

The Life Changing Gospel of Luke: A Call to Deeper Discipleship

Rev. Dr. Thomas K. Tewell

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9 Principles to Help us Understand the Gospel of Luke

1. Luke is a Historian who puts Jesus's Life and Ministry in a Broader World Context

Luke is conscious of the larger world in which Jesus lived and ministered. His numerous historical references are extremely valuable in helping us put the life of Jesus in the proper historical context. **In other words, the story of Jesus is not a fairy tale. It does not begin with the words, "once upon a time."** In Luke 2:1 he says, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment when Quirinius was Governor of Syria." In Luke 3:1 he refers to the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar as Emperor and in Luke 3:23 he explains that Jesus was 30 when he began his ministry. Luke is the only gospel writer who refers to Jesus's age. Luke sets Jesus' ministry within a larger context or world events, not simply within Jewish history as Matthew and Mark do.

2. Luke is a Vigorous Champion of the Outsider.

"Luke is a vigorous champion of the outsider. An outsider himself, the only gentile in an all-Jewish cast of New Testament writers, Luke shows how Jesus includes those who were typically treated as outsiders by the religious establishment of the day: women, shepherds/ common laborers, the racially different, (Samaritans) and the poor. Luke will not countenance religion as a club. As Luke tells the story, all of us who have found ourselves on the outside looking in (and who of us has not felt it) now find the doors wide open, found and welcomed by God in Jesus."

Eugene Peterson, the Introduction to the Gospel of Luke, [the Message](#).

3. Luke was a physician and a gifted writer who wrote Luke-Acts, the most words written by any New Testament writer...even the Apostle Paul!

Luke/Acts represent the largest contribution by a single writer in the entire New Testament, even more than the Apostle Paul. The author of the Gospel is Luke, the Physician who was a companion of Paul on his missionary journeys. Luke was of Greek ancestry and was a gentile, who converted to Judaism and then became a follower of Jesus. **As a Doctor, Luke was a clinical observer of life, and, thus, his communication is characterized by a keen attentiveness to detail.** You will see attentiveness to detail throughout his gospel. It is interesting to note that throughout history some of our most brilliant novelists, poets and authors have been physicians like Luke: Somerset Maugham, John Keats, Robert Browning, Anton Chekhov, Michael Crichton, and Walker Percy, among others.

4. **Luke is a Literary Artist who Organized his Material to make a Statement about Jesus.**

See Luke 1:1-4. Luke was not an eyewitness to the life of Jesus. He spent many hours investigating, researching, and writing the stories of Jesus in a compelling way that brings them to life. As you read Luke's gospel, ask yourself these questions:

- A. **Why do you think that Luke put the stories of Jesus together in this way?** Why is his version and placement of the stories different from Matthew and Mark?
- B. **What is Luke trying to teach us about Jesus?**

Jerome, the fourth century Bishop, who translated the Bible into Latin, (the Vulgate) and who wrote commentaries on the Gospels, referred to Luke as "the most skilled writer of the evangelists." Of the four evangelists, Luke is pre-eminently a person of broad culture who adapted the Greek language to different occasions. Sometimes Luke's writing style is extremely formal, classical prose and other times he uses a racy, narrative style in the vernacular of the day. **Luke's gospel has been described by many as "the most beautiful book in the world."**

Luke is a master storyteller who uses restraint to produce anticipation. Notice as you read the gospel that Luke does not give away the punch line too soon but allows the story to progress naturally. Luke's style allows for the element of surprise in the narrative. Notice the difference in how Luke tells the story of Jesus coming to his hometown of Nazareth in Luke 4:16-30 and the way Matthew and Mark tell the story in Mark 6:1-6 and Matthew 13:53-58. Luke brings the reader into a dynamic story as he tells it while Matthew and Mark describe what happened in Nazareth in more general terms. Luke brilliantly uses contrast to help the reader see different sides of a story. For example, in chapter one, notice that Luke places an older woman who is barren (Elizabeth) in contrast to a young woman (Mary) who both become pregnant and who talk together about the destinies of their unborn sons! He also uses the angels and shepherds in juxtaposition to one another to make the point about the inclusivity of the gospel to poor people. The shepherds were ceremonially "unclean" and could not keep the Jewish law. They were not able to conform to the ceremonial acts of cleanliness which Jews consider an important part of serving God. In Luke's gospel the angels and the shepherds are important contrast metaphors in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

5. **Luke was a Gentile who is writing primarily to Gentiles.** A gentile is anyone who is not a Jew. Luke approached his gospel not with Jewish eyes but with a more universal eye. He is writing with the entire world in mind, not simply to a Jewish audience. Thus, Luke's lineage in chapter 3 does not go through Abraham, the Father of Judaism, as Matthew's does, but through Adam the first human being. Luke brings a "bigger world perspective" of culture and history to his gospel. He often uses the Greek word, master, and not the Jewish word, rabbi, when referring to Jesus. Although Luke was a gentile, he took the time to develop a thorough understanding of the Jewish faith and tradition.

6. Luke focused on the Cost of Discipleship

- **In Luke 9:51 Jesus points his face to Jerusalem.** Everything after that verse points to the cross, the death and the resurrection of Jesus. This verse sheds light on Jesus's life, ministry, and the motives for his actions. For example, in the story of Mary and Martha, Jesus is approaching the sister's home in Bethany with the cross on his mind. (See Luke 10:38-42.) Perhaps that is why he told Martha that " there is only one thing that is needed." In other words, he was teaching these sisters to live on the spiritual bread of life that only he can give instead of on a scrumptious meal!
- In chapter 14 of his gospel, Luke groups 4 stories together that occur at a table. You might call this section Table Talk. They tell us volumes about the hospitality and approachability of Jesus, the Savior of the world, and about Jesus rearranging the priorities of the culture in this teaching.
- In Chapter 6:17-39, Luke groups many of the core teachings of Jesus in the section known as the Sermon on the Plain. Matthew puts much of this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7.
- **Luke puts the Good Samaritan story and the vignette about Mary and Martha next to one another** to teach us that discipleship (following Jesus) involves both being with Jesus (as Mary displayed by sitting at Jesus' feet,) and doing as the Good Samaritan did in the parable. Then Luke puts most of Jesus's teaching on Prayer in Luke Chapter 11, next to the story of Mary and Martha where the emphasis is on being with Jesus, which is the essence of prayer!

7. Luke is the only gospel writer to include these stories. Why did Luke include them?

- A. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37)
 - B. The Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost (Prodigal) Son (Luke 15: 1-32)
 - C. The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)
 - D. The Ascension of Jesus into Heaven (Luke 24:51)
 - E. The Story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)
 - F. The Story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
 - G. The Boyhood Story of Jesus in the Temple when he was 12 in (Luke 2:41-52)
 - H. The Resurrection Appearance on the Road to Emmaus in (Luke 24:1-35)
8. **Remember that Luke took great care in researching and writing his gospel.** He told Theophilus that he "investigated everything very carefully and decided to write an orderly account of all that had happened." Luke conducted research by reading Mark and Matthew's gospel as well as other documents and by interviewing some of the eyewitnesses to Jesus and his ministry. Luke was with the Apostle Paul under house

arrest for two years in Caesarea Maritima, and as a companion of the Apostle Paul, he not only had access to the mind of Paul, but he “may have had access” to some of the great characters in the early church...possibly Peter, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the Apostle John, and Barnabas and Timothy, too. Imagine the richness of those conversations! Luke must have felt like he was there with them as they told the stories of being with Jesus and what they were discovering about Jesus ...and God! Luke was most likely a student of the style of Herodotos, a Greek historian, who lived 400 years before the birth of Jesus. Herodotos was known for his systematic investigative method and the precision in which he arranged his material into a compelling historical narrative. Cicero called Herodotos the Father of History, and, as a well-known orator, he told “amazing, breathtaking stories!” Luke had some of the flare and the brilliance of Herodotos.

9. Luke Places a Special Emphasis on Prayer

Luke includes more stories about Jesus’s prayer life than any other gospel writer. In Luke 11:1-3, Luke pictures Jesus’ disciples coming to him and asking him, “Lord, teach us to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples.” **It is the ONLY thing that Jesus’s disciples asked him to teach them. They did not ask him to teach them to preach, teach or heal.** The disciples recognized that prayer was the source of Jesus’s power. They realized that at the significant moments of Jesus’s life, Jesus was praying. Luke noticed this about Jesus and made it a central focus of his gospel. Perhaps he learned about Jesus’ prayer life from the people who had been with Jesus. However, he learned about it, Luke focused on it and as a result, prayer is an essential part of his gospel and is something that Luke wants US to make a part of our lives.

Jesus prayed at his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan (Luke 3:21), before his first encounter with the Pharisees, (Luke 5:16) and before he chose the 12 disciples, he prayed all night long! (See Luke 6:12.) He prayed as he asked his disciples who they thought he was and before his own prophecy of death (Luke 9:18.) He prayed at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:29) and upon the cross (Luke 23: 34 and 46.) Luke is the only gospel writer who tells us that Jesus’ sweat was like drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, (Luke 22:41-44,) as he prayed for God to take the cup of suffering away from him. And, Luke is the only gospel writer to include the two prayer parables of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-13) and unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8.) To Luke, “the unclosed door of prayer (the door that is always open to us) was the most precious doors in the whole world!”

William Barclay, the Gospel of Luke Commentary.

Two Life Changing Masterpieces of writing side by side in Chapter Ten
By Luke: Writer, and Physician

- A. Notice the Lawyer's Question** Luke 10: 25-28 (Both Matthew and Mark include this vignette but only Luke follows it with...
- B. Verse 29..."** But he wanting to JUSTIFY HIMSELF asked Jesus " Who is my neighbor?"
- C. Verse 30...Jesus tells the story of The Good Samaritan. Luke is the only gospel writer to include this story.**
- D. Notice in this story that the religious people of the day (the Priest and a Levite) can't perform an act of love and charity because of their ritualistic obligations to fulfill the Jewish law. If they touch a dead body and become defiled, they must take a leave from their duties until they can be ceremonially cleansed and, only then they can resume their priestly duties.**
- E. Notice in the story that the hero is a SAMARITAN, a deadly enemy of the Jews because the Samaritans intermarried with "unclean" people of the surrounding area. He is an unlikely hero. He was "moved with pity" and to help the man in the ditch.**
- F. The Good Samaritan did three things for the man in the ditch:**
 - 1. He saves his life.
 - 2. Pays his debt.
 - 3. Promises to return.

Who does this sound like?

The Story of Mary and Martha (See Luke 10: 38-42)

Luke is the only gospel writer who tells this significant story of discipleship. Although John tells us the story of the raising of Lazarus, only Luke tells this story of the discipleship of Mary and Martha.

Reflection Questions

- 1. Does Martha have a " right to be angry?"
- 2. Why does Martha take her complaint to Jesus?
- 3. Why does Jesus say that " Mary has chosen the better portion?"
- 4. Who Exercises true hospitality in the story?
- 5. Why do you think that Luke put these two vignettes about the Good Samaritan and the story of Mary and Martha side by side in his gospel?

NOTE: when Fred Craddock looks at these two stories side by side, (the Good Samaritan and the Mary and Martha Story) he asks Jesus: " So which is it Jesus? Should I serve my neighbor OR should I spend time sitting at Jesus' feet? " Fred Craddock thinks that Jesus would say, " YES!"

Luke's Teaching About Money

Luke 12: 13-21 teaches us several significant lessons:

1. **Be on guard against greed/ wanting more!**
2. **Greed can never be satisfied.**
3. **In this parable of the Rich Fool, we learn that the greedy accumulation of things is an attempt to avoid our dependency on God.**
4. **One's life does not exist in the abundance of one's possessions.**
5. **Our lives do not belong to us. They are on loan from God.**
6. **We do not own anything. We are stewards not owners of everything.**
7. **Notice that 9 times in verses 17-18, the rich fool in the story uses the words, "I, my or mine." He thinks that he owns everything!**
8. **What does it mean to be rich toward God?**

Reflection Exercise on Money and Possessions

- **What do you learn about money in the home in which you grew up?**
- **If your children, grandchildren, or a good friend asked you "what have you learned about the proper use of money" what would you tell them?**

Quotations on Money

1. You make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give."
Sir Winston Churchill
2. A reporter once asked John Paul Getty, the richest man in the world, "How much money is enough?" Getty replied, "Just a little bit more."
3. Oscar Wilde once said, there are two great tragedies in life. The first is not getting what you want. The second is getting it. Because, when we get the thing that we think we want, it leaves us feeling hollow inside. "

Luke 18: 18-30 teaches us several lessons about money and its power over us.

1. Notice that the rich ruler believes that he has obeyed the commandments since his youth! He does not recognize how far short he has fallen from being who God wants him to be.
2. Notice that when Jesus asked him to sell all that he has and give it the poor, he cannot do it. He will not do it! The possessions have become Number # 1 in his life...not God!
3. What does Jesus mean when he says that it will be hard to those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? What does Jesus mean when he says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Luke's Teaching about the Crucifixion and Resurrection

- Notice that everything Luke includes in his gospel after 9:51 point toward Jerusalem and Jesus's death and resurrection. Everything that Jesus said and did after that verse is colored by his pending death.
- Remember that the largest body of material in the four gospels deals with four days in the life of Jesus of Nazareth from Maundy Thursday to Easter. Mark, Matthew, and Luke each devoted three chapters and John devoted nine chapters to the last four days period before and after the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Notice what the **Apostles Creed** says about the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
“ I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead, his ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty!”
- Notice what **Karl Barth** said about Jesus. “Jesus Christ was the man who was born to die!” In the Gospel of Luke, everything points to the cross and the resurrection!
- When asked at a seminar on theology, “Dr. Barth, does God reveal the Divine Self in other religions or only in Christianity? Barth replied, “ God does not reveal himself in any religionincluding Christianity. God reveals himself in his son, Jesus. **Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship with Jesus.**” That is what Luke is trying to point out in his gospel.

The fact that the stories around the crucifixion and the resurrection in the four gospels are so different points to their authenticity. Take time this summer to compare these stories and Read Matthew chapters 26-28, Mark chapters 14-16, Luke chapters 23 and 24, and John chapters 18-21. The Story that God raised Jesus from the dead inspired the early Christians to live for Jesus. That is the story Luke writes about the early church, in the book of Acts. We are the 29th Chapter of Acts! 😊

Eugene Peterson's Introduction to Acts

Because the story of Jesus is so impressive, there is a danger that we will be impressed, but only impressed. As the spectacular dimensions of this story dawn on us, we could easily become enthusiastic spectators, and then let it go at that- become admirers of Jesus, generous with our oohs and ahs, and in our better moments inspired to imitate him. It is Luke's task to prevent us from becoming mere spectators to Jesus, fans of the Message. **The story of Jesus does not end with Jesus. It continues in the lives of those who believe in him.** The supernatural does not stop with Jesus. Luke makes it clear that these Christians he wrote about were no more spectators of Jesus than Jesus was a spectator of God- they are in on the action of God, God acting in them, God living in them. Which also means of course in us.” **The Message, Eugene Peterson**

“If you had one chapter of the Bible to tell people about the nature of God, what chapter would you choose and why? I would choose Luke 15. “ Tim Keller, The Prodigal God

The Greatest Chapter: The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son

Read Luke 15: 1-32

Prodigal- adjective -does not mean wayward but...

- A. Recklessly extravagant
- B. Having spent everything

10 Reflection Topics/ Questions on Luke Chapter 15

1. Notice the words of Luke in Luke 15:1-2
2. Notice that 1 in 100 sheep are lost in Luke 15: 3-7
3. Notice that 1 in 10 coins are lost in verses 8-10
4. Notice that 1 in 2 boys are lost in verses 11-32.
5. Or...are there two lost sons? One lost in a far country and one lost in his own righteousness?
6. Does Jesus' tailor the parable to the audience who is listening? Are the tax collectors and sinners symbolized in the prodigal son and the Pharisees and Scribes symbolized in the Elder Brother?
7. Does the Father love the younger son **more than** the older son, or does the Father love both boys the same?
8. What is the primary message of the parable? What is the point?
9. Could the parable be named the “Parable of the Prodigal God?” Why?
10. How would you express the point of these stories without using religious language?

An Invitation to Transact Business with God

You are invited to write a letter to God and seal it in the envelope that the Camp Meeting Association will give you. Write what is on your heart and ask God for guidance, forgiveness, or a new beginning. Where do you need to let go of something or someone? Then place it in the CHAIR. Natalie Stevens and Tom Tewell will take care of these letters and will send them back to you in God's perfect time.