were and have others report their findings. This is time consuming, but it may be necessary for the sake of the whole, until the others get their rhythm. One of our overarching goals is to encourage participants to open their own Bibles, feel comfortable finding and reading passages, and seeing how it applies to their lives. If Bible study is new to them, this format is a good way to start.

THE MATERIAL IN UNDERSTANDING JESUS IN THE WORLD OF LUKE

The first few pages of introduction in the book explain some of the basic assumptions that governed our approach to the gospel. The background on Luke is meant to offer a common knowledge base to everybody, assuming this experience is new to at least a few.

Each lesson begins with an opening thought which introduces the general theme of the lesson.

“Time Travel Research: Gather the Data” pages identify Luke passages relevant to the lesson’s theme. We ask each person to find and read these selections, establish their immediate context in the story, and remember the gist of its content. In an “inductive Bible study” this would be the **OBSERVE** phase. Then in “Time Travel Research: Interpret the Data,” learners are asked some questions, either sending them to different passages to augment the first set, or to try to interpret the meaning and purpose of the data collected earlier. This is the **INTERPRET** phase, in which you unpack the text in light of its context and as the original readers understood it. By the end of this phase, you should feel that the theme has focused.

The last couple of questions in private study point toward personal application, particularly if the questions are more personal in nature. Since these questions are pursued individually, one can perhaps be more honest without the fear of telling the whole group. Having said that, the “Back to the Future: Group Discussion” questions are intended to be a vehicle for trying out new ideas for personal application. For those who want to avoid disclosure until it is less threatening (perhaps in the next meeting or two), the questions can usually be answered in a more distanced fashion. Be alert to this dynamic, and take cues from your group members about what constitutes a “safe” environment for sharing.

By the end of the meeting, each participant should have a pretty good idea of a basic application of the lessons and one concrete idea (at least) for implementing it in real life. Urge them to this end.

Just a note here about format: regardless of the way the layout sets up the questions on the page, the intended order of the questions follows down one page and then resumes at the top of the next page. In Lesson 1, for instance (pages 6 & 7), the white box across the top half of both pages suggest that those questions within it go together. But the intended order of questions is achieved by working down page 6 and then continuing at the top of page 7. This is the pattern throughout the study.

HOW TO USE THE LEADING NOTES

Your best preparation for leading the discussion of these lessons is by doing the Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke workbook yourself. In fact, please do this before you refer to the Leading Notes for help! You have only one chance to experience the lesson the way your group participants are experiencing it (ambiguities, anxieties and all), so please give yourself that insight. After you have completed the personal study pages, then read and absorb the Leading Notes provided in this guide.

The Learning Objectives at the top of each guide are designed to alert you to the intended direction and focus of the lesson. Some of these objectives may be met by individuals working at home on the workbook, but the Relational Objectives and the Process Objectives can only be met in the discussion time itself. If you have these objectives well in mind before the group meeting, you can keep the discussion focused and on track with where the lesson is going.

How small groups work together develops over time. As personalities emerge and gel (or perhaps clash), as spiritual gifts come out, or as personal lives are made known, a small group becomes something larger than the sum of its parts. The processes at the beginning are fairly straightforward, but later in the series, you'll see the process goals get more challenging as the group is expected to accomplish more, to feel more deeply, or to analyze more maturely the material presented.

After the learning objectives, you'll find informational notes on the content asked for in the study pages of the workbook. They are general comments meant to give you a good sense of where we hope the discussion will focus. They are not to be used as "the right answer" in discussion; they are offered to reassure you that you have found the links and meanings of the texts.

The group discussion section of the guide focuses more on the intention of the discussion questions and the process you can expect to lead. It is here that we offer concrete suggestions for how to conduct the meeting, though not an exhaustive play-by-play.

Each meeting is to be opened and closed with prayer, and suggested topics are included here. It is understood that at the beginning of the group's life together, prayer aloud might be awkward for some. We have taken that into account and made suggestions for easing into the group prayer discipline over the course of the nine meetings.

THE WORLD THAT HEROD BUILT

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- transport themselves back to first century Israel under Roman rule
- become familiar with the reach of Roman rule into everyday life in the first century
- feel the seriousness of the pagan environment surrounding John's and Jesus' ministry
- admire Jesus' deft handling of conflicting claims for his loyalty and endorsement
- yearn, with first century Jewish citizens, for their promised Messiah (as relief from Roman oppression)
- distinguish between governmental authority and God's reign
- identify concrete steps toward faith as a way of life in their civic involvements
- become responsible citizens who work within the freedoms and limitations a "secular" government

[Process Objectives]

- discover the joy and fascination of the inductive method of Bible study, by gleaning information from Scripture, pondering its meaning and significance to first century hearers, and applying its lessons to their lives today
- get in the rhythm of advanced preparation for each lesson
- recognize the difference between the types of questions asked in the personal study (pages 1-5) and the discussion section (pages 6-7).
- desire to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- have a good first experience of this study and discussion
- get to know their fellow adventurers
- take the risk and pray a one-sentence prayer for a fellow participant at the end of the meeting.

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 1-5)

The general point of this lesson is that Roman rule permeated first century Jewish experience, and most of its influence was negative if not oppressive. The leaders ranged from ruthless (Herod) to ambiguous (Pilate), while the Jewish leaders relied on these leaders to prosecute offenses within that community. Jesus' relationship with the Romans and their sympathizers was non-discriminatory (socializing with tax collectors [Luke 19:1-10] and healing centurions' staff [chapter 7]), shrewd (13:32, 20:20-26), and unlike his cousin John, uninvolved with Herod's exploits (3:19). Jesus was

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not a political threat to the Romans, even though the Pharisees for their own purposes tried to characterize him as such (23:7). Jesus kept his sights on another Kingdom, the Kingdom of God (4:43) and left earthly realms to their rulers. In application, the question of a Christian's involvement in, for instance, American politics is raised but not necessarily discounted. We leave it to you and your group to sort out how you can engage in governance and politics without selling your soul.

PAGE 2 NOTES:

The references to Roman rulers in Luke 1 and 2 established the time frame for Jesus' birth and early life. This is how we can date Jesus' birth to between 6 and 4 B.C., which defined Quirinius' term of office. Luke is the only gospel writer to attach secular dates to the gospel narrative.

The first two chapters of Luke present the Roman ruler as almost benign, though one might see the demand for a census and the hardship this placed on peasants as abusive. But as chapter three unfolds, we see the tetrarch take an interest in John the Baptist and Jesus, and antipathy develops. Thirty years later (Luke 9), Herod Antipas exhibits insecurity about criticism, evidenced by locking John the Baptist in jail. Jewish rulers try to intimidate Jesus with threats of Roman interference. When this doesn't work, they accuse Jesus of political offenses against Rome: being subversive, evading taxes, and claiming to be a "king."

PAGE 3 NOTES:

Matthew's gospel highlights the Flight into Egypt, made necessary by Herod's killing of Jewish male babies. This account shows Herod is ruthless, manipulative, deceptive and jealous of his power. His son, Herod Antipas, is easily led astray by seductive women and tries to avert political unrest by killing John the Baptist.

The reaction to Roman rulers by Jews is fear and appeasement. Joseph and Mary comply with the requirement to travel to Bethlehem for the census. After Jesus' birth, an angel warns the new parents to flee to Egypt to avoid persecution (Matthew 2:13) and their suspicion and fear of Herod and his offspring keep them from resettling anywhere near Jerusalem (Matthew 2:19-23) later. Nazareth is an insignificant "back-water" town where Jesus can grow up in obscurity.

Jesus' first reaction to Roman pressure appears in Luke 14:1-13. Upon hearing the news of John's execution, Jesus goes off by himself presumably to think and pray. He is sobered, but as the evidence unfolds, this illegal and ruthless action by Herod Antipas has no intimidating effect on Jesus.

PAGE 4 NOTES:

The passages cited demonstrate some of the civic intrusions of the Romans into everyday life: tax collection, corruption (cheating, bribes, and false testimony), financial coordination, and legal system.

PAGE 5 NOTES:

Jesus shows little concern for “the things of Caesar,” but is very concerned about his followers showing primary loyalty to God. The Jewish leaders, in contrast, have a vested interest in keeping Roman rulers happy because, for them at this time, life is fairly good and they are given power among their own people. Anything that rocked that boat (Jesus’ actions especially) is suppressed.

We see evidence that Jesus is a law-abiding citizen, but that he does not recognize the Romans to have moral authority or any say in how he conducts himself and his ministry. Jesus is very concerned that Zaccheus pay back the people he had cheated (Luke 19), suggesting that collecting taxes for the Romans is not in itself wrong, but bilking the people by charging too much is wrong.

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGES 6 & 7)

Each participant has come to group discussion, we hope, having read the assigned passages and given some thought to the questions above. If at any time you feel the discussion gets off track, that is, the learners settle into tangents or points of view that are contrary to the basic data presented in the Scriptures, you as group facilitator can help by referring back to the appropriate study question. Remember, we want to use facts from the Scripture itself as evidence to support an answer, if we can.

The year this study is published happens to be a presidential election year, and feelings may run hot or cold or evenly divided in your group about “religion and politics.” Help your participants listen well, speak judiciously, and show open-mindedness; our agenda is not to identify with a contemporary political party, but to discover how we can be Christ-centered even as we search out our civic responsibility and appropriate role in the Kingdom of God.

Open your meeting with a short prayer for Christ’s Spirit to guide you, and dedicate the time and discussion to the Lord’s glory.

PAGE 6 NOTES:

The answers to the first two questions can vary widely, depending on the diversity of your group. What may be “protective services” to one person may be “intimidating presence” to someone else. Foster sensitivity to the feelings presented at this point. . . there’s no “right” or “wrong” answer to these questions.

The “then” and “now” question is meant to deepen the learners’ appreciation for the seriousness of Roman oppression (with a possible side effect of appreciating constitutional freedoms now). However, the point may also come out that just because things are better for us here in America than they were for Jews under Roman rule, nevertheless, our relationship with civic government cannot constitute a primary loyalty, which is reserved for God alone.

PAGE 7 NOTES:

Regarding the choices for characterizing Jesus' relationship with Roman rule, there's an element of truth in almost all of them. As a group, go down the list of possibilities and discuss the merits of each. Give prime time to this discussion, with an eye to application (the last question of the discussion, bottom of page 7).

The "Stop and Think" question assumes the participants know a little about Roman history, like *Pax Romana* and first century commerce. Suffice it to say, the Roman occupation of Israel put the conquered people in touch with the rest of the Mediterranean world. Word could spread, powerful people could be impressed, because there were roads, commercial travel, leadership transfers, mail and other powerful communication tools (well, okay, limited to first century technology). On the other hand, the dominance of Rome made the Jews lowly, and their obscurity on the world stage would allow Jesus Christ to work without Roman interference for most of his adult ministry. The circumstances certainly proved that Jesus did not need earthly political power to further his agenda, nor could a hostile, dominating power stop him.

"What Jesus would want you to remember" is the application question of the study. In discussion help your learners get specific about how they would live out their discipleship in this area. Possible answers might include "treating people honestly" and "avoiding financial corruption," "without sacrificing your integrity as a Christian disciple, work with all kinds of people for the good of all," and many more.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

Be sure to close your time in prayer for one another and for responsible engagement in civic affairs. This is your first meeting, and some might not be comfortable with praying out loud in a group. So ask your fellow learners to suggest areas where they might get involved or change the nature of their involvement in the community political process, and then encourage one-sentence prayers for God's leading, power, humility and character to fill them. Individuals in groups have found it helpful to focus on the prayer request of the person to his or her right, and you might suggest this as an easy way to get started.

GOD'S PROMISE AND PURPOSE

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- discover the “back-story” of Jesus’ birth in the context of God’s plan for salvation
- identify the OT covenants that God made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and eventually with all people
- appreciate God’s covenants as indicators of his plan for the salvation of all humankind
- see the continuity between God’s covenant promises of the OT with their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ in the NT
- stand in awe of God’s desire to initiate relationship with wayward humanity in order to reconcile us to himself
- hope and pray for the salvation of all people in Jesus Christ
- feel a personal need and gratitude for the salvation God has enacted through Jesus Christ
- purpose to show gratitude for God’s salvation by behaving according to God’s will (seeing the connection between “faith” and “obedience”)
- be assured that God acts faithfully on his promises
- become people whose hope for themselves and for the world is in Jesus Christ the Lord

[Process Objectives]

- develop skills in the inductive method of Bible study, by
gleaning information from Scripture,
understanding continuity and links between OT and NT
and recognizing themselves as recipients of God’s story of salvation
- experience the fruit of meditative Bible reading
- desire to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- not be afraid to open up to the grand and personal themes of this study and discussion
- get to know their fellow adventurers at a deeper level
- take the risk and share one hope for which others can pray

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 10-13)

The general point of this lesson is that God has been working on a plan for the reconciliation of all people to himself since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. God initiated personal contact with Noah and then Abraham, as a way of declaring his presence (“I am your God”), establishing a relationship with a particular people (“You are my people”), and setting in motion a process

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by which all could be saved from the consequences of sin. God's relationship with Abraham and his offspring (known as the people of Israel) is the grand illustration of God's desire to relate to all people. When Jesus appeared on the scene, he was recognized as the Christ and Savior of the world. Wow! Through him, all the promises of God were and are fulfilled, and every person has the opportunity to be reconciled to the Creator.

PAGE 10 NOTES:

Luke 1 and 2 build anticipation for the Savior, through the prophecies and declarations of angels, priests and devout Jews. The word is that this baby Jesus to be born is "the salvation of Israel," "the Savior, Christ the Lord!" The promise and plan of God is to provide salvation through Jesus Christ, to bring people to repentance, to overcome evil and to reign forever. The promises are made to lowly people: Zechariah, Mary, shepherds, Simeon . . . and through them to all Jews first, and then to "all the people" (including Gentiles) in 2:31-32. That includes us!

PAGE 11 NOTES:

It is important to realize that the expectation of God's people for a saving Messiah goes back to the beginning of time. The lesson does not refer to very subtle Messiah sightings in Genesis 3:15 & 22, but picks up the redemptive story with Noah, then Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon. God made eternal promises to all these men, who themselves could not see that far ahead. It is interesting to note the frequency with which promises were made regarding a nation (Gen 12, Ex 19, 2 Sam 7), land (Gen 15, 2 Sam 7) and progeny (Gen 17:16, 2 Sam 7). But the key features of divine covenant are three-fold: God declares that a relationship exists between God and the Chosen (no human initiative "Gee, I think I'd like to get to know God better"—God spoke first!); God sees this as an "eternal covenant," that is, permanent; and, God expects us to act like people under covenant, following God's decrees and commands.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all these promises, coming to earth through the line of David to establish God's eternal kingdom. Jesus was sent by God to redeem his people from sin and reconcile them to God.

PAGE 12-13 NOTES:

This spiritual exercise is intended to give every participant the experience of meditative Bible reading, in which you put yourself into the story to observe and feel the events first-hand. Though not referred to specifically in the group discussion, this encounter might elicit insights among your members—and it would be good to inquire about how it went. If, on the other hand, your group found this exercise difficult or fruitless, listen for what might have thwarted its purpose and make this a subject for prayer.

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGES 14 & 15)

Open your meeting with a short prayer for Christ's Spirit to guide you, and dedicate the time and discussion to the Lord's glory.

PAGE 14 NOTES:

The overarching problem? Sin and its consequences, including alienation from God, experienced both personally and corporately by all humankind.

God's plan of salvation was advanced as he took initiative to identify himself, chose a person (Abraham), and then chose a people (the Israelites) with whom to work to make YHWH and salvation known to "the nations." By establishing a relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God was illustrating in microcosm the choosing of people to be his own. Later, in Christ (prophesied by Jeremiah), this promise is extended to all people. Anyone, to be considered "chosen," would be expected to obey God's decrees and commands.

Jesus' part in God's redemptive plan was to appear in our midst, fully human and fully divine, to reconcile us to God. He redeemed human life by living it sinlessly himself, and he atoned for sin by his ultimate sacrifice on the Cross. Christ's resurrection from the dead enabled him to reign forever on "the throne of David."

Have we seen the end of the story? Yes and no. Yes, Jesus defeated all the powers that alienated human beings from God (sin and death); but no, people are still coming to know and believe in Jesus Christ, and the world must still be redeemed (Rom 8, Mt 24:14, 1 Cor 15:24).

PAGE 15 NOTES:

God's promise and purpose is that 1) God is our God—we won't ever discover a bigger or better one than YHWH; 2) God has done what was needed to reconcile us to himself; and (by implication) 3) God has done everything necessary to redeem *my* life and empower me to live in covenant gratitude and obedience.

The "take a leap" question is intended to help the participants see their own ministry as an extension of God's plan and purpose. For many, this is an entirely new thought. But think of it this way: if God intends to reach out to every single person, through belief in the Son of God, Jesus Christ the Lord, then wouldn't it make sense that those who have been reached and known by God would extend God's reach to others and widening the circle? For many "out there," the *only* contact they will have with God is through a person like you whose life has become an extension of God's redeeming love.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

The last question points to prayer needs that might have come up during the individual Bible meditation on Simeon (Luke 2:25-32). In order to set the expectation that lengthy, deep, personal sharing is not necessary (this is only the second meeting of the group), model a brief response to the question of “What promise are you waiting to be fulfilled?” Ask others to do likewise, following the bulleted questions, and then invite prayers for “the person sitting to your right.”

CHRIST'S MISSION

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- understand the purpose for Christ's coming: to seek and save the lost, to forgive sins, and to release people from bondage
- discover that they, too, have a mission in life that is a continuation of Christ's purposes
- celebrate the promise that Christ's salvation is available to all people, despite their worldly condition
- make the distinction between a mission focus (narrowing down the options to a specialized area of Christian service) and mission expansion (enlarging the range of availability)
- express gratitude for Christ's mission that reached into their lives individually, to the point that they now have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord
- identify and (re)commit to a specific ministry action that fulfills their mission in life
- evaluate their current commitments for consistency with Christ's mission in the world and church
- become individuals who live as called people rather than driven people

[Process Objectives]

- develop skills in the inductive method of Bible study, by
observing the development of today's theme through the course of the gospel of Luke
interpreting this material properly to discover Christ's message about their own calling
and taking concrete steps to align themselves with that message
- begin to think theologically about the meaning of life
- desire to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- support one another in the pursuit of their life calling
- get to know their fellow adventurers at a deeper level
- share one hope for personal mission focus and/or expansion, and receive prayer support

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 10-13)

The point of this lesson is to recognize the primary reason for Jesus Christ to be incarnated in our midst: he came to seek and to save the lost, to preach, to heal, and to release every human being from the consequences of our universal problem, sin. By the time Jesus was 12, he was aware that his heavenly Father had business for him to do, but his ministry went public and full-time when he was thirty. His identification with the anointed one of Isa 61:1-2 set tongues wagging in his

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hometown, but this did not deter him from a clear focus on offering salvation or widening his audience throughout Israel and among Gentiles. If Jesus had such a clear mission, is it possible that his followers would also be called to focus their ministry efforts with the same keen intensity? The application questions will define and guide this inquiry, with the hope that group participants will discover God's calling upon their lives.

PAGE 18 NOTES:

Scripture passages that give some insight into Christ's developing sense of call are listed here. At an early age, Jesus is aware that he has come to do God's business (not, presumably, his own), that this business entails preaching good news to the disadvantaged, proclaiming release from bondage of all sorts, and declaring the Lord's favor available to all people. Jesus also demonstrates authority in teaching, healing and forgiving sins (*gasp!*).

Jesus' declaration in the Nazarene synagogue (Lk 4:14-22) is extremely significant for at least three reasons: 1) this event occurs immediately after his 40-day desert retreat, and seems to be the announcement that his time has come to do the things for which he was sent; 2) by using a powerful and well-known passage in Isaiah that everybody knew referred to the Messiah, he was claiming to be the One for whom they had been waiting; and 3) the focus of his ministry is those who need release, rescue, and salvation.

PAGE 19 NOTES:

The key theme of Jesus' ministry calling, just in case you missed it, is **FORGIVENESS!**

Who stands to benefit? Anyone, particularly those with no social advantage at all, can be released from bondage to sin and its consequences. Examples include the man with leprosy, women of loose morals, babies, as well as the poor, imprisoned, the blind, and the oppressed. To be fair with the text, God's salvation is not *only* for the poor, as evidenced by Jesus' offers to the rich (Lk 18:18-27) and powerful (Lk 7:1-10). But Jesus goes to special lengths to be sure the powerless have been reached and loved and released from their infirmities and conditions.

Jesus focuses his mission on the spiritual needs (often accompanied by very physical needs) of the lost; but his efforts expanded to include not only "the house of Israel" but also Samaritans, Gentiles, and pagan Romans. The gospel of Matthew has Jesus placing a priority on reaching "the lost sheep of Israel" (15:24; 10:6), but Luke does not mention this limitation and in fact promotes the idea that Jesus' salvation was "for all people" (Lk 2:10).

PAGE 20 NOTES:

There are various ways to get at the question of "What am I doing? Why am I here?" One way is to pick up on the theme introduced by the songs and celebrations early in Luke (1:46, 2:9, 2:14, 2:20, and 2:32). Presbyterians have a confessional statement that [our] "chief and highest end is to

glorify God . . .” So in answer to the question of how this focus can shape your life, it might be helpful to examine what it means to glorify God. Glorifying God involves giving praise, reflecting God’s nature (letting God’s light shine) in me; shedding light on God or making him known; giving credit to God for mighty works and subtle influences.

These aspects of glorifying God can find expression in our everyday life in such ways as 1) giving credit where credit is due; not withholding acknowledgment of God’s activity in a situation; 2) hoping that people would see Jesus in me, and experience something of God’s grace coming out in the way I speak and act toward them; 3) caring for those who are overlooked, despised, or underestimated by others.

PAGE 21 NOTES:

The purpose of these questions is to give the learners an opportunity to recall the circumstances that drew them into the circle of God’s grace and truth. If Jesus’ mission is to seek and save the lost, to forgive sin, and to release us from its consequences, the question here should focus on how your group members have experienced this happening. Some members may feel there was never a time in their lives when God was outside their experience, but even if there is no “conversion date” to recall, encourage your members to share as concretely as possible some aspect of life in which God has acted in a saving, redeeming way.

The comments made at the bottom of page 21 are intended to prime the pump for a conversation that may turn out to be difficult for some (on page 22), having to do with their calling in life. Particularly as people get older, there is a great temptation to feel that they are too old to find a new purpose for living. But anyone can “glorify God,” which is the most important calling of all!

Please note that there is a typographical error on the last line of this page. The first Scripture reference should be Luke 4:43; but while we’re at it, you might as well add John 4:39 as a beautiful example of how the testimony of one woman changed an entire town!

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGES 22 AND 23)

Open your meeting with a short prayer of thanks for what Christ has done for you, and ask him to continue seeking us out, even as we seek him out in the Word of God.

PAGE 22 NOTES:

There is enough material in the personal study section to guide this first question, of Christ’s mission.

The theme of Jesus ministry seems clear enough, but the question of when Jesus became aware of his mission is interesting, because scholars disagree. For instance, is it possible that Jesus might

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not have really understood his calling until his prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night he was betrayed? Help your group look again at the Scriptural evidence and come to a conclusion about Jesus' sense of calling and purpose.

Jesus approached his assignment with amazing calm, considering the competing pressures and expectations of Roman rule, Jewish expectation, and his own very humble circumstances. It is clear, though, that Jesus did not seek to become a celebrity, a politician, or a powerful person of any kind. He stayed “under the radar” by going from village to village in Galilee (not the hub of the socially elite or politically powerful), starting first in synagogues to teach “the lost sheep of Israel” and then conducting an itinerant ministry to reach the lowly and undistinguished citizens of the area. His message was clear, and it required a choice to follow or not; but it was accessible to all.

The question of purpose in life is meant to help your learners to articulate the sense they have of a unique contribution they are making to the work of Christ's kingdom. If they get stuck answering this one, ask them where they feel drawn to human need, or what sort of passion moves them to act, or what cause do they have a heart for? If they have ever made the effort to discover their spiritual gifts, this exercise might provide a clue to their calling. Or perhaps, from negative experience, have they become aware of a need they have felt the tug to address?

PAGE 23 NOTES:

The purpose of the first question here is to get your folks interacting with each other on common experiences, particularly in the way they have determined their calling in life. This might also be the catalyst for a discussion of a group project, if enough people are headed in the same direction.

You, with every Christian believer, is a result of Christ's mission. How? His faithful witnesses transmitted the good news from one generation to another until *you* heard the gospel of the Kingdom, your sins were forgiven, your life was redeemed and reoriented around Christ's mission to reach others!

One's personal mission overlaps Christ's mission when it seeks out the “lost,” offers the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19), and makes known the salvation of Jesus Christ to others. People may not see their “church activities” this way at all, in which case it would be worth the effort to uncover whether the congregation's mission aligns with Christ's or if it has become something other than a mission outpost in its community and beyond

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

Let the last question on page 23 inform your prayer time this week. As each person identifies a personal vision for mission—even tentatively—pray for this movement and the empowerment of God's Spirit to accomplish Christ's mission through him or her. Don't forget, “to glorify God” is a great calling, so in the absence of any other vision for ministry, pray that God would be glorified by the prayers, the conduct and the attitude of each group member.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- observe the remarkable frequency with which Luke refers to the arrival, filling and work of the Holy Spirit in ordinary people's lives
- discover the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in several Old Testament examples
- recognize the difference between the Spirit showing up when needed and the Spirit coming to abide in the believer permanently
- be able to identify signs of the Spirit's presence and activity, including faith, joy, and commitment to God's will
- welcome the appearance and movement of the Holy Spirit in their personal lives
- feel caution and a need for "testing the Spirit" as they learn how to listen for the Spirit's input in their lives

[Process Objectives]

- develop skills in the inductive method of Bible study, by
gleaning information from Scripture,
piecing together clues from both OT and NT to develop a basic understanding of the Holy Spirit
and gaining confidence in application to real life
- begin to think theologically about God's ongoing presence and activity in their lives
- desire to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- support one another in the discernment of the Spirit's guidance
- show a growing love and concern for each other

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 10-13)

The Spirit's interaction with people in the time before Christ came is different from what has been possible since Jesus Christ's arrival. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit comes upon people (or fills them) when a particular task needs the Spirit's help or inspiration. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit comes to abide with a person, changing that person's character and shaping him or her spiritually. The OT Holy Spirit is a temporary help; the NT Holy Spirit is a permanent guest in one's heart. We get the impression from the data that the Holy Spirit is positive and joyful and enjoys celebrating God's work in the world. The Holy Spirit is available to all believers as this reassuring, abiding presence; and when necessary, the Holy Spirit can make us very uncomfortable until we confess sin, engage in a godly action, or obey a clear direction God has given.

PAGE 26 NOTES:

The Holy Spirit is very active in the first few chapters of Luke's gospel. As personal emissary of God to lowly people, the Holy Spirit fills, blesses, empowers, and informs those who are willing to be led by God's Spirit. Joy results, hymns abound, and God gets the credit!

PAGE 27 NOTES:

The Holy Spirit is also a key presence and power in the life of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is present at Jesus' baptism (bringing the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—into one scene together). If it hadn't been for the Spirit, I doubt Jesus would make it out of the desert retreat alive; but with the Spirit, Jesus is strengthened and inspired to withstand the wiles of the devil. The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus for his mission, and provides delightful joy when the 70 disciples return from their mission trip with a great report. The Holy Spirit appears to be the critical and essential agent of God's knowledge, grace and power, for the people playing a part in God's salvation story and for Jesus himself accomplishing the mission assigned by his heavenly Father.

PAGE 28 NOTES:

The Old Testament evidence of the Spirit's work suggests that the Holy Spirit approaches for the purpose of empowering a particular task. He is present for the Creation, hovering over the void. He empowers the craftsmen who build the Tabernacle. He helps Gideon stand in strength against a mighty army and prevail. But once the task is over, the Holy Spirit takes off again. The most striking difference between the Spirit in the OT and in the NT is "duration of stay." In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit enters in and fills the person, and stays as the abiding presence of Jesus Christ inside us. In the NT and today, the Holy Spirit not only empowers action but changes hearts!

PAGE 29 NOTES:

The purpose of these questions is to give the learners an opportunity to observe the Holy Spirit in action and perhaps to recognize new ways the Spirit has been around all along. Qualities and characteristics produced in a person by the Spirit can include bringing order out of chaos (Gen 1), producing joy (Luke), increasing creativity (Exodus), giving strength and courage (Judges), and increase faith (Luke 1-Zechariah).

We are careful here to realize that the Holy Spirit is not in the business of leading people to do things that are contrary to God's revealed will. Jesus' encounter with Satan in the desert (Luke 4) demonstrates this beautifully. If a person in your group attributes to the Spirit's leading something identified in the Scripture as sin, the error must be pointed out in as loving a way as possible. You can say, "I know you feel that the decision you made was a good one, but it is possible to believe it was good for you without suggesting that the Holy Spirit led you in that direction." This may seem like a fine point, but it becomes relevant in the last small group question on page 30.

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGES 30)

Open your meeting with a short prayer of thanks for what Christ is doing in you and the members of your group, and ask for the Holy Spirit to be your teacher today.

PAGE 30 NOTES:

The first question regarding the Holy Spirit's activities should lead your people to list actions of the Spirit discovered in their Scripture digging on pages 26 and 27. "Fill," "increase faith," "work a miracle," "overshadow," "make joyful," etc. are all ideas. The question of whether the Spirit still does these things is a good one—don't overlook it. The obvious dilemma is, if one has not seen evidence of this activity, is this because the Spirit has withdrawn or because one is not receptive to the Spirit's presence?

The speculation about what would have happened if Jesus had not enjoyed the constant presence of the Spirit is intended to get people thinking about the inextricable and intimate relationship the Triune God has. The discussion should ask the questions about what it would have been life if the Spirit wasn't there at Jesus' baptism, wasn't there in the desert temptation, wasn't there when Jesus spoke in the synagogue. What would have happened? What difference did the Spirit make? The application question to follow is meant to help you imagine what could happen if the Holy Spirit invaded *your* life too. Or, if the learner has been a Christian for many years to see where the Spirit has been at work all along.

The questions on the bottom of page 30 are critically important for the church today. Gordon T. Smith wrote a book called *The Voice of Jesus*. In its introduction, he observes that there are two questions every Christian needs to be able to answer: 1) what is Jesus saying to you? and, 2) How do you know it's Jesus?

The bottom line is that the Spirit speaks consistently in a life-giving, even surgically clean way to instruct, convict of sin, correct, guide, and define godliness. The devil seeks to destroy, to deceive, to discourage, and to confuse. The world tries to entice our thoughts and affections away from God and onto things, power, or feelings. Any one of these dynamics can produce guilt: the world can make you feel guilty for not conforming to its pleasures; the devil can make you feel guilty by heaping on blame and causing hopelessness and shame; the Holy Spirit can make you feel guilty, too, but always in a way that points to the hope of forgiveness and transformation in Jesus Christ. If feelings of guilt can't really be pinned down to anything specific and only succeed in making you feel bad, the devil is trying to paralyze you. But if feelings of guilt go to a particular action or habit, with hope for release and God's forgiveness, confess the sin you have become aware of, repent (turn away from it and purpose to do something else that is pleasing to God) and receive the Spirit's power to prevail over it!

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The Holy Spirit's work is "new" in the sense that he is active every day in every way dealing with the new situations we create. [Illustration: A teacher may teach the same course every quarter, but the class is a new experience each time because the students are new.] The Holy Spirit's work is unchanging in that the Spirit does not add to the revelation already embodied in Jesus Christ and given witness in the Scripture. The Holy Spirit is not writing a new book or developing new doctrine, nor is he disembodied from the other two persons of the Trinity to act independently. What God has said, the Spirit seals to our hearts. What Jesus has done is applied to us, "because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5).

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

Try a new structure your prayer time by using the "ACTS" outline:

A—Adoration: give praise to God for the obvious and the subtle things he has done for you

C—Confess: admit your need for the Spirit's deep reach into your life

T—Thank: express gratitude to your Savior Jesus Christ for sending his Spirit to empower you and change your character.

S—Supplicate: Ask God for the instruction, inspiration, empowerment and equipping of the Holy Spirit in specific situations that need divine enablement.

JESUS' TRUE IDENTITY

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- recognize Jesus' claims to deity as they appear in the gospel of Luke
- see the logic of asserting that Jesus Christ was and is God from the data collected in the gospel
- add their affirmation of faith to the chorus of believers in Luke's gospel, and believe in and trust Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Lord of all
- be equipped to explain Christ's true identity to others
- digest the implications of Christ's deity and lordship for church life

[Process Objectives]

- learn how to sift through testimony and evidence to come to a conclusion about Jesus' identity
- as a group, complete a task together by writing a statement describing Jesus' true identity, based on Luke's gospel
- continue to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- support an honest assessment of congregational life, in light of the question "If Jesus is God and Lord of all, how should our church family be responding?"
- link individual personal faith to its corporate expression in the church

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 32-35)

We discover in Luke's gospel that many titles were attributed to Jesus, all of which point to a reality that defies human categories. In current theological literature, a debate rages around the identity of this person. In these conversations, "Jesus" refers to the human being born approximately 4 B.C. into a particular historical era and cultural setting. "Jesus Christ" or "the Christ" refers to the faith-affirmation that this One is God-come-in-the-flesh. No credible scholar claims that Jesus of Nazareth never existed, but the critical question of Jesus' identity (mere human? God? perfect human? great teacher? mythical hero?) generates much discussion, the most accessible occurring between Jesus Seminar scholar Marcus Borg and Episcopal bishop and New Testament scholar N. T. (Tom) Wright.

This present study comes from the perspective that the New Testament gospel writers were believers in Jesus Christ's deity, having come to that conclusion based on their interaction with him

and his followers. Your Bible study group will be asked to come to the same conclusion these first century witnesses did, that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!” and therefore worthy of our trust, our worship, and our obedience.

PAGE 3 2 NOTES:

“Son of the Most High,” “Son of God,” “Christ the Lord,” and “the Lord’s Christ” all refer to one who has been sent by God to save the people from their sins and establish a permanent reign over the nation, Israel. The Son of God identifies Christ as of the same substance as the Father, to be equated with him.

We can discern the meaning of these terms by the reaction they got from Pharisees. For instance, in Luke 22, the local religious leaders wanted to execute Jesus for blasphemy, which meant that he had made claim to be God by saying “I am [he].”

Son of Man, the Chosen One, king of the Jews, the king who comes in the name of the Lord . . . are understood by the Jews of the time to refer to the specific role of Messiah, with all its accompanying political undertones: sent by God to take charge politically. Jesus eschewed this role while embracing the identity by demonstrating that first the Lord’s chosen must die and be resurrected before the reign could begin (Luke 17:24-25). Luke has the disciples questioning this timetable even up to the point of Jesus’ ascension into heaven in Acts 1.

PAGE 3 3 NOTES:

Jesus modeled here some great ways to get into the conversation about his identity. The first occasion (Luke 7) has John the Baptist, from prison, asking if Jesus is the one. And Jesus’ reply was, “Look at what I am doing! What does that tell you?” Refer to Lesson Four for the details.

In Luke 9, Jesus asks his closest followers, “Okay, so tell me, what’s the buzz out there about me?” This is a great non-threatening question to ask someone: “Hey, what are your friends saying these days about Jesus Christ—anything?”

Finally, in Luke 22 at his trial before Jewish authorities, the chief priests and teachers of the law demand that Jesus identify himself. He declines, saying, “You won’t believe me if I tell you.” But they insist, by asking, “Are you the Son of God?” And Jesus replies, “Yes, you’re right to say that I AM.” When Jesus said, ‘I AM’ (in the Greek, it is *ego eimi*, the emphatic form of “I am”) he was giving himself the name equivalent to the Hebrew “YHWH” (Yahweh), the name by which God made himself known to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3)! Jesus was claiming to be *one and the same* as the God who spoke to Moses! This is why the Jewish authorities threw up their hands and said, “See? There it is. We need hear nothing more. He is guilty of blasphemy.”

Jesus accepted both titles “Son of God” and “Son of Man” because together they describe his identity as fully human and fully divine. Jesus Christ was God-in-the-flesh, come to make God

known through his salvation and permanent reign. Jesus Christ was the Son of Man, lifted up and anointed as the unique and perfect representation of humanity to reign over all creation.

PAGES 34 AND 35 NOTES:

We now pause to extricate ourselves from the philosophical and theological jungle we have created in our discussion of the *concept* of Jesus' identity. On these pages, the learners are given the opportunity to engage in a *lectio divina*, or "divine reading" of the gospel story. The point of this exercise is to foster a faith response to the "Who do you say I am?" question. The reading and re-reading of the text allows you to become very familiar with its contents, and then to enter into the scene and let Christ point you toward something of particular relevance to your life. I cannot predict what God will do by this means, so just follow the directions and see where the Lord takes you.

In the group discussion, you might ask how it went, whether any burning questions arose among your participants, or if anything changed internally as a result of their encounter with Christ and his claims in this passage of Scripture.

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGE 36-37)

Open your meeting with prayer that the Lord would help you collect your thoughts and enliven your faith to recognize Jesus' true identity.

PAGE 36 NOTES:

A group writing assignment is always a little risky (though it can be very fun!). It would help if you had some butcher paper on the wall, or a white board in a classroom, or some other way for the whole group to see the written statement develop. Follow these steps, and you should be able to craft your fifty-word statement in a somewhat orderly fashion:

1. Ask for the words and phrases Luke used (like "son of God," "the Christ") and write them as a list.
2. Ask for definitions or paraphrases of these titles, so the group can put them into their own words. Think how you would word it if you were sharing your findings with a non-Christian friend at the coffee shop.
3. On a fresh piece of paper, start framing the actual statement until you arrive at your focused but complete affirmation of Jesus Christ.

The last question on this page is another excellent case study question. Your strongest evidence comes from Luke 22:66-71, but all the Q & A input on the top of page 33 is helpful here.

PAGE 37 NOTES:

If in fact Jesus is God, then we should (e.g. worship, obey, love, appreciate, imitate, pray to, listen to) him!

So then the question becomes whether or not the group's *church family* worships, obeys, loves, appreciates, imitates, prays to and listens to Jesus Christ. If in any way there is a sense that the church has fallen short, please (not in a critical, cynical or judgmental way) take that to prayer in a spirit of true repentance and commitment to help turn things around. If the church *is* faithful in its response to Christ, then discuss how each person can participate convincingly in the witness to Jesus Christ's true identity.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

Close in conversational prayer for the church(es) of which the members are a part, thanking God for their existence, their location, and their ministry. Ask God to be made known through these congregations and the faithful witness of all their members. Pray for boldness to proclaim Christ's true identity and the confidence to enter into conversation in a spirit of grace and truth.

Pray for individuals around the circle, that their faith in Christ would grow.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE FRINGE

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- identify the sorts of people who received Jesus' personal ministry
- correlate these beneficiaries with the basic mission Jesus was pursuing
- recognize the counter-cultural nature of Jesus' reaction to fringe people
- feel Christ's empathy for themselves in the inner place that feels marginalized or ignored
- be moved to show compassion and tenderness to the overlooked, as Christ did
- grapple with the spiritual tensions that go with wealth and happiness (distinct from poverty and discouragement), and identify the points of temptation in their lives, as applicable
- resolve to do one thing to represent Christ's love for fringe people in a contemporary setting.

[Process Objectives]

- develop the ability to tell a Bible story and attach their testimony to it
- get a taste of the value of comparing gospel accounts of the same event, for the purpose of identifying Luke's unique emphasis
- continue to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- open up a vulnerable side by sharing an identification with one of Jesus' "fringe people"
- discuss ways to open their circle of relationships to those most often overlooked

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 40-43)

The point of this lesson is that Jesus noticed and cared about people who were otherwise on the fringe of first century society. He violated taboos and even religious law that declared touching lepers, associating with sinners, and coming into contact with bleeding women as defiling, or making one unclean. Jesus' actions turned the tables on the society's expectations, by denying that their touch defiled *him*, but demonstrating that *his* touch healed *them*! The power flowed from him to those who needed forgiveness and healing, not the other way around. In this lesson, we are encouraged to recognize that same power to bring healing and hope to the fringe people in our lives, without fear that associating with them will taint our reputation or standing before God. And just in case anyone of us may be experienced at the fringe, the good news of the gospel is within reach—so let us touch the hem of Jesus' robe!

PAGE 40 NOTES:

This cluster of mid-gospel close encounters with Jesus give us glimpses into the needs and heartaches of the region, and the tender heart of our savior! Jesus shows amazement at the centurion's faith (remember, he was a Roman), his heart goes out to the widow whose only son has died; he recognizes the gratitude and devotion of a woman who has fully experienced God's forgiveness; and shows tenderness to a synagogue ruler (not usually on Jesus' list of favorite people) and a woman suffering from a 12-year hemorrhage ("unclean" according to Jewish law).

Nain is a little town in Galilee, mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament, but situated a few miles from Nazareth to this day.

In the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10), Jesus stands up for Mary, who has chosen to spend time with him rather than in the traditional household role of women. Martha, doing all the work, also receives some grace (along with the gentle rebuke) from Jesus, but the lesson is this: your social role or your counter-cultural devotion to Jesus are valued by God.

The Ten Lepers of Luke 17 are healed, just by Jesus looking at them. Only one—and a Samaritan at that!—returned to thank him. Jesus affirms the returning one and misses the others, suggesting that Christ's care of social outcasts continues even after they have been integrated back into society.

PAGE 41 NOTES:

The recipients of Jesus' blessings are all social outcasts, of various kinds. In the extreme, "unclean" (lepers, bleeding woman), then "immoral" (the Samaritan leper, the woman with a sinful past), "merely female" (Martha) or "not one of us" (the Roman centurion's servant). They represent the ones that proper society did not associate with. Ordinarily, most of them would have been shunned or avoided, and certainly not *touched*! The general effect of their contact with Christ was healing, forgiveness, and freedom from social stigma.

Remember, in Lesson Three, we discussed Jesus' mission statement. What follows is a table comparing that job description with the events of Luke 6:20-26.

Luke 4 Mission Statement	Luke 6 (version of Beatitudes):
Preach to the poor	Blessed are the poor • theirs is God's kingdom
Freedom of prisoners	The excluded • they will be brought in
Sight for the blind	
Release for the oppressed	Those who weep • they will laugh

The "woes" of Luke 6 are not saying that the rich, well-fed, happy, and upstanding people were disqualified from blessing. Jesus was warning that there are temptations that go with wealth and privilege, and they must keep on alert for the hypnotizing lure of self-satisfaction, gratification and laughter. Rather (it is implied), the well-healed must be diligent to cultivate spiritual hunger and dependence upon God, when everything else around them says, "Depend on us."

After exploring these encounters with Jesus, we can appreciate more fully the promises and prophecies of Luke 1. God sent an angel to explain *The Plan* to Mary and reassure her that all was well. Mary appreciated that God was mindful of her humble estate, that the Mighty One had done great things with a very obscure girl, that God's mercy extends to all who fear him, and that God delights in lifting up the humble, filling the hungry, and helping the teeny tiny country of Israel.

Jesus demonstrated these concerns of his heavenly Father in the way he showed tenderness and compassion to the humble he encountered. He not only addressed their earthly concerns, but also dealt with the spiritual issue by forgiving sin.

PAGES 42 AND 43 NOTES:

There are two avenues for application of this lesson's scriptures. One is identification with the outcast (and the invitation to receive the touch and healing and welcome of Jesus) and the other is discovering God's heart for the social outcasts around us.

The first question explores the individual's identification with one of the outcasts of the gospel. The hope would be that the reader would experience the same sense of relief, gratitude or blessing that one of those characters experienced.

Otherwise, on page 43 the participants are encouraged to look around and see the fringe people they have been missing up until now. One lady became aware (through her volunteer service at a homeless shelter) that there were people living under a freeway overpass near her home. She decided to take sandwiches to them on a particularly bad weather day, as a way of "seeing them."

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGE 44-45)

Open your meeting with prayer that the Lord would give you eyes to see people from his perspective. Read the following hymn text to conclude your prayer:

Open my eyes, that I may see	Silently now I wait for Thee,
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;	Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Place in my hands the wonderful key	Open my eyes, illumine me,
That shall unclasp and set me free.	Spirit divine!

—Words & Music by Clara H. Scott (1895), public domain

PAGE 44 NOTES:

The first question can be answered to as great a depth as each participant is willing. Encourage each to tell the Bible story in his or her own words, and then explain the personal “point of contact.” This gives everyone a chance to get into the gospel account, but also to share from personal experience. The experience might not have been met with faith before, so encourage those who share to see Christ in the midst of whatever vulnerability they admit.

The sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet met with at least two reactions: Jesus’ and the dinner host’s. The dinner host’s reaction would have been the typical sneer expected of “holy” people (but note also in the text their put-down of Jesus’ ability to discern what was up with this woman). Jesus’ reaction was empathy, support and appreciation for her symbolic gesture.

Putting the Matthew, Mark and John texts side-by-side for comparison, notice the differences (e.g. the name of the table host). But it becomes clear that the Luke version is the longest, giving greatest detail to the woman’s devoted act. The reaction of the onlookers was not about the expense of the perfume, but about the kind of woman who was making this gesture. The message is quite clear, in Luke your past does not disqualify you from coming to Jesus, and your devotion is in proportion to the number of sins Jesus has forgiven.

Also note that the Luke version has Jesus observing the difference between the reception given him by the woman vs. the reception he receives from the host who should have known better.

Finally, only in Luke does Jesus address the woman directly. This tells you that Luke is focusing on the personal aspect of Jesus’ ministry, built upon relationship with him and not merely on the doctrinal statements about him.

PAGE 45 NOTES:

In Luke 5:27-32, Jesus calls a tax collector to join him. Then this social outcast (a Jewish citizen hired by Roman authorities to collect taxes from Jews, often charging extra as “commission”) threw a big dinner party for Jesus and ‘sinners’ as well. The Pharisees—the Jewish sect most concerned with ritual purity—protest that Jesus is spending way too much time with questionable people. But Jesus explains his choice as focusing on those who know they need spiritual help, rather than wasting his time with people who claim to be doing fine without help. His ministry is a spiritual one in this instance: calling sinners to repentance.

Does Jesus love the outcast more than the privileged? I doubt it, but Jesus *does not overlook them* like everybody else does, and to the privileged that attention may feel like a preference (i.e. “favor”). This simply points to a false view of God that says, “There is a limited amount of love out there, and if other people get it, there’s less left for me.”

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

Open your concluding prayer time by reading the third verse of “Open My Eyes”:

Open my mouth, and let me bear,	Silently now I wait for Thee,
Gladly the warm truth everywhere;	Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Open my heart and let me prepare	Open my eyes, illumine me,
Love with Thy children thus to share.	Spirit divine!

Go around the circle and recount the outcasts and overlooked people that have been mentioned throughout today’s study. Gather thoughts for prayer, and then ask each person to lift up one of these fringe people (or groups) and pray mightily not only for God’s intervention in their lives but for their participation in his work to offer redemption, healing and forgiveness.

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT?

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- become familiar with Jesus' teaching style (parables, question & answer, object lesson)
- synthesize accumulated knowledge about Jesus' life into an evaluation of his lifestyle and priorities
- develop a summary of Jesus' teaching about possessions
- notice and be inspired by Jesus' attention to prayer and "alone time" as spiritual essentials supporting a demanding public ministry
- grapple with the idea that personal use of time and money reflect spiritual values
- use the Lord's Prayer as a template (model prayer) for personal prayer
- seriously evaluate their giving patterns and resolve to allocate their finances to reflect their gratitude to God more accurately

[Process Objectives]

- bring diverse opinions about Jesus' lifestyle into a cohesive whole, by deciding upon his "weekly calendar" and comparing it to their own
- experiment with group participation in prayer time (Lord's Prayer paraphrases)
- continue to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

[Relational Objectives]

- submit their intentions in spiritual practices to the group for prayer support

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 48-51)

Jesus' ministry included a lot of teaching, either to small groups (e.g. the disciples) or large crowds. With the reminder that Jesus was/is the smartest man in history (see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 93-95, 134-136), his teaching method reached peasant and privileged alike. Jesus used methods that brought ideas into concrete, daily life. His agenda was set by the context of the moment, out of which might flow a parable or an object lesson. When the two brothers brought him the question about their inheritance, Jesus took the opportunity to teach on the subject of greed and the relative significance of wealth. For Jesus, life offered many opportunities to reflect on God, the Kingdom and the gospel, and he capitalized on them all to help his followers understand what is important in life.

PAGE 48 NOTES:

The eight stories cited first on this page highlight different aspects of one's relationship with God, with wealth, and with each other. Storing up wealth for oneself is not favored, but becoming "rich toward God" is urged. Securing one's inheritance tempts a person to greed, but all benefit of accumulation vaporizes at one's death. Wealth can prevent a person from full devotion to Christ, or in Zaccheus' case, wealth can be turned into an instrument of repentance. The overall message is Be Careful! Listen to what Moses and the Prophets have said about wealth, and hold your assets lightly in this world!

The six boxes at the bottom of the page pinpoint occasions in the gospel when Jesus prayed. The *Who* is Jesus, of course, and the *What* is "withdrawing to pray." The *When*, *Where* and *Why* of each story varies: sometimes the prayer time was all night, or at the end of the day, or the beginning of the day. Sometimes Jesus prayed alone, other times with a few disciples. Sometimes the prayer was recovery time from a grueling day of ministry; other times it was preparatory to big decisions or spiritual challenges. No set pattern is intended here; suffice it to say Jesus prayed *wherever* and *whenever* he needed to, for as long as it took to accomplish his purposes! And prayer seems to be at least as rejuvenating as a night's sleep.

PAGE 49 NOTES:

If you're interested in the 17 mealtimes referred to in Luke's gospel, here is where they can be found:

Luke 2:41, Luke 5:29, Luke 7:36-50, Luke 9:12-17; Luke 10:38-41, Luke 11:37-54, Luke 12:45-46; Luke 13:29; Luke 14:1-6; Luke 14:7-11; Luke 14:15-24, Luke 15: 22-24; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 17:26-27; Luke 19:1-5; Luke 22:7-23; Luke 24:30

Jesus time was spent in private prayer, discipling his followers, teaching crowds and healing individuals. He also walked from place to place, socialized with people, etc.. Though it is anyone's guess precisely how Jesus used his time, we know he observed the Sabbath (from Friday night through sundown Saturday), and had significant times of prayer (sometimes all night) every day. The only real "down time" we hear about is his dinner with Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10). [And in John's gospel we have his rest at the well in John 4.]

The questions on the bottom of the page are personal reflection questions meant to give the participants an opportunity to take stock of their time, in order to be open to some alterations. A helpful method for doing this can be found in Gordon MacDonald's book *Ordering Your Private World* (chapter 2).

PAGES 50 AND 51 NOTES:

The exercise on the Lord's Prayer is meant to help the participants see a pattern that can be adapted for one's private prayer. The pattern elements include praise of God, welcome of his Kingdom reign, request for provision, spiritual cleanup, relational harmony and protection (internal and external), closing with an affirmation of God's power and glory.

Jesus' attitude toward possessions was non-dependent. He understood how an abundance of possessions can lead to complacency, greed, insensitivity to the needs of others, and pride. He himself, with little or no tangible assets, was content and well taken care of.

His teaching about possessions included at least these three points:

1. they do not have eternal value—you can't take them with you (Luke 16:19-31)
2. life consists of more than one's possessions—what you have is not what defines you (12:15)
3. possessions tend to dull one's spiritual senses (e.g. 18:18-30)

Being "rich toward God" means being aware that one's possessions really belong to the Lord and are available at all times for God's use and purposes. In our everyday lives, being "rich toward God" is expressed in a spirit of generosity, tangible giving for the work of the Kingdom, and non-reliance upon material possessions for ultimate security or meaning in life.

Jesus links prayer with possessions in his teaching to the Rich Ruler in Luke 18:18-30. There he says, "You can take your devotion to God further by selling all you have and giving the proceeds to the poor." The Lord's Prayer encourages us to pray for what we need today, and for strength against temptation. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) demonstrated contrasting views: the Pharisee—who was not rich, but tithed his income—sought to preserve his reputation through the use of his assets, but at the expense of having a humble relationship with God. The tax collector—who could have been rich—was rich toward God by repenting and recognizing his unworthiness. In Luke 19:45f (not cited in our study yet), Jesus throws the money-changers out of the temple because they were diverting focus from prayer to commerce in God's house.

The questions on page 51 are personal and could feel uncomfortably probing. Really, what they are intended to do is to enable participants, in the privacy of their own thoughts, to assess honestly the use of their money and their time. Some discomfort is to be expected, but most people have no idea how their time and money is used, and this exercise is simply a first attempt to discover reality in these areas. The outcome of this exercise will not be discussed in the group, unless someone brings up the subject.

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGE 52)

Open your meeting with prayer that Jesus Christ will enter into the details of your lives and help you align them with his teaching.

PAGE 52 NOTES:

See notes above about the calendars. Jesus' calendar will be sketchy (let the group members struggle with this a bit, until they land on the features that were clearly seen in the gospel), but the idea is straightforward: Jesus spent significant time cultivating a relationship with God in prayer and Sabbath-keeping; cultivating relationships with his disciples in teaching and fellowship; cultivating relationships with "the lost" in social situations; and releasing people from the consequences of sin and mortality in his healing ministry.

In the remainder of the discussion, once the text is established and everyone is together on what Jesus taught, encourage them to be honest about their concrete application related to possessions and money. Particularly if you see attitudes changing from a self-centered to a God-centered view, be affirming of progress and acknowledge the challenge of living wholly for the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

To close your time together, have each person read his or her version of the Lord's Prayer. Then pray for one another to take the concrete steps necessary to live out Christ's teaching in the areas of time and money.

JESUS' STORY BOOK

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- survey the parables unique to Luke's gospel and find themes running through them
- understand what a parable is and is not
- discover the diverse methods Jesus employed to teach the crowds, those hostile to him, and his followers
- explore the ways that people learn today and develop a procedure for teaching and motivating through a particular lesson
- develop a profile of a faithful Christian disciple
- write a parable

[Process Objectives]

- work collaboratively to define a "parable"
- give equal time to each other for sharing their own parables

[Relational Objectives]

- be unafraid to share at a more personal level about disturbances or difficulties
- deepen their prayer for one another based on accumulated personal knowledge of each participant

A PARTICULARLY HELPFUL RESOURCE

Indispensable to a serious study of the parables of Jesus in Luke is the work of Kenneth E. Bailey, who lived in the Middle East for decades and compiled his biblical and cultural understanding into a detailed explanation of Jesus' stories. Still in print and available as a combined edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983):

*Poet & Peasant, and
Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 54-57)

Continuing on the path of discovering Jesus' methods of teaching (as well as the content of what he taught), this lesson focuses on his use of parables.

Upon the advice of parable scholar Kenneth E. Bailey, we look at three basic elements: 1) the points of contact with the real world used in the story; 2) the response expected of the original listener when Jesus first told the parable; and 3) the beliefs that inform and motivate the listener to respond appropriately and whole-heartedly to Jesus' teaching.

2 — Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke

We are acting on some foundational assumptions in relation to these three elements:

1. Parables are not allegories. They are meant to teach one basic point rather than reveal a constellation of symbols with individual lessons attached. Each story has a “basic lesson,” beyond which the group is over-analyzing . . . so be careful!

Here’s one scholar’s definition of a parable:

“A parable is a literary creation in narrative form designed either

- to portray a type of character for warning or example or
- to embody a principle of God’s governance of the world and [people].”

—T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*. 2nd edition (Cambridge: University Press, 1935), 65.

2. Parables in particular were meant to be heard and applied to real life; a response is expected either in changed behavior / attitude or in the adoption of a different way of seeing God and the world.

3. Jesus often revealed a worldview that put his instruction into perspective, either in terms of rewards or implication. Somehow in each parable, Jesus identifies an intrinsically motivating factor he felt would make the difference between obedience and indifference to his teaching. [This is captured in the question, “According to Jesus, what motivates us to follow him in this particular matter?”] These are generally more long-term motivators, like “resurrection of the righteous” in Luke 14:1-14. So it is helpful also to put into our own words what might motivate us in the short-term to do what Jesus says. This question for each parable calls for honesty and perhaps creativity; but don’t expect the motivators always to be “benefits,” for there is a cost in this life to following Christ as a disciple. That is to say, sometimes what motivates us in the short-term is simply knowing we are doing the right thing despite the pain or discomfort it causes.

PAGE 54 & 55 NOTES:

Seven parables unique to Luke are listed here to practice our interpretive skills:

Luke 10:25-37 (The Good Samaritan): If someone needs help, and you’re there, you’ve got a new neighbor! Don’t let rules or dirt keep you from doing what is right.

Luke 14:14 (Humility Etiquette): Don’t promote yourself or expect honor. Look for ways to deflect honor to other people. Give to be generous, not to buy people’s loyalty or put them in debt.

Luke 14:15-24 (Great Banquet Excuses): Respond to Jesus’ invitation to “come to the banquet”—no excuses! On Christ’s behalf, invite those who want to come to respond to his gospel.

Luke 14:25-35 (Count the Cost): It’s going to cost you a lot to follow Jesus, but ultimately it’s worth it. Don’t be afraid of losing (or gaining) your reputation, relationships, or responsibilities—be Christ’s disciple because he is the Best One to learn from and live for!

Luke 15:8-10 (Lost Coin): God is out searching for the lost—we should, too. Help people appreciate that God has not lost sight of them.

Luke 15:11-32 (Prodigal Son, Resentful Brother): *Repent* of your sin. *Return* to the Father. *Receive* the grace that God offers, and be willing to give grace also. *Rejoice* in the transformation that comes with faith.

Luke 17:1-10 (Basic Instructions About the Christian Life): Don't cause others to sin, and forgive those who sin against you. Faith starts small, but accomplishes a lot. Do your Christian duty without expecting fanfares or rewards. Serving Christ is about living a quiet, faithful life without expectation of recognition.

Themes of these parables may relate to each other. For instance, I linked

- Humility Etiquette with Basic Instructions, because they both promote humility and deflecting honor.
- Good Samaritan links with Count the Cost. Go out of your way to help and make serving Christ your priority.
- Lost Coin links with Prodigal Son, both about the Seeker (God) looking out for the sought until they are found and reunited.
- Lost Coin and Great Banquet Excuses each urge that seeking out the lost and bringing them in as “found” is a picture of God's pursuing love of us, despite our backgrounds or significance.

The basic lesson Jesus seems to be teaching is to put Jesus Christ first and let wealth, reputation, convenience and societal norms be of less importance.

PAGE 56 & 57 NOTES:

The features of a parable can be determined by looking at our sample of seven. What they have in common are ordinary life situations and characters, a simple plot line, one lesson emphasized through its telling, and a reference to the bigger picture of faith or God's economy.

What makes parables an effective teaching method is that they draw you into the story and involve you in the choices of the characters. Involvement is always a positive thing when it comes to teaching and learning.

Everyone's answer is going to be different regarding ways they've learned important lessons. My list included: almost making a Big Mistake; parents' instruction; watching the good example of others; and accumulated experiences in a foreign country where all my assumptions were challenged on a daily basis.

Jesus demonstrated diverse teaching methods:

- lecture (Luke's equivalent to the Sermon on the Mount)
- parables

4 — *Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke*

- object lessons (e.g. 11:33ff, a lamp to be seen)
- questions (“Who do you say that I am?”)
- Modeling appropriate behavior (Luke 8:22-25, calm through a storm)
- Sending out on assignment (Luke 10, the two-by-two mission)
- negative example (the Pharisees in Luke 12:1-12)
- capitalizing on teachable moments (e.g. Luke 12:13f)

The reference in fine print (bottom of page 57) is to prophet Nathan’s truth-telling parable to King David in 2 Samuel 12. The point of this reference is to demonstrate that even the wealthy and privileged David could be reached *only* by use of a parable. It is not dumbed-down teaching, but a very effective tool for getting an important point across!

What Jesus taught—the content of his message—helps us profile the faithful disciple.

Character: selfless, humble, persevering, faithful

Attitude: reverence for God, compassion for the needy and outcast, deference toward others, optimistic (Kingdom and eternal mindset), doing “right” is more important than “rules”

Action: responsive to physical needs, believing in Jesus and responding to his invitation, hospitality toward all regardless of their social status, generosity, pursuit of the lost, celebration of spiritual progress.

The question about motivating a child to adopt a Jesus-like quality requires you to have in your mind’s eye a particular child who might need a particular lesson. For instance, I’m thinking of an eight-year-old boy who somehow missed the memo on “gratitude.” I would go about developing a “lesson” for this child by following these steps:

1. know what God means by “gratitude,” i.e. a recognition of what has been done for me and what that cost the giver, with an accompanying feeling of indebtedness and unworthiness

2. translate that knowledge into learning objectives (just like we’ve done with each lesson in this Luke study) appropriate to the child. So, for instance, when the child has learned the lesson about gratitude, he will actually notice when nice things have been done or given to him, he will regularly give verbal thanks when things are given or done for him, he will write thank-you notes when he receives gifts, and he will develop a general attitude of thanksgiving that supplants a sense of entitlement.

3. devise learning activities to help with the practice of this quality. In this case, practice saying thanks and writing notes, conduct “idle” chatter (à la Deut. 6:7) that notices the kind things people are doing around him, have a particularly grateful person come over for dinner and share his/her story . . . and make the most of your next Thanksgiving holiday!

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGE 58)

Open your meeting with prayer that you will all be open to the lessons Jesus has been trying to teach *you* lately.

PAGE 58 NOTES:

Help the participants brainstorm the features that are always present, and sometimes present, in the parables. This will enable you to come up with a definition. Then give them the chance to share their favorites and their most disturbing encounters in Jesus' stories. The texts are somewhat familiar to anyone who has spent time in the gospels, so this discussion affords your group the opportunity to go a little deeper. The idea is not to belabor your analysis of the parable, but to go deeper in its implications for personal and corporate life.

Some might have had trouble with the interpretation of the parables, so the next section gives an opportunity to explore that difficulty a bit more. The reasons for difficulty can relate to Bible study experience, spiritual readiness, or social support. Be the sort of group that can accept a person's reasons for having a hard time, without being judgmental about it.

Teachable moments are those occasions when an event or circumstance calls you up short, and a lesson must be learned in order to move on. Asking the participants to recall one such event in the previous week opens them to the possibility that Jesus is actively teaching them—a new thought for some. Sometimes identifying a teachable *moment* also identifies the *lesson*!

Welcome the sharing of parables written during the week, and affirm them and the story-teller with genuine gratitude and affection.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

In preparation for your closing prayer time, you might ask each person to state what he or she wants to learn from Jesus this coming week (or month). Have each participant pray for the person on his or her right according to the requests that have been made.

Please remind the folks that the next (and last) lesson in the series requires them to read the entire gospel of Luke in one setting (or as close to that as possible). The idea here is to give them the experience of reading the whole story as a continuous narrative, which may bring to light some new perspective not possible by reading selected paragraphs.

Suggest to the folks that they read the questions for the entire lesson 9 before they begin reading the gospel. The questions on page 62 especially require the overview, and some brief note-taking as those elements appear in the gospel will help them process this question.

YOU ARE WITNESSES

As a result of this study, we hope the participants will

[Learning Objectives]

- grasp the overall flow of the gospel of Luke by through-reading it and locating turning points in the story
- be overwhelmed by the personality and power of Jesus Christ as depicted in the gospel
- be able to articulate remaining questions about Jesus' identity and mission and have a pretty good idea of how to get those questions answered
- discover themselves to be witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and realize its implications for their lives
- believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

[Process Objectives]

- work together according to their gifts to explore the lesson's questions and themes
- collaborate to synthesize their learning into a collection of the key events of Jesus life

[Relational Objectives]

- appreciate the deep bonds of fellowship that have been forged in this group
- commit themselves to pray for one another according to the resolutions made at the end of the study

NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 60-63)

The questions in this section are intended to guide the reading and pondering of the gospel as a whole. The experience of doing so is documented through the questions and observations at the end, and obviously everybody will be processing this differently.

Scholars generally identify the following events or passages as “turning points” in the story of Jesus' life and ministry:

Turning point 1: Between Luke 2 and Luke 3, the narrative jumps from early childhood to the public ministry of John the Baptist, perhaps a 30-year “fast-forward.” This section depicts the coming-of-age of Jesus in preparation for his ministry.

Turning point 2: At Luke 4:14, in Nazareth, Jesus comes out at the one fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. This is huge, based on the various reactions of those present. Jesus begins the work by calling his disciples, setting the parameters of his ministry and message, and announcing the good news of the Kingdom of God in the region of Galilee.

2 — Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke

Turning point 3: At Luke 9, Jesus is developing his disciples by sending them out on various assignments to minister and to get feedback on Jesus' impact. Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah occurs here, as does the Transfiguration.

Turning point 4: One of the most significant transition points in the gospel, is found in 9:51 as Luke observes, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." The rest of the story records the events occurring in this light—Jesus is preparing for the confrontation in Jerusalem that will lead to his execution. What follows in the gospel story is an intensified schedule of teaching opportunities, conflicts with the religious leaders, and ministry triumphs, all as he gets closer and closer to the capital city.

Turning point 5: Jesus' entry into Jerusalem at 19:28, beginning the last week of his life, full of challenge, poignancy, betrayal, trial, suffering, humiliation and death.

Turning point 6 : The ultimate! Jesus is resurrected from the dead in Luke 24 and the following narrative processes this amazing turn of events from different perspectives.

The significance of the resurrection story is that some people get it and others are confused. The women who came to finish the burial rites recognized what had happened immediately and were entrusted with the task of telling the others. The men had to see for themselves, of course, because they were set up culturally to doubt the testimony of women. But the women's witness was verified and the news began to spread.

The two walking on the road to Emmaus were still puzzled by the meaning of everything, and it took Jesus *in cognito* to sort everything out for them by "opening the Scriptures." What finally opened their eyes, however, was his breaking bread with them. The rest of the disciples are graced with Jesus' appearance, at which he "opened their minds" to the meaning of what had taken place.

To this day, the ministry of Christ's followers, in the power of the Holy Spirit, has been to open the Scriptures, open people's eyes and open their minds to the events that changed the world and the hope for human beings.

PAGE 62 & 63 NOTES:

The answers to these questions will reflect the perspective of each participant, but they can be gleaned from the through-reading of the gospel.

My list of nouns or titles to describe Jesus' identity:

1. Son of the Most High (1:32)
2. Son of God (1:35, 3:22)

3. Savior (2:11a)
4. Christ the Lord (2:11b)
5. Joseph's son (4:22)
6. The Holy One of God (4:34)
7. Healer and Forgiver of Sin (5:20-24)
8. Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath (6:5)
9. A great prophet (7:16)
10. Lord over nature (8:25)
11. Teacher (9:38)
12. God—"I am" (22:70)

The adjectives are a bit more subjective, but are attainable by picturing Jesus in various settings throughout the gospel and asking the question, what kind of person would act this way?

The point of the exercise on page 63 is to feel the impact of realizing that Jesus was raised from the dead. Since none of us have actually had this experience, we have to use our imagination and the data we glean from Luke 24 about what that must have felt like.

NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGES 64 & 65)

Open your meeting with prayer for openness: that God would open your eyes and your minds and open up his Scripture so that you can comprehend what he is trying to teach you.

PAGE 64 NOTES:

You might be helped by having a white-board or a flip chart to record the elements the group brings out in Jesus' story.

The questions at the bottom of the page are meant to explore a "what if," namely, what if Jesus had never been raised from the dead. This is the question Paul raises in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, and the group should read this passage in order to discover the centrality of this event in Christian belief.

PAGE 65 NOTES:

At the simplest level, the idea that Jesus is alive today means that he exists and presumably is listening to our prayers and interceding for us at the right hand of the Father (Romans 8:34). Jesus made this known to us while walking on this earth, and we now can live in the reality that he is with us.

The last question is the ultimate application question. “Now that you know what Jesus is like, in what ways do you want and need to be like him?” The more concrete people can get in answering this question, the more powerful your prayers for each other will become.

CLOSING PRAYER TIME

This is your last prayer time together, so make the most of it! You have learned a lot about each other and your spiritual aspirations. Take these matters to the Lord in heartfelt prayer, inviting every person to pray (even more than once!) to cover the needs thoroughly and faithfully.

Plant the seed that knowing Christ imparts an obligation to make him known. Support one another as you make new commitments to do so, for the sake of others—the lost and needy and invisible people.